MMedia Magazine

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- Creative people – Lynch, Gondry, Audiard, Hitchcock
- Creative production work
- Creativity and technology
- Call of Duty and The Hurt Locker
- Stop-motion animation
- Come Dine with Me
- Creativity and genre

MM

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Welcome to *MediaMagazine*. Whether you're new to AS level Film or Media, or returning for A2, we hope you'll be able to make maximum use of this year's issues, delve into our archives, and above all enjoy a really good read – not to mention getting involved with us by writing articles, giving us feedback, or suggesting topics you'd like us to cover.

This issue is on the theme of **Creativity** – what is it, who's got it, which technologies promote it, and how does it impact on your own studies? We've grouped the articles around variations on the creative theme, promoted by you yourselves. So there are pieces on **creative people**, film-makers both young and old – David Lynch, Michel Gondry, Charlie Kaufman, Jacques Audiard – but also Alfred Hitchcock, still a true original after all these years.

To support your production work, there's a strong focus on **creative processes** – Mark Ramey's tips to make your video work original and different; articles from Jayson Burns and Brian Mulligan and Simon Ward on how to research, plan and produce creative print work with Photoshop and Illustrator; where to find the best stop-motion animation; and inside stories from creative film and TV directors.

The **creative texts** featured in this issue are strongly linked with ideas about **genre variation**: Nick Lacey argues that TV crime drama constantly re-invents itself to reflect the zeitgeist, while Emma-Louise Howard explores the creativity of films which play with non-linear approaches to narrative and time. *Glee* is innovative because of its fusion of soap, musical, high-school teen drama conventions, while the daytime format of *Come Dine With Me* has been creatively scheduled and re-worked to become a prime-time blockbuster.

And on a more exam-related note, Steph Hendry explores creative ways of preparing for the AQA Mest1 multiplatform case study, and AQA examine Tina Dixon proves that analysis can be creative too. Elaine Homer explains how to get the most out of your Film Studies small-scale research project – and two of her A2 students show you how it's done. And whichever spec you're studying, Peter and Elinor Block's debate about the creative potential and limitations of digital technologies will provide much food for thought.

So go ahead – get creative.

Online this issue

The Creative Art of film Reviewing: an interview with Telegraph Arts Commissioning Editor and film critic Mark Monahan, tips for creative reviewing techniques, and a review deconstructed sentence by sentence.

Great expectations: Owen Davey talks to some young graduates in creative arts about their work, following their dreams, and surviving in the real world of the creative industries. A must-read for aspiring artists in all media.

Post-modernity, technology and Creativity: David Bell finds post-modernist creativity in mobile phone technology.

Fanvids: Creativity vs Counterculture: Fay Jessop shares her passion for vidding, and provides links to some brilliant examples.

Putting Creativity into Critical Perspectives: Some of the questions you'll need to ask of your own creativity in answering OCR's A2 exam question 1.

Plus Audiard the auteur in context, student magazine artwork deconstructed, and poster analysis.

contents

Front Page News

facebook

under fire on privacy issues

Facebook has made further changes to its privacy settings, in response to widespread concern that users do not have enough control over how their information is shared. Complaints have focused on the fact that the site's privacy settings were too complicated, and were set on the lowest level of protection as a default. To control their privacy settings, users must go through a number of different screens, each with options for different aspects of their information, such as their photos, their work or school details or their status updates. They can then choose from three options for who can see this information: friends, friends of friends or everyone. However, in the past, if users did not make a selection on their account, the settings were put on 'everyone' automatically by the site.

In addition, the settings pages have been frequently updated, with more aspects being added – these were also set to 'everyone' until users noticed they were there.

Now Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg has pledged that this will no longer happen. In a message on the site, he said:

If you decide to share your content with friends only, then we will set future settings to friends only as well. This means you won't have to worry about new settings in the future.

The new privacy controls are also said to be simpler, with a basic main page and fewer choices to make, although some settings are still tucked away on other pages, including the 'instant personalisation' feature, which shares your details with 'partner websites', unless you choose to disable it.

What does the internet know about us?

- Search engines such as Google track our queries, building up a picture of interests and spending that could, in theory, be traced back to an individual.
- Google has also been under fire for its Street View service, which involved taking pictures of real people, although their faces were blurred before they were put online. Some of the pictures showed a couple kissing, a man urinating in the street and an apparently naked man painting his garden fence.
- Google apologised after its Street View camera cars inadvertently picked up data from unsecured Wi-Fi networks.
- There have been concerns that adopted children are being contacted by their birth parents via social networking sites, bypassing controls put in place by adoption agencies and, in some cases, causing great distress to the children and their families.

Rules on TV swearing relaxed

The media regulator, Ofcom, has relaxed the rules on offensive language on television, following research that it claims shows people's attitudes are now more tolerant.

The research was based on discussions with 130 participants and showed that words such as 'loony', 'poof', 'lezza' and 'Jesus Christ' were considered socially acceptable. These words can now be used before the 9pm watershed.

More serious swearing, including the F word and the C word, is still reserved for after the watershed, but very few of the participants thought any words should be banned altogether.

However, those opposed to the move have said that the sample group is too small to truly represent a change in attitudes. *The Daily Mail* commissioned its own research, which found that 76% percent of respondents thought swearing on TV was a bad influence on young people, and 25% percent had been personally offended by it in the last year. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these figures were higher for the over-55s.

Meanwhile, other groups were concerned that the rules were being relaxed on language that was not politically correct. Offensive terms for homosexuals, such as 'poof', 'queer' and 'lezza' were generally rated as more acceptable than racist terms, while terms for the mentally ill, such as 'mental', loony' and 'nutter' were also placed in the most acceptable category.

Marjorie Wallace, from mental health charity Sane, told *the Guardian*:

These sorts of words often betray fear and ignorance rather than a lack of sympathy. The main lesson is that they should not be used lightly. On the other hand, we would not like to be heavy-handed or prohibitive.

Microsoft launches motion-sensing gaming device

Microsoft has revealed details of its latest gaming device, designed to challenge Nintendo's Wii in going beyond the traditional joypad controller. The Kinect, which was known as Project Natal in the development stages, does away with the Wii's need for a handheld, wireless controller, instead using a video camera, infrared sensor and microphone to detect players' movements and commands and translate them into on-screen movements.

Microsoft hopes the Kinect, which plugs into the Xbox 360, will emulate the Wii's success in breaking away from the traditional gaming demographic and attracting casual and inexperienced players. However, there has been scepticism about whether the device will catch on with hardcore gamers. In the Edge forums, a user known as 'Ray_Marden' said:

Where is the gameplay? This is all simply motions and nothing complex. Where is the control? They're only showing really confined movements and you can't play most popular genres with motions.

Shareen Butler is late

Marie Stopes advert causes controversy

The charity Marie Stopes launched a controversial television advert for its advice service for women with unwanted pregnancies. It was first screened in May, and was widely reported in the press as an 'abortion ad', although abortion is just one of the services Marie Stopes provides, and is not even mentioned in the advert.

The thirty-second television advert shows worried looking women, and features the strap-line 'Are you late?' A voiceover says:

If you're pregnant and not sure what to do, Marie Stopes International can help.

Marie Stopes receives NHS funding to carry out abortions, but it does not make a profit from them. It also offers counselling and advice and its website says:

We always support a woman's choice to continue with her pregnancy or have an abortion. […] No one should pressure her into either continuing the pregnancy or having an abortion.

However, nearly all the news media described the new campaign as an 'abortion advert', *the Sun* reported that it was 'promoting abortion' and a *Daily Mail* headline even claimed it was 'selling abortion'.

It remains illegal for clinics that profit from abortions to advertise on UK television.

What do you think of the Marie Stopes advert? And what do you think about the way it has been reported? Watch it at **www.mariestopes.org.uk/Womens_ services/Abortion/Are_you_Late$.aspx**

Coming soon on the big screen

September:

- **Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps**
  Wall Street, the Oscar-winning 1987 film that gave us the phrase 'greed is good', gets a credit-crunch era sequel. Original director Oliver Stone and star Michael Douglas both return for this version, while Shia LaBeouf plays new main character Jake, a young trader working in a bank in the run-up to the 2008 stock market crash.

October:

- **Made in Dagenham**
  British comedy based the true story of female workers at a car factory in 1968 who went on strike for equal pay with their male counterparts. Stars Sally Hawkins (*Happy Go Lucky*), Bob Hoskins (*Mrs Henderson Presents*), Miranda Richardson (Rita Skeeter in the *Harry Potter* films) and Rosamund Pike (*Surrogates*).

- **Buried**
  Here's a brave move for a film-maker – a thriller set almost entirely inside a coffin. Ryan Reynolds, (*The Proposal*) plays a contractor working in Iraq who is kidnapped by insurgents and buried alive somewhere in the desert. With only a mobile phone to help him, he must try to work out his location so he can be rescued before he runs out of air.

- **Let Me In**
  Hollywood continues to insist on making its own versions of excellent foreign films, and now it's the turn of critically-acclaimed Swedish movie *Let the Right One In*, a disturbing tale about a lonely, bullied boy who befriends a vampire. The remake will be directed by Matt Reeves (*Cloverfield*) and will star Chloe Moretz (*Kick-Ass*) and Kodi Smit-McPhee (*The Road*). It remains to be seen whether it will be as haunting and moving as the original, or more of a straightforward horror.

What's changing in the media under the Lib-Con coalition?

It's probably too early to predict what sots of changes we're likely to see in the media under the new coalition government, but here are some of its first thoughts:

- The BBC's independence will be maintained, and the National Audit Office will be given full access to its accounts to ensure transparency. Although the Conservatives originally planned to dismantle the BBC Trust, this now looks unlikely.
- Plans to replace ITV regional news with independently-run news consortia, funded by £130 million from the BBC licence, have now been dropped; instead the money will pay for developing super-fast broadband access across the country.
- The Coalition government intends to bring greater de-regulation in order to 'enable partnerships between local newspapers, radio and television stations to promote a strong and diverse local media industry'. It will also be imposing tougher rules to stop newsletters run by councils from competing with independent local newspapers.
- The Freedom of Information Act will be extended, for greater transparency, and libel laws will be reviewed to protect freedom of speech. The government will 'crack down' on irresponsible marketing and advertising, particularly to children.

Game explores freedom and civil liberties

What with ASBOs, curfews and dispersal orders, there are already many laws in place that might make you feel as though teenagers are being unfairly demonised. But what if those laws were taken to extremes? That's the concept behind Channel 4's new online game *The Curfew*. Set in a nightmarish future where freedom for young people is severely restricted by the state, the game explores the potential consequences of the erosion of civil liberties.

www.thecurfew game.com

Front Page News researched, written and designed by Priscilla McClay who has been working as a publishing intern at the English and Media Centre.

making the most of your aqa mest1 multi-platform case study

AQA Examiner **Steph Hendry** shows you how.

During the first year of the AQA specification you will be asked to complete a **multiplatform case study** in preparation for the Mest 1 exam. In the second year, both the exam and the coursework will require you to demonstrate your own personalised work, so dealing with a case study is an important skill to develop. Working on a case study can be a worry because you may be asked to choose your own media areas, texts and issues rather than being told what to work on. Of course, if you choose carefully and select areas and texts that interest you, this can be a huge advantage, as you can become quite a specialist in your chosen area.

Selecting your topic/area

There may have some restrictions to your choice but your teacher will let you know what topics are available to choose from and what kinds of areas are appropriate. The examiner is, however, looking to reward **independent study** and it is advisable to **personalise** the case study as much as possible rather than just replicate the ideas you have learned about in class. Mest 1 has a range of topic areas – all of which are quite broad and so can be personalised further. Suggested topics for Mest 1 are:

- **Film or Broadcast Fiction**
- **Documentary and Hybrid Forms**
- **Lifestyle**
- **Music**
- **News**
- **Sport**

You may decide to choose a particular area, issue or text that you are particularly keen on. Do take care, however, as you will be required to undertake a critical evaluation and you will need to analyse in great detail. Some students find choosing an area that they are a 'fan' of can be a problem as it can sometimes be difficult to be objective, and may lead to an overly personal approach which could be an issue in the examination.

Approaching the case study

The best way to start a case study is to identify some of the key issues and questions you could consider. One way to do this is to focus on the media concepts.

- **How are texts in the three platforms constructed?**
  - Are there similarities and/or differences in the way the area is dealt with in each **platform**?
  - What type of **media language** is used and how?
  - How are **genre** codes used?
  - How do texts within the three platforms construct **narrative**?
- **How do audiences access texts across the three platforms?**
  - Do the texts enable different types of audience activity/interaction?
  - Are audiences able to play a role in the construction of media texts?
  - Are there differences in the audience gratifications offered across the three platforms?
- **How are representations constructed and are there similarities and/or differences across the platforms?**
  - What **values and ideologies** are communicated within the representations?
- **What institutional issues are raised by the topic areas?**
  - How are institutions reacting to changes in technology?
  - How are institutions attempting to reach and engage their audiences?
  - What economic issues are behind the construction and distribution of contemporary media texts?

Selecting texts

You will need to demonstrate knowledge of a range of media texts from across all three media platforms of broadcast, e-media and print. Each topic area raises slightly different issues and you should be able to show the examiner you have considered the media concept issues in the area rather than just a specific knowledge of one media text.

For example...

The BBC 3 drama *Being Human* is a digital television broadcast and it is repeated several times across the week on different days and at different times. Just before Series 2 began, BBC 3 repeated the first season over one weekend. The first series has been released on DVD and is available as a download on iTunes. During the broadcast period of the second season each episode was available on **BBC's iPlayer**. It has a substantial **online presence** both on the BBC and across a range of other sites and a **YouTube** search brings up many video clips including sections of the programme uploaded by fans, interviews with the actors, previews of episodes provided by the BBC and even a 'merry Christmas' message from the cast filmed 'behind the scenes'. The programme has been featured in a number of magazines including *Radio Times,* and *the Guardian* runs an episode-by-episode blog which has a comments section which usually gets between 20 and 50 comments each episode.

At the moment this would be a good, if limited, starting point for a cross-platform case study on *Being Human*. Considering other texts from other institutions and for different target audiences, would allow you to construct a broader analysis

Cross Platform Issues – Film or Broadcast Fiction

Media Concept/ Platform	Broadcast – could include:	e-media – could include:	Print – could include:
	TV broadcasts Cinema screening; Broadcast trailers (on TV or at the cinema) Review programmes Promotional features Discussions within other TV programming, e.g. chat shows, review programmes Promotional appearances/tie-ins Promotional competitions DVDs (including extras & commentaries) Blu-Ray Radio interviews, reviews and features	Webisodes UGC in YouTube (parodies, fan-videos etc.) Streaming or downloadable trailers Review sites Official marketing sites Fan-constructed sites, fiction-related social networking, blogs, podcasts etc. On-demand/download services Star/actor sites Fan fiction Forums/chat-rooms Online databases TV/film tie-ins with gaming	TV guides Film magazines TV tie-ins in newspapers and magazines Reviews/commentary in newspapers and magazines News stories generated by the text (could also be e-media)
Media Forms	Each platform could be considered in light of the way it uses media language in its construction. A comparison could be made in the way some media language choices are **specific to each platform** and how genre codes are **replicated across platforms**. It would be worth considering how each platform has its own media language codes and how these are used to communicate ideas about fiction. You may also like to consider how narrative is constructed within the different platforms and also perhaps how the platforms work to extend the narrative.		
Representation	The representations focused on in fictions tend to be the **characters, groups and roles depicted**. This is a valid way to approach the concept but it may be worth considering a few other ideas. **How are the actors/the director/the crew represented? How is the audience represented?** Does the **audience** have a chance to represent themselves? How is the text itself represented? Are some of these representations reliant on a specific platform or platforms?		
Audience	It is worth thinking about the way the platforms provide differing experiences for the audience. The physical experience of the text is a good place to start (TV vs Cinema, watching TV or film fiction on different devices such as handheld phones, laptops, portable DVD players and desktop computers). Audience gratifications can be evaluated, not only through the traditional **'uses and gratifications' approach**; you could consider how the platforms provide **further pleasures and rewards** for the audience. Not all texts are made by media institutions so it would be worth looking at how the audience can be involved in creating additions to the text, or simply get involved with the texts more by using **interactive opportunities** offered by e-media platforms.		
Institution	You can consider how media institutions produce, promote and market their fictions. How do they deal with the modern **fragmented audience**? How do they use the **platforms** to help them reach their audience? How are they using **technological developments** to provide new audience experiences? How do other media texts/platforms interact (synergy and/or vertical/ horizontal integration)?		

of how the different platforms are used in relation to fictional films or broadcasting. By considering these issues rather than one single text you can gain a broader understanding of the cross-platform nature of modern media.

Other topics can be approached in similar ways

- **Documentary and hybrid Forms**
  - As well as traditional moving-image broadcasts, there are many radio documentaries which approach the form in their own specific way. You could also look at documentaries on **YouTube** which have been made by audience members rather than institutions, and/or websites that deal with similar topic areas to the one you are studying. Some documentaries are linked to websites which develop the ideas further and in a more interactive way; and there are often tie-ins with print media.
  - **Reality programming** is multiplatform and you may want to consider how websites add to the gratifications received by the audience. **YouTube**, for example, allows specific moments from reality programming to be spread to a large number of people very quickly (Susan Boyle is one of the best examples of this) and newspapers and magazines rely on reality programming for a lot of human interest/gossip stories.
- **Lifestyle**
  - Lifestyle can cover many different subjects: health, beauty, decorating, cooking, relationships, holidays, raising children and so on.
  - As well as TV programming, lifestyle is an important aspect of radio output and magazine and newspaper content. You could compare how the different platforms engage audiences on lifestyle issues and how lifestyle ideas are presented. E-media is also used to tap into lifestyle interests whether this is

through electronic editions of magazines and newspapers or topic-specific websites. **YouTube** is also part of this, with many videos being created by audience members on a range of lifestyle topics such as fashion/make-up tips, 'how to' videos etc.

- **Music**
  - This is a topic area going through many changes at the moment. You may be interested in looking at the ways the different platforms are dealing with changing technologies and changing audience behaviours. **Traditional radio and music televisions** is a good starting point but you might also want to consider how **the web** is being used to access music and how **print media** is responding to this. **Social networking** is being used by institutions and musicians to help promote music and offers a more interactive relationship between musicians and audience. **Twitter**, for example, is now a powerful tool for communication between stars and fans, some bands offer music free online, others encourage audience members to get involved in the production process, offering tracks for mixing and so on.
- **News**
  - Like music, news has gone through many changes as technologies have developed. Newspapers are finding it difficult to generate profit given the amount of free alternatives available on e-media. Electronic editions of newspapers are using technologies to attempt to attract audiences and appeal to them in a number of ways and alternative news sources are in competition with more established news 'brands'.
  - Audience members are becoming more involved in the **selection of news** through the rise in interaction and also as they select news outlets based on their personal preferences.

- Television news has become more competitive, with broadcast news offering 24-hour coverage and a range of different approaches to reporting to appeal to different audience demands. So you get *Newsnight* with its more formal, analytical approach as well as *Live from Studio Five* and its focus on opinion, gossip and entertainment.
- **Sport**
  - Digital television has provided lots of new ways to attract and engage the sporting audience and uses technology to provide new experiences (3D football) and to get them more involved (multi-camera presentation of games/matches). Newspapers discuss sport on their back pages and sometimes the topic becomes front-page news too. Radio broadcasts of games/matches are still popular and the web is a source of news and information, and part of the increasing links between sport and celebrity culture.

Focus on the issues

Whichever topic area you decide to focus on for your case study, the most important thing is that you **engage with the topic** along the lines of the issues outlined here (and any others you think are valid). You may want to do some close textual analysis (and this can be very useful) but your main focus should be on the **issues raised by the cross-platform nature of modern media** with its integrated use of media platforms to create, promote and comment on media texts and products. In each topic area, you should be able to use **a range of different media texts** as examples of the ideas and issues you have been looking at to show the examiner a broad and detailed knowledge of modern media practices.

Steph Hendry is a Lecturer in Media Studies at Runshaw College, Lancashire. She is a Senior Examiner, freelance writer and trainer.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THE SMALL SCALE FILM STUDIES RESEARCH PROJECT

If you have a passion for film, the small scale research project for WJEC Film Studies A2 provides an ideal opportunity to investigate an area of personal interest and to practice the independent research skills you'll need for university. **Elaine Homer**, Advanced Skills Teacher at Kidbrooke Secondary School, has collaborated with her current A2 Film Studies students to share their experiences and offer advice on how to tackle this project successfully.

How you are assessed at a glance

The small-scale research project is worth 40% of FM3 **Film Research and Creative Projects**, 40 marks in total, and provides the context for your creative work. You are assessed on your research skills as well as on the quality, range and presentation of the ideas you develop.

The project findings must be structured effectively in a referenced 1000-1500 word **presentation script**, worth 25 marks; all sources must be recorded in an annotated catalogue of approximately 10 to 15 items, accompanied by notes (worth 15 marks); print-outs and photocopies of research sources used.

Six steps to success
Tip 1: Choose a research focus that will sustain your interest over time

For enthusiastic film buffs it can be a challenge to choose just one area of investigation that is small scale and manageable. It can be helpful to look at examples of previous students' work; then do some preliminary research and scope the resources available on the topics you're interested in. Choices usually '**stem from a single film or topic-based concept' (WJEC)** so if you love gangster films, are Tarantino's number 1 fan or have a passion for Johnny Depp, make the most of it.

It can be tricky narrowing your research focus, so take time to explore a range of possibilities before committing to a topic. Your teacher's tutorial support and guidance will be crucial in helping you refine your ideas before they are sent to the examiner for verification. Remember that your focus will guide your research so it needs to be well thought through and clear in your mind before you start.

I decided to choose the auteur option for the Film Studies small-scale research project. An auteur is usually the presumed or actual 'author' of a film, normally the director. Auteur is also sometimes used in an evaluative sense to distinguish good film-makers from bad ones. An auteur tends to have a distinctive style that is recognisable through most of the films they

create. Choosing an auteur to use for the coursework can be easy if you use the bigger and extremely well known directors that are connected to influential films. Anything other than a well-known director can make it hard to source reliable information, let alone find it. I chose to go for someone more obscure, Michel Gondry, as I am a big fan and knew he had a great artistic distinctive style. Whilst researching Michel Gondry, I analysed his use of surrealism through animation techniques; editing and mise-en-scène. Choosing directors that you know well is handy as you have knowledge of their work and have watched their films. It also makes the process far more enjoyable.

Jasmine

I chose to look at the representation of black people in early American cinema and also racial conflict because of my interest. I believe there is inadequate discussion or emphasis on black cinema and its effect on modern society. The topic was very broad with many different possibilities to consider before I could make progress on my investigation. I decided to look at both the historical and political aspect of black people in cinema and themes such as status, power, influences and pioneers. The topic being broad had its positives due to the fact I wasn't 'stuck' as I always had information to pick from a range of sources.

Rachel

I encourage students I know will cope to tackle challenging and more obscure topics. Rae Baden took on David Lynch as an auteur; her interest was in the narrative complexity of Lynch's work. With Jasmine's taste in arthouse and avant-garde cinema and her interest in art and photography, Michel Gondry made a good choice for her. Although I knew there would be limits to the amount of material available. I was confident in her ability to analyse independently and apply theory to his work – in this case Surrealism. What made Rachel's project a success was that she was personally invested in the issue of how black people have been represented in film. Although she initially planned just to examine contemporary films, she quickly realised to understand the present she had to look into the past and early representations. She was clearly appalled at the injustice of how, in early cinema, black people were either absent, played by whites or represented as stereotypes. Conversely she was encouraged by how, through the contribution of black directors Spike Lee and Jon Singleton, issues of race and black people's experiences were finding a voice. The challenge she faced, because she was highly motivated and her research was so comprehensive, was in keeping it focused and deciding what to include in her script and what to leave out.

Elaine Homer

Tip 2: Apply a critical framework to ensure your project has academic rigour

Another key to success is being clear on **the critical framework** that will shape your research. The critical framework options are **star/performer; genre; technology; social, historical and political contexts; auteur and institutional**. If you opt for an **auteur** approach it is recommended to look at two or more signature features; for **star study** you must ensure your focus makes the research **sufficiently analytical**, as a common pitfall is to lapse into a biographical study or consider stars to be an easy option. WJEC recommend looking at the characteristics of a star performance across different directors or production contexts; the meanings a star brings to films or star as 'signature'. If you study History or Politics you can bring a substantial amount of knowledge of the **social context**, but you must ensure the project remains film focused.

Tip 3: Choose apt focus films that will illuminate your research

The study must be based on **a main focus film and two others** and you should note that you 'may not choose as a **focus film** any films you have specialised in elsewhere in the specification (i.e. either at AS or A2)...' whether for coursework or exam.

I had chosen three contemporary films *Jungle Fever* (1991)**, *Boyz n the Hood* (1991) and *Crash* (2004) as my focus films as they reflected how black people had broken from past cinematic stereotypes.

Rachel

Tip 4: Access a wide range of sources; don't just rely on the web

Your research must cover **different sources and media (e.g. books, periodicals, popular magazines, newspapers, television documentaries, radio recordings, DVD material, websites, etc.)**

For topics that have been widely written about the examiner will expect your range of sources to be more extensive than for a more obscure topic.

Visit **www.amazon.co.uk** for books closely linked with your title as it is worth investing in a couple that you will use extensively.

Look out for general theoretical reading relevant to the critical framework you have chosen, for example, **auteur** theory; articles about star persona or acting style.

Key points may be included in articles that do not appear directly relevant to their research on first inspection so it is important to scan articles for relevant points and check contents pages; the index and chapter summaries for clues.

Primary research sources will include your focus films so buy DVD versions that include extras such as the **director's commentary; interviews with stars or documentaries on the making of**. Look at institutional websites for companies, stars and directors; although often biased, such sites can be insightful about their philosophy and working practices. **Fan sites** can also offer a refreshing perspective.

Web-filtering policies in school can be restrictive so be prepared to do research at home. And remember that, although the web can provide easy access to a wide range of sources, you should be discerning about **the quality and reliability**.

Make the most of all of the resources available to you at your centre, including the library; it may also be possible to arrange a visit to a local university library or to the BFI library.

When looking at a range of sources such as websites and books, I had to question if the content I had chosen was relevant to my study as a whole. I found that, as I progressed in my project, my ideas and the content had changed slightly and so I had to revisit sources to make sure that the sources still had a correlation with my topic title

Rachel

Never neglect the need for a wide variety of sources; be prepared to have to search extensively. Going for (a young, contemporary film-maker) Michel Gondry made it hard to find academic articles for the annotated catalogue. This meant I had to really look at his style and deconstruct. I was then able to find books that related to his style which was 'Surrealist' so I could apply this myself to his work. Looking at any auteur from this angle definitely helps the direction of your work and the questions that need to be asked to structure your presentation clearly and succinctly.

Jasmine

Tip 5: Record and evaluate the research process in your annotated catalogue

Your annotated catalogue will be assessed on the *range* of primary and secondary research material that you have included; the *relevance* of each item to your focus and the *quality* of notes. It is a good idea to organise your catalogue into sections under headings such as films; books; magazines and the internet. List all of the sources you have used and number them for ease of referencing in your presentation script. Show you have been selective by listing 3-5 rejected items excluded from the final catalogue.

Rae's annotated catalogue

Websites

Item 1: www.nytimes.com/2006/02/26/movies/26raff.html – 'David Lynch, Still Disturbing After 20 Years' by Terrence Rafferty – An article on David Lynch's work focusing particularly on *Blue Velvet* and the use of Surrealism and shock tactics. Highly relevant to my project due to its concentration on Surrealism, a focal point of my work, as well as one of my chosen films (*Blue Velvet*).

Item 2: www.lynchnet.com – A website with links to informative sources related to David Lynch, including interviews, podcasts, articles, trivia, all useful in terms of contextual and background information.

Item 3: www.timeout.com/film/features/show-feature/5443/david-lynch-interview.html An article dated just after the release of Lynch's *The Elephant Man*, this source is mainly promotional writing for the film not the focal point of my project. Despite this, the article marks Lynch's move from obscure independent film-making to the production of studio pictures. Contextual information on Lynch's influences and style, as well as some focus on *Eraserhead* (1977) as a comparative piece for *The Elephant Man* (1980) makes this article useful to my work.

Item 4: www.wired.com/culture/lifestyle/news/2007/01/72391 A detailed interview with Lynch, covering the creation of his website, the source of his artistic inspiration in 'Transcendental Meditation', his view on the film industry, the internet, and the actors utilised in his films. Whilst Lynch's answers are often typically obtuse, this interview is ripe with contextual information and providing an in-depth evaluation of his style.

Books

Item 5: *Strange World of David Lynch: Transcendental Irony from Eraserhead to Mulholland Drive*, Eric G. Wilson A highly informative read focusing on the artistic nature of Lynch's cinematic style, and its multiple interpretations. The author expresses a very positive view of Lynch's work, citing numerous themes including the religious connotations of my focus films such as *Eraserhead* (1977) and *Mulholland Drive* (2001) which was extremely beneficial to my project.

Rejected item: *Fifty Contemporary Film-makers*, edited by Yvonne Tasker Listing examples of the most influential and popular film-makers of our time includes a section on David Lynch, analysing his style as an **auteur** and providing an overall critique of his work – however, it does not cover his most recent films.

Tip 6: Present your findings well

Finally, your presentation should be well-structured; include references and direct reference to items of research with 'well-chosen and relevant examples'. Your analysis of scenes from your focus films should illustrate the ideas you have developed. The exam board encourages flexibility and creativity in the presentation of your ideas and provide exemplar foci; scripts and annotated catalogues in the **WJEC Examiner's Guidance** at their website **www.wjec.co.uk**.

Here is a list of recommended sources to get you started or why not read Rae Baden and Jasmine Ketibuah's research findings in the following article for inspiration.

Elaine Homer is an Advanced Skills Teacher in Media and Film Studies who teaches at Kidbrooke Comprehensive School, London

The article on p12 has been written by two of her A2 Film students.

Recommended resources:

Start your literature search at the British Film Institute 16+ source and subject guides:

www.bfi.org.uk/filmtvinfo/publications These excellent book lists are a great starting point for research and cover topics that include *Auteur* (2008); *Re-makes* (2004); *Stardom* (2007); *Strong Women II* (2003); *1990's British Cinema; Animation* (2000) and *Black British Film and Television* (2001). All of the listed sources are available in the BFI National Library where you can pre-arrange a visit and buy a day pass.

www.screenonline.org.uk Comprehensive resource on British Film, so get your school to register for a free site license and you will be able to access all of the video clips in school.

Sight and Sound magazine film review archive is available at: **http://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/archive/search.php**

MediaMagazine online **http://www.mediamagazine.org.uk** has a good range of articles.

For institutional information access **www.imdb.com**

Watch video clips from the TV show 'Inside the actors' studio' on **www.youtube.com** for star research.

For film reviews see **www.empireonline.com** and **www.totalfilm.com**

For statistics and fan responses see **http://uk.rottentomatoes.com/**

For Kermode uncut and the Film Programme podcasts see **www.bbc.co.uk/film**

Search for a wide range of articles **www.guardian.co.uk/media**

SURREALIST CINEMA: CONSCIOUSNESS AND CREATIVITY IN FILM

For their A2 Film Studies small-scale research study, **Rae Baden** and **Jasmine Ketibuah** investigate two film directors who at first glance have little in common. **Michel Gondry's** dreams contrast starkly with **Lynch's** dark nightmarish visions. But they share a capacity to use film creatively to expose the spectator to suppressed human emotions and desires.

I Dream of Gondry by Jasmine Ketibuah

Michel Gondry is the herald of child-like naïve cinema. He has the ability to encapsulate human emotion in its barest form and portrays it in a way only a child could see. Gondry is the visionary director of academy award-winning *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004); *The Science of Sleep* (2006) and *Be Kind Rewind* (2008). His complicated, endearing and visually-captivating films are one in a million, creating his own distinctive style that clearly comes from his experiences. His approach to directing is fun and compelling, focusing on dream-like scenarios that shouldn't happen anywhere else but your mind.

Michel Gondry's films can be described as **Surrealist or Fantasy cinema** or even avant-garde; his style is best characterised through his use of **animation and mise-en-scène**. The puppets and items used within the film *The Science of Sleep* express a child-like nature. This lo-tech style, stop-motion animation and manipulation of our understanding lends insight into Michel Gondry's dream world. His use of child-like psychological themes can thrill and captivate even the plainest of imaginations.

His avant-garde style is epitomised by his use of quirky and lo-tech mise-en-scène. Avant-garde artists try to push the boundaries of the norm and be experimental in terms of art, music, culture and politics. Quite often, especially within *The Science of Sleep,* the experience can be confusing and so surreal that the viewer just cannot connect. It's hard to follow the stories due to their addled nature and even stranger plot lines and twists. Nevertheless, it all adds to his quirky presence over the film and its 'tacky' aesthetic. These qualities could be considered significant to the way Michel Gondry represents dreams within his films, as dreams tend to be **non-linear and surreal**.

Some critics have argued that Gondry does not deserve his **auteur** title as his works are simple and effectively 'not sophisticated enough'. His narratives are far too ad-hoc and constantly have a bittersweet ethos. Themes that run through his films are **dreams and romance** – perhaps most strongly within *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and *Science of Sleep,* both with plots that entail these themes explicitly. The first time you watch a Michel Gondry film it can be an overwhelming and incoherent experience. Considering he uses his dreams as a direct source of inspiration, it is no wonder audiences react this way. These quirky attributes definitely

make his films what they are: original.

Michel Gondry is truly a genius, as inventive as a video artist can get. I always saw him as a child in an adult body, and that's a compliment because only children have such a vivid imagination while exploring their world. But somehow, when we grow up, we lose that instant creativity, the kind of naïve curiosity that drives children to filter reality.

Childhood occupies the biggest part of your brain, so a lot of my memories subconsciously (and consciously) enter the videos I do.

Gondry, http://thinkexist.com/quotes/ michel_gondry/

Gondry's unique style derived from his early years working in the media industry with **bands and musicians**. His directing career started alongside a French band called 'Oui Oui' for which he originally played drums. When the band became known within the French music scene, they turned to drummer Gondry to make and direct their videos. His distinctive style of directing caught the attention of some big stars, namely **Bjork** who later asked him to direct a video for her song 'Human Behaviour'. After this big break into the film industry many musicians wanted to use his lo-tech imaginative style in their videos. Bands such as **Daft Punk** have looked to Michel for his inventive take on directing more famously for their short film *Electroma*.

Gondry uses his low-tech version of special effects to enhance the drama in his videos and movies, never just for show. For instance, in a video he directed for the Rolling Stones in 1995 (for their version of a Bob Dylan song 'Like a Rolling Stone'), time seems to slow to a virtual stop as a girl walks through a hectic party. This technique of severely slowing the passage of time, which Gondry pioneered, has since been frequently copied – most famously in the movie *The Matrix*. The video is a miniature character study set to music, and like most of Gondry's work, it is distinctly romantic.

The New York Times www.nytimes.com/2006/09/17/magazine/17gondry.html

The three films that Michel Gondry has directed and created all carry his distinctive lo-tech heartfelt style. The all too noticeable and recognisable child-like quality is subjectively a reference to Michel's own inner child, childhood and what he himself experiences in his dreams.

His films tend to involve **stream of consciousness** and human emotions such as desire, love and paranoia. The dream world is the key to understanding Gondry's **auteur** style as this is his general source of inspiration and creativity. Iconic images such as the 'big hands' seen in his previous works on 'Everlong', a **Foo Fighters** video, came directly from his dreams. **http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=IyvvCulHrJw**

We tend to encounter a surreal and muddled narrative in his films. Events seem to happen sporadically and randomly, again seeming to mirror his personal dreams. However, the chaos is always organised in such a simple way that it is comprehensible because of the way the techniques, narrative and mise-en-scène fit and complement each other. Take the example of *The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*: we are literally inside Joel's memories and subconscious whilst they are slowly being erased. He seems to be holding on to vague memories of his lover but parts of his memories are fragmented, giving a surreal dream quality.

Michel Gondry's work entails so much inner child and surreal enthusiasm that it's almost hard to believe a fully-grown French man is capable of creating these beautiful monster works of visual art, where the borders between dreaming and film-making almost blur. Gondry's dreams behold a new beauty: a cute aesthetic that could melt the coldest of hearts.

Nightmares on Lynch by Rae Baden

The torrid, dense and unconventional works of **David Lynch** repeatedly depict a world detached from reality and rooted in fantasy, with manifestations of the psychological being the focus of films such as *Mulholland Drive* (2001) and *Eraserhead* (1977). Even films with a conventional plot, such as *Blue Velvet* (1986) or *The Elephant Man* (1980), translate their storyline through recurrently dark, nightmarish imagery and characters openly demonstrating perplexing mental issues – for instance the creepily Freudian and violently disturbed character of Frank (Dennis Hopper) in *Blue Velvet* (1986).

The distinctive works of David Lynch are the chosen focus of my studies – whilst Lynch himself conforms to the definition of an '**auteur**', the perplexing physiological depth of his work provides endless material for investigation, and the often obscure nature of his films is open to multiple interpretations. I plan to concentrate specifically on the **Surrealist elements** of Lynch's art, uncovering possible influences within the movement, not solely in the form of film.

The methods utilised by Lynch to conduct these irregular themes and storylines are often highly obtuse, bordering on impenetrable for some; the slow, eerie crawl of *Eraserhead*, its plot lost in a series of seemingly random and unsettling events, set against a backdrop of a colourless, densely industrial world and an overall feeling of incomprehensible unreality left its

ERASERH
DAVID LYNCH'S

"IT'S THE FIRST HORROR FILM
MEMORY THAT IS TRULY FRIG
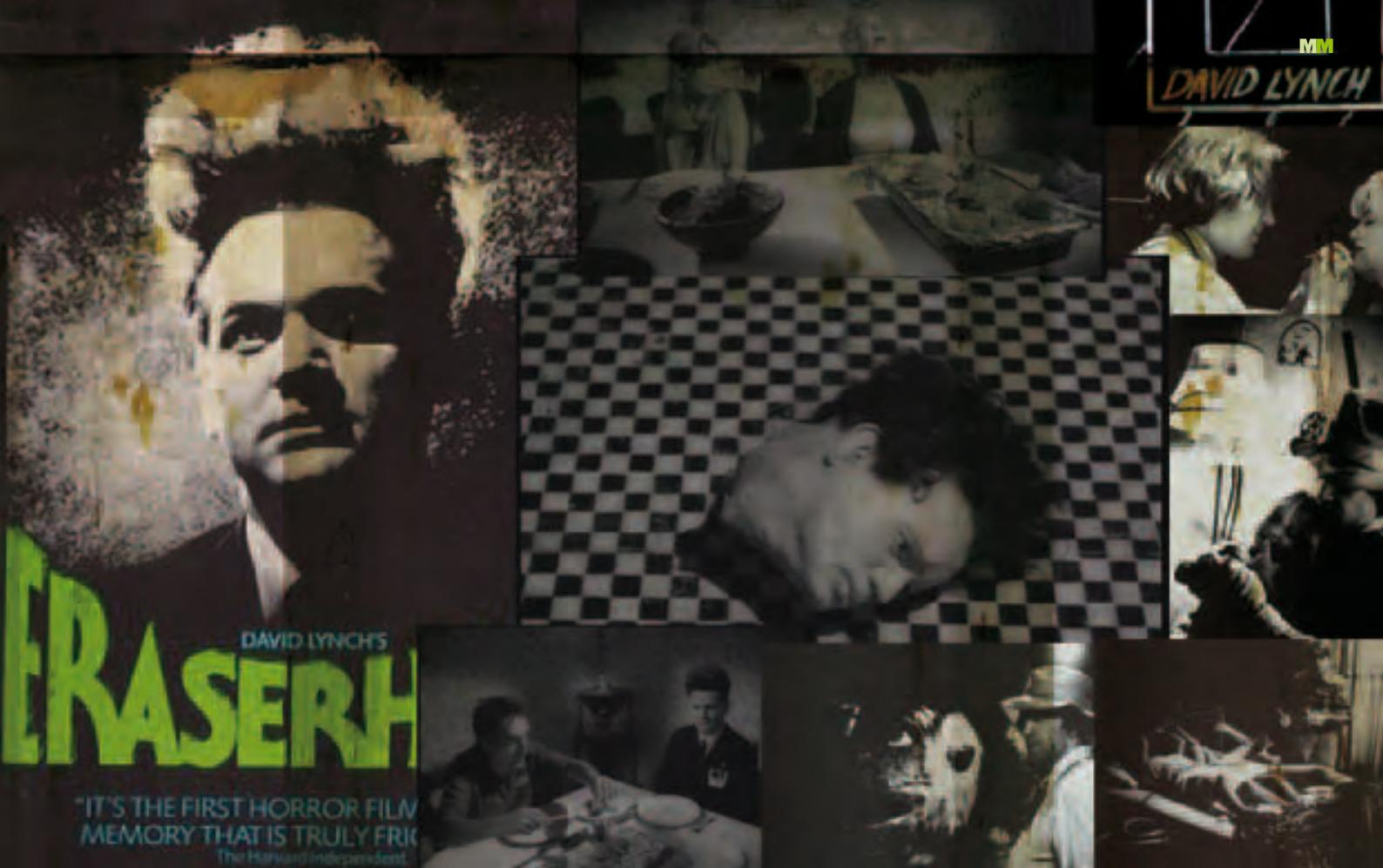
audience haunted and questioning. *Mulholland Drive* (2001) – a film evocative of Lynch's style, possessing no coherent narrative structure and embellished with meandering conscious and subconscious perspectives, illicit love and a 'juxtaposition of cliché and surreal, nightmares and fantasies, non-linear storylines, camera work, sound, and lighting' – received an equally perplexed audience response; too eccentric for a conditioned mainstream audience, it gained a dedicated cult following. Fifteen years earlier *Blue Velvet* received a similar reception; widely famed for its memorably vibrant imagery conflictingly vivid alongside scenes of shocking violence, the combination of Surrealism, mystery and Film Noir resulted in audiences and critics both struggling to uncover the meaning behind its blend of graphic imagery, haunting characters, and opposing themes of innocence and the corruptive criminal underbelly of seemingly idyllic suburban America.

Video Clip; Eraserhead (1977) 'Dream Sequence'

This scene consists of a dream sequence in which *Eraserhead's* awkward-mannered protagonist Henry Spencer briefly escapes the claustrophobic confines of his life through a breach of reality and transition into fantasy. Throughout the film, when overwhelmed by the constrictive circumstances of his life (such as the inescapable responsibility of the unwanted birth of his 'deformed' child), Henry envisions 'The Lady in the Radiator', a recurring and ambiguous character with numerous symbolic interpretations. Lynch's choice to fix Henry's emblem of escapism in an object as mundane as a radiator is evocative of the monotonous tedium

of his life, and the human ability to transcend the most ordinary, unimaginative environment – a sparsely furnished apartment with the singular outside view of a brick wall – into an alternative 'dream' realm. The reasons for the woman's bizarre appearance (her grotesquely swollen cheeks) are unclear; however her unsettling features only serve to accentuate the unreal and dream-like tone of the sequence, and her eerily melodic and girlishly sung mantra, 'In Heaven, everything is fine' has been interpreted by some critics as a tantalizing lure into death, a permanent retreat for Henry into the dreams that allow him diversion from his bleak life:

When Henry stares at his radiator (where Death resides), as he does on several occasions, he is considering suicide.

http://www.britishfilm.org.uk/lynch/eraserhead.html

As the film goes on, and his life appears more subtly desperate, Henry increases his focus on the radiator, suggesting a possible growing idealisation of death, and a wish for a cerebral existence in a place where 'everything is fine'. Although unseen in this clip, whilst the Lady in the Radiator conducts her child-like show on a recurring setting of Lynch's films (the spotlighted and theatrically-lit stage), odd worm-like creatures, which are a frequent and inexplicable occurrence in *Eraserhead*, fall from the sky and are crushed beneath her feet. These creatures appear to resemble sperm or foetuses – a reference to conception, original sin and the process from which the main constraint of his life – his misshapen child – was created, and which the Lady in the Radiator, or death itself, can destroy.

This unconventional mode of film-making is Lynch's own cinematic brand of Surrealist art – his films are frequently compared by critics to that of famous Surrealists such as Salvador Dali and to the 1920's cultural phenomenon referred to as **Dada** – one such example being the bizarre *Un Chien Andalou* (1929) by **Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dali.**

Lynch's consistent style is also what distinguishes him as an **auteur**; his influence and creative control is apparent in each of his works, and his use of his Surrealist cinematic techniques distinguishes him from other directors of his generation, so much so that film critics have coined the term **'Lynchian'.**

Conclusion

Surrealist directors do not conform to cinematic rules; their creativity is bound only by the limits of nightmares and dreams. Directors Lynch and Gondry captivated audiences forced to inhabit a different reality that traverses escapist cinema by projecting our own minds in the cataclysmic chaos of theirs; an inescapable world. The ability to create such art is rare and underrated. Yet, when it comes around, all we can do is watch in awe at what's about to unfold; there is no predictability in this form of creativity.

Rae Baden and Jasmine Ketibuah studied A Level Film at Kidbrooke School, Greenwich, London. This article is adapted from their FM3 small-scale research study presentations.

Technology & creativity
curse or cure?

Elinor Block evaluates the ways new technologies have transformed the media industries, their processes and products; and **Peter Block** draws on his life in television to debate whether they are intrinsically creative, or simply tools to enhance or exploit creativity.

Without doubt people in the creative industries are often the first to adopt, and then the first to discard, new technologies. Whether it's aspects of new social media such as **Twitter**, or the technology that enabled James Cameron to take a huge innovative leap in *Avatar* and to win three Oscars in 2009 (albeit in the technical categories, not Best Picture), the media industry will be the first to exploit the potential of a new technology for both creative and commercial gain.

How does technology impact on the creative industries?

First, it enables us to do what we already do **better and faster** and, from a business perspective, **more efficiently**. For example, broadcast companies in the UK no longer need dedicated technical staff to play out and monitor their channels. This can all be done from a central control in countries such as India, where the whole thing can be managed at a fraction of the cost and just as efficiently as in the UK.

Then, there is technology that enables us to **take a leap forward** into new areas and new methods of production. James Cameron's *Avatar* required a whole new way of working not only for the technical staff and crews, but also for the performers in a way that now makes the special effects in *Lord of the Rings* seems pedestrian in comparison.

Finally, hyped technologies (for example

Twitter), which are, so far, untried and untested, are explored as **new methods of communication.** They provide a means for individuals to develop relationships, network and create their own online personae by which they can promote the skills and capabilities they offer. This is true of all social media networking tools such as Facebook and the 'professional' networking tool LinkedIn. But this is even more significant in **an industry in which networking and associations are seen as vital to success and raising your profile**.

A history of innovation

Technological innovation is hardly new to the media industry. In 1450 **Guttenberg** designed the printing press; until that time print materials were produced by hand, predominantly by monks, in Latin and were mostly the Bible **or** religious tracts. **Printing** was the start of the mass media industry and the first step to the **democratisation of knowledge.** It was a few hundred years before **photography**, followed by **sound reproduction**, made further in-roads into the ability to reach a wider audience. The **moving image** came in the 1910s with the first cinemas, followed by radio in the 1920s and television in the 1930s. The **web** emerged in the 1990s, and the **universal mobile phone** in 2000. Technology has driven the creative industries which owe their very existence to these series of technological breakthroughs.

However, the key factor since the 1950s is not *just* the new technology but **the rate of change** that has taken place and the reduced time it takes to reach the consumer and change the market. With the rate of change comes the challenge for those who want to, or need to, adopt the technology and adapt to its use. The technology applied in *Avatar* raises questions: Is the actors' work more technical than talent? Are they almost automatons of a system, as opposed to artistic and creative individuals who are being enhanced and supported by the technology?

What happens when new technology is made available?

It is suggested that every new technology goes through what **Gartner**, a business consulting organisation, calls the hype curve. This **hype curve** starts when the technology first becomes available and the very keen early adopters buy the product or service with no real understanding of its potential or pitfalls. It doesn't matter whether it is a technological innovation such as the iPad or a more nebulous system such as **Twitter**; both will get launched with a fanfare of yet-to-be-fulfilled promise. For example, it could be argued that the **iPad**, being a tablet computer and similar in many ways to the hugely successful iPhone, did not require a huge leap of faith by the early adopters; but even so it is remarkable that as of May 2010 Apple had sold over one million of these devices.
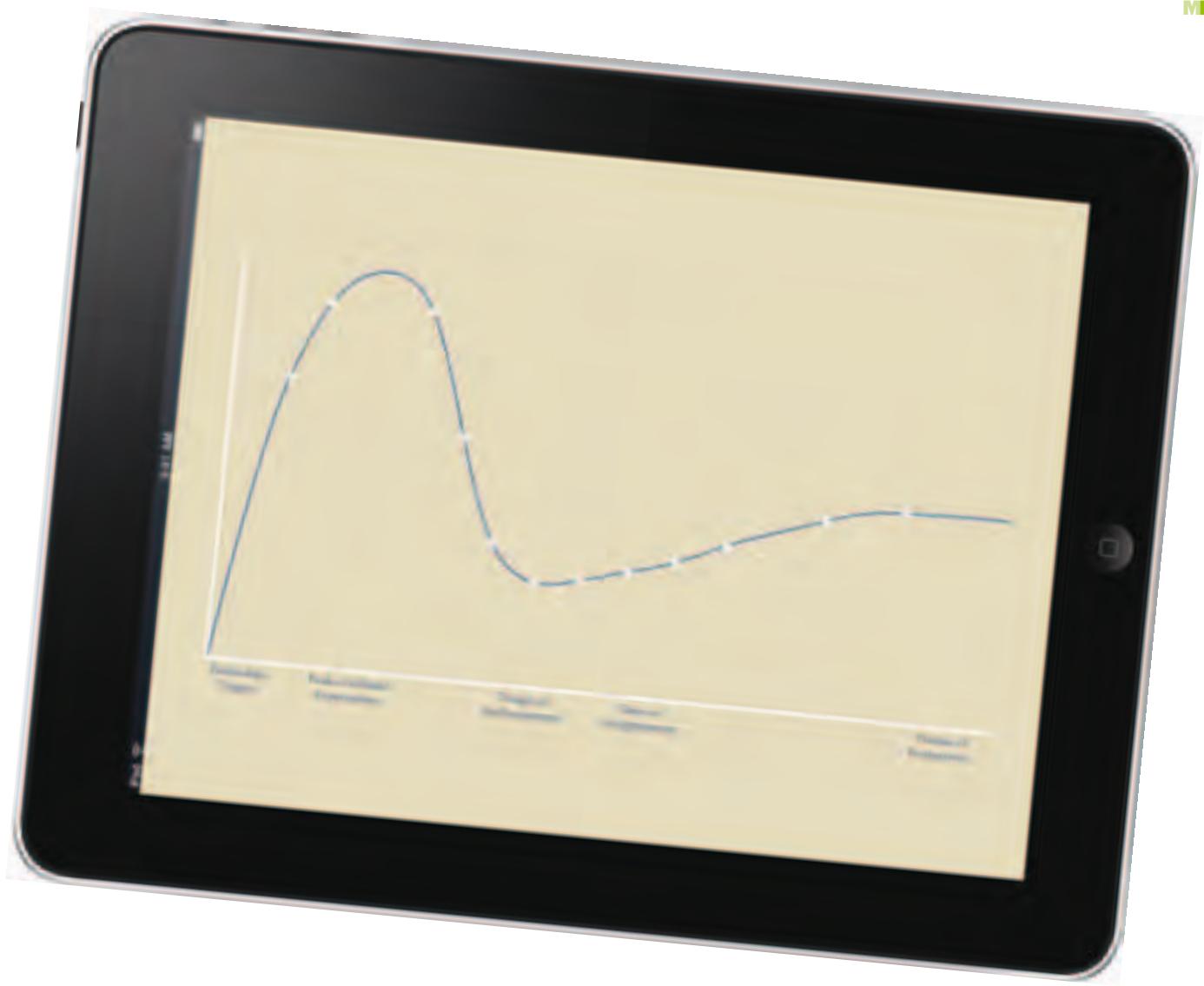
Do you believe the hype?

So, whether it is the **iPad** or **Twitter**, when these technical tools first come on the market there is a great flurry of excitement about their functionality, and a great peak of **inflated expectation** about what they might offer. Will they provide the answer to a particular technical issue? Possibly; but there is a time when this over-inflated sense of expectation fails. What is clear is that many will be disappointed; there is a stage of **disillusionment** with the product or the service. Then the true understanding of what this technological function can offer slowly emerges, to what Gartner calls the **slope of enlightenment**. This is where the more conservative start using the product or service and begin to find that it is proving, in some areas, a useful and productive tool.

Here are some questions you might ask:

– **is 3D, as used by Cameron in *Avatar***, a fantastic niche product that will be restricted to the cinema, or a phenomena that will **saturate** the television or film industry to become **the next logical step on from high definition**? Or will it actually remain a **niche** along with previous attempts at 3D in the 50s and 60s that failed?

– **Twitter**: will it become more than a self-indulgent narrowcast/personal cast (by Stephen Fry), or a useful marketing tool? This is already emerging.

When these technologies settle down and are used by the wider community, will the early adopters tire of the technology and move on in search of something new?

Changing technology, changing industry

Until the early 1990s 'media' meant **mass media**. There were very clear channels to the audiences and markets, and very clear delineation of the technologies used to reach them. Radio and TV were broadcast and predominantly free for all to access. The print industry was made up of newspapers, magazines and books; the film industry was all on celluloid and so required a specialist location to present their films. Finally, although vinyl was on the way out, the music industry had a fairly stable physical distribution system through tapes and later CDs.

Digitisation

The technological change that threw this up in the air was **digitisation**. Digitisation brought about the **convergence** of all these seemingly unique channels to **single, transportable, common format**. Allied with the web and the tumbling cost of personal technology, distribution channels and modes of access become multiple and unclear. In the new world of media an entirely new communication model emerged. **In the old world, the owners and experts *pushed* pre-packaged linear content to mass audiences according to pre-determined frameworks, schedules and layouts. In the new online world, individuals *pull* what they want**, when they want, from a mass of content produced by both professionals and by amateurs as they make use of tools such as **YouTube**, iPlayer and Spotify.

Convergence

The convergence of telecommunications, IT and media into the common digital format meant that many different types of content have been, and can be, aggregated into **one multiple media product or service**.

The BBC website exemplifies the way the printed word (albeit online) can be used to enhance the moving-image text. The printed word is used as a wrapper around their material. **The newspaper industry**, whether it is *the Guardian*, *the Times* or *the Sun*, use their printed-word experience to replicate their print material online, supported by examples of the moving image, produced by their own people or submitted from multiple sources, from professional camera operators to individuals who have video cameras in their mobile phone. It is in this world, with its wealth of possibilities, that the new media creative works.

An industry perspective

One person well qualified to comment on the technological impacts on broadcast industry is **Peter Block, the Executive Director of the Broadcast Equality and Training Regulator (BETR)**. Peter joined the industry just as the transition from **analogue** to **digital** was taking place, and has been at the centre of many of the changes that have impacted on the working conditions of people employed in the broadcast industry. What follows is his experienced response to some big questions.

Peter Block's view

Many years ago I was designing computer graphic systems for small production companies and design departments of universities and colleges. At the time I believed that what we were designing would revolutionise the way people worked and therefore significantly impact on the approaches people took in using new technology. Those new to the creative industry technologies, especially those in Further and Higher Education, happily engaged with the technology, first and foremost as their development tool. What I saw in those designers already established in production companies was that they saw the new digital systems as **another tool in their kit bag of skills**. What astonished me was the fact that they did not use it all the time as their *prime* tool, but saw it as an additional piece of kit. They would put sketches they had produced under a digital camera, they would use tracing paper to create images and photograph them, they would use objects and capture them into the system, grab images off camera, off tape or disk and by so doing **amalgamate and integrate all the technologies they had at their disposal to create a new and innovative creative output**.

The key for me was the fact that all the graphic artists had straightforward, traditional graphics design drawing skills that they applied first. *Then* they used the technology to **enhance or develop the idea** or make it easier and quicker for them to try out multiple new techniques before presenting it to the producer or director.

It has remained clear to me ever since, that those **basic core skills** are so important in any aspect of broadcast production to which new technologies can bring greater opportunities to experiment, enhance and develop. It has been said that the more attempts you can have at exploiting an idea, the more creative you get! However powerful the new and innovative technologies become, they are essentially **creatively neutral**. By that I mean that technology does not inspire creativity; the skills of, say, a graphic designer still have to be there. The **technology is an enabler for the realisation of the creative idea and not necessarily an end in itself.** Unfortunately we have all witnessed what happens when a new piece of technology has become available to people in the broadcast industry: every new programme will make use of it as a means of experimenting, which may on the face of it seem an exciting and new effect; it gets the hype among the professionals.

How do they cope and keep up to date?

The challenge for anybody working in the industry is to understand how much they need to know of the various technologies around them, which may not necessarily be core to the job they are doing. The expectation from many production companies is that all in-house production must be able to multi-task and be multi-skilled.

What does this mean for those working in the industry?

It might mean that someone trained as a journalist needs to be able to film, record an interview while it is taking place as well as taking notes and asking appropriate and probing questions of the person they are interviewing. They then should be able to take that recorded material back, load it onto their laptop, and edit it together into a sensible sequence so it can be used as a supporting presentation to the article they have just written.

It doesn't mean that the individual must be a really proficient camera operator, sound recordist or editor; if they are producing a **package** they will still need a camera operator and possibly a sound recordist to accompany them on the shoot. It is often assumed that the camera operator now has the capabilities to set their own lights and ensure the shot is well lit and well framed. In my experience the limiting factor is *not* about the ability to master or manage the technology, but the fact that there are

too many processes to concentrate on. Can a camera operator listen to what is being asked of the person being recorded, and simultaneously ensure that the shot remains framed, that the sound levels are good, that noises outside are not interfering with the recording as well as ensuring that the person who is moving around whilst being interviewed remains well framed in the picture? I don't think so.

The bottom line in all of this is to know how much you need to know of any one area of skill, even if it is outside of what you consider your core capabilities. This will vary greatly between individual and role. What's clear is that the professionalism and application of the work you are doing will very much depend on the level of practical knowledge that you should have or need to have. Whether you're working on a broadcast shoot, a quick news item, or a piece to end up on a website as a secondary channel will dictate the capabilities demanded of the team. But the fact is that a basic understanding of how any one element in a production chain works is no longer enough. You can no longer assume that you will just hand over a recording for the editor to edit or for the sound recordists to do their job. The truth of the matter is now that we are all now **producers and directors of our own material**. The camera operator can no longer expect the editor to sort it all out; the first cut is her/his own responsibility.

To an extent **convergence and multi-skilling is essential to drive down costs**.

For the companies, the bottom line is very important, and in harsh economic times they need the staff they employ and the content they create to fulfil several functions. We all have to remain open-minded and aware of all new technologies that may come along and impact on our role. Multi-skilling may be a jack of all trades, but in some cases you still need to be master of some. However, instead of entering the broadcast industry as an editor, sound recordist or even make-up artist, nowadays that level of specialisation comes later and later in one's career. Convergent technologies mean a convergence in skills; it is suggested that a **skill remains valid within a time frame of less than two years**.

What is a portfolio worker?

The impact of this increased rate of change of technology means that the skills you had when you entered the industry may not be valid for very long. The portfolio worker is someone who has **a set of skills which they can apply to different roles at different times**. It is a term coined over twenty years ago and is now part of the broadcast industry employment landscape. But more importantly, along with that portfolio of skills is the fact that **as an individual you have to maintain and improve those skills all the time**. More than ever you are responsible for your own career development. How you network through your professional relationships and how you keep up to date on a key piece of technology is more than ever a **personal development**

responsibility. Being able to use the technical tools might not actually improve your creativity; but **not being able to use the tools will be a barrier to entry**.

Conclusion

The case Peter is making is that **technology is creatively neutral** and yet can provide a vehicle for **new expressions of creativity**. Understanding the technology may not be critical to resuscitating your creativity or that of the industry, but an inability to use the tools will be a barrier to joining the creative workforce of which you want to be a part. Understanding technology and technical tools is no substitute for creativity, but a lack of technical know-how will prevent you exploiting that creative flair.

Peter Block is Executive Director of The Broadcast Equality & Training Regulator (BETR), the co-regulatory body for training & skills and equal opportunities in the broadcast industry acting on behalf of Ofcom. Elinor Block recently completed her masters in journalism at City University and is now a full-time intern at Condé Nast working on the traveller magazine. She holds a BA in French and Spanish from the University of Newcastle

CREATIVE FILMMAKING

FOR THE CREATIVELY CHALLENGED

Hide the hoody, cut the corridor chase … being creative in your production work means avoiding the easy options. **Mark Ramey** suggests the five key ingredients for really good short film-making.

If I have to watch one more hooded psychopath chasing a victim around our college corridors I am going to go mad. Equally if I have to watch any more elongated takes in static long shot with mumbled unscripted dialogue then I am going to don a hoody myself and … well you know the rest.

Creativity, it seems, is trickier than some people realise; and yet it forms a major component in most current Media and Film courses. 'A' grades are virtually unachievable without some creativity in evidence. So how can one learn to be creative?

If you subscribe to the idea of the tortured artist tearing originality from their over-fertile mind, then 'creativity' may seem a tough state to attain. However, such an elitist view of artistic invention is now unfashionable: **today you don't need to be 'special' to be 'creative'**. In light of this I here offer five tips for aspiring film-makers that, if followed, will yield creative results without the need to sever an ear, take opium or wrestle with your inner demons.

But a word of warning: **laziness and creativity don't mix**. Creativity is, at the very least, 'producing something'. Ideas are important – but without the will to execute them, you may as well not bother. What follows is a list of ingredients that will make your films creative, but without the desire and the will to achieve creative results, no list of tips will make any difference. **Film-making is hard and creative film-making harder**. But then what thing done well isn't?

If, however, you want to make a film just to keep your teacher off your back, then this is what to do: get a guy in a hoody and chase a bored mate around a corridor; now add a metal soundtrack and a Foley scream in post-production as you fade-out to predictable black; finally spend the rest of your valuable editing time on an elaborate credit sequence full of bloopers that you all find hilarious but which your audience will find embarrassing and self-indulgent. Do all that well and you may just get a low 'C'. Boring. Boring. Boring.

My **Five Top Tips** are defined by the idea of **structure**: creativity doesn't spring out of the ether but cultivated through structure. Creativity is then the product of many failed ideas, and structure encourages that failure. Creativity is contained and directed by structure.

1. Know the rules of your genre

Most film texts are **generic**. So know the rules of your genre. What are the **generic conventions** of rom-coms or thrillers or vampire texts? Armed with such knowledge, your supporting written work will be better received, but, critically, so will your films. By following the conventions of a genre your creative work is done for you. For example, if you are making a horror film then you really need to think about lighting because low-key, high-contrast **lighting** is a feature of the genre. So are canted camera angles, extreme close-ups and jump cuts. Rules are like recipes. **Creativity starts as a rule-following exercise.**

Aside from generic conventions there are also **technical rules or codes** that need to be followed. Lighting codes in horror have already

been mentioned but there are also the broad principles of classical narrative film-making. One such principle, **continuity editing**, can help create opening sequences (the transition from ELS to CU), a sense of continuous space (180 degree rule) or transitions between scenes (cutting on action).

2. Now break the rules

This is where you get revisionist. This is where you challenge generic conventions. Such a move will shock your audience and thrill your examiners. To know a rule and then consciously break it is a real sign of creative intelligence at work. A simple way to achieve this is through **a substitution exercise**. If it is a generic convention of gangster films to have a male hit man or boss then substitute a woman instead. If most murder weapons are guns or knives, then use pencils or bags instead. If most action sequences are accompanied by fast-paced non-diegetic music then use calm music as a counterpoint, or introduce the music in a diegetic way.

Technical rules or codes can also be broken but this is perhaps too advanced for GCSE and AS Level work. However, students of A2 film may well like to **homage** the use of freeze-frame endings and jump cuts that were first controversially pioneered by the French Nouvelle Vague directors in the late 1950s.

3. Plan the film

Most mainstream films are shot within three months. Production is expensive and involves lots of people so it needs rigorous, military style planning and coordination. Pre-production on the other hand can take years and years of false starts and revision. Amateur film-making is no different. No plan and … hoody, corridor, bloopers, etc.

Planning allows for creative revision: it is, after all, impossible to revise something you haven't previously planned. Creativity, then, arises naturally out of a well-planned film shoot. Uncreative work is invariably unplanned. **Creativity needs structure. Creative people are organised people.**

Planning can be broken down into three areas: (a) Script, (b) Storyboard and (c) Mise-en-scène.
(a) Script

Shooting ad lib is a disaster in all but the most assured directorial hands. Ad libbing stops actors getting truly creative with their characters, as there isn't any character to begin with. **The ability to improvise is a hard-won skill**, not the product of innate talent. The decision to ad lib your first film is therefore not a decision: it is rather the avoidance of creative work through blind faith that it will be all right on the night. It won't. Your actors will stink. Dialogue will feel flat. Audiences will not engage. Your work will be boring. Actors who can't learn their lines and film-makers who can't script them are lazy and arrogant. If it works then you were lucky; if it doesn't, then you had it coming. A well-drafted short film script should be punchy (avoid overlong dialogue) and in a readable industry format. One page generally equals one minute of screen time so five pages should be ample. Finally all cast and key crew should get a typed

copy. With a script actors can now be auditioned and rehearsed.
(b) Storyboard

Once the script is complete, the director can start to **visualise** the film. Anyone with minimal art skills can plan shots in a sketchy format or later with more precisely arranged photographs. This allows the director and the crew to now start planning the actual film-shoot, as well as looking ahead to the editing. By providing a rough visual guide to a film sequence, the storyboard also introduces the idea of **location and costume.** Armed with such visual sketches the film's production designer can now resource props and recce locations. Without a storyboard the film exists in a nebulous and vague order and no one will really have any idea what the final product will look like. Once again, a storyboard provides the **structure** for people to be creative. Without it a film is really only an idea, a thought. To assume the idea can be made real without the effort of planning is a serious mistake, as well as a virtual impossibility.
(c) Mise-en-scène

A creative approach to the film's design in terms of its location and some of the key props such as clothing and furnishings is critical. On a technical level attention has to be paid to maintaining **continuity** between different takes (changing hair, clothes and weather are the classic areas of mishap). But there are so many simple **aesthetic decisions,** like colour schemes, which can impact positively on the film.

Generic conventions will also help here: many of the successful student-made gangster films that I have seen have used iconography that fits the genre: sharp suits, flash cars, industrial locations. On an even simpler level, **intertextual references** or **narrative nuances** can be made though the use of well-placed **film posters** or by having a character read a pertinent **book**, study a poignant **painting** or watch a **relevant TV show.** By not paying sufficient attention to the mise-en-scène in a film, students are missing the opportunity to creatively 'dress the scene'.

4. Narratives and names

In terms of narrative development the old **structuralist theories of narrative as formulated by Propp, Barthes, Levi-Straus and Todorov** can all help. The structures they identify can help in the creative process of plotting and building character arcs – the journeys characters go on through a narrative.

For example, in a short film you will only have time to follow one or two people (protagonists) in any real depth. You will need to show these characters going on an emotional **goal-orientated adventure**, perhaps aided or hindered by other minor characters or events (**Propp**). You may have a sense of **resolution** for their narratives (**Todorov**) or you may wish to build in **enigma** (**Barthes**). Certainly there will be moments of **conflict** (**Levi-Straus**) as a narrative without conflict is like a shopping list: a series of loosely connected items with no real tension linking them together.

Another often overlooked aspect of narration is **naming**. Name your characters and always give your film a **working title**. Naming gives **identity**

to a project and can help focus creative energies. An untitled film lacks ownership and a generic signpost. A film called *The Dead Walk* tells everyone what to expect. Likewise a character called Sebastian Fox-Hythe has a connotation far removed from that of a similar young male character named Jim Steel. Name a character and they will talk to you, and, more importantly, your audience.

5. Personality

Often the best creative work has **a sense of identity**. Identity comes from your own experience and influences. Creative work often benefits from the authenticity of that experience. In other words – **film what you know**. If you're making a romantic comedy then try to include events that have really happened to your or your friends. Generic elements will then seem honest even if they are rather clichéd in terms of narrative development.

Another easy thing to do is to **pay homage to a key text** that has influenced your film. Rather like making intertextual references in the mise-en-scène, this can be a loving recreation of a scene from a film or though the use of a more oblique reference as in the choice of soundtrack. Homage may seem like copying but it is much more than that. Aside from the postmodern theorising it can engender, it also shows off your sense of **wider contexts** and can engage your audience on a level deeper than the narrative on display.

'The Team'

That's it. Five top film-making tips that if followed will yield creative results.

However it all may seem too obvious. Are there any other ways to make sure 'creative work' emerges? One equally obvious idea is to **use talented people** suited to their roles. Film-making is a corporate activity. Don't ask your friends to perform or crew just because they are your friends. Pick your team like a football manager would pick a football team: **choose the best**. **Audition** if you have time. Certainly select people according to their talents. Photographers should have sufficient transferable skills to cope with a film camera. Drama students should be able to 'get into character'. English students should be able to produce a script and Art students should be able to produce sketched storyboards.

Another obvious but no less key idea is **'listen'** – listen to your peers, your teachers, your audience. Films made on Film and Media courses live in the public domain and will generate a reaction. Ideally, screen your work *before* the final edit, and allow time to reshoot and revise. Hollywood uses test screenings all the time to gauge the potential success of its product. At the very least be open to criticism. You may think it's obvious what is going on in your film, but if no one else does, then it doesn't work. Because creativity is so personal it can be hard to take criticism but **film-makers should never forget their audiences**. Listen to what they have to say.

To conclude then, **creativity is a product of structures**. Use the structure of rules inherent in genre, narrative and technique to develop your stories and characters. Plan your work so that creative decisions can develop from a secure base and remember that you (your persona) are a structure too.

Finally, remember that creating a film is not like giving birth; it is rather like growing an apple tree, pruning and caring for it until it flowers and bears fruit. Get creative through organisation. Care for the film and the audience will care for it too. If it is effortless, it will be careless, and so no one will care for it.

Now, chase her down this corridor. What's your characters' name? I don't know, err, Pete. So chase her and look mean in your hoody. Oh we can't see his face. Never mind. Shame this corridor is full of posters for a trip to Disneyland. Oh well. I think we will shoot this in long shot. Dialogue? Just make it up. And …Action!

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cReAtive coveRs

Jayson Burns guides you through the key stages of magazine artwork production.

The OCR AS Level specification asks students to produce a front cover, contents page and double-page article for a new music magazine. Much of this article can be applied specifically to that task, but also to a range of other print exercises and to the other specs.

The print tasks offered by various exam boards have three main areas – photos, fonts and layout. This may sound simple and obvious, but if you can get these first two elements to grab the reader's attention and have a clear understanding of the way a 'real' print text should be set out, you will be well on the way to success in your production work.

Research, research, research!

As with any production task, you will need to thoroughly research **a range of similar products** (texts) and **the preferences of your chosen target audience.** The first bit will involve looking at a range of 'real' print texts. In the case of my students who produce pages from a music magazine, they look at the front covers, contents pages and articles from a range of magazines, not just music, to get a sense of how professional products should look. They are looking for common ground (codes and conventions) across these examples – so for the cover, for instance:

– **The masthead** – Where is the title of the magazine positioned?

– **Coverlines** – Where is the text that tells us what is inside the magazine placed?

– **Type of shot** – What type of image is used (close-up, long-shot or something in between)?

– **Gaze and eyeline** – Does the subject look straight at the camera creating an instant relationship with the reader?

This is often seen as the least exciting part of production work but, as the old saying goes – 'Fail to prepare, prepare to fail!' and exam boards are very keen to see that you have researched your task carefully. This will often show through in the quality of your work as well as in any evidence you submit directly.

Research your target audience

There is often a temptation to produce coursework aimed at your friends. While this is handy for access to a potential target audience when you are doing your research and planning, you can come unstuck by creating work without thorough consideration of who will read your magazine by making assumptions based on your own taste and not on your research. To ensure that what you are producing will be appealing, you could produce a **'style board'** of images and fonts, show them to your target audience and then ask them to tell you which ones appeal and why. Armed with this information you should be able to produce images and fonts that will attract

cReAtive coveRs

your chosen target audience. And remember, a moderator is likely to see a number of **NME**-style magazines but far fewer classical music magazines aimed at an older audience. It can often pay to be different and stand out from the crowd!

It's all about the image!

In many ways the photos that you take are the most crucial element of your project. If you get these wrong you will spend hours correcting them in Photoshop when a few basic principles at the start could have saved you slaving over a hot keyboard in the first place!

When analysing magazines you should have become familiar with the term **'mise-en-scène'** – this literally means 'put in the scene' and refers to everything in the shot. If you have a fire extinguisher or fellow students in shot, a tree coming out of your potential Pete Doherty's head, or your mum doing the ironing in the background, remember that if it can be seen then it is there for a reason! It isn't always possible to 'Photoshop out' these imperfections so choose your background carefully. It is also extremely difficult to cut out images from a 'busy' background if you want to change it – so don't take your photos in front of multi-coloured walls, backgrounds that are close to the skin tones of your subjects or position them in front of objects like railings (unless you want to keep them)! A simple shot in front of a plain background that leaves room for text is often the best to work with.

Avoid flash!

Digital cameras are great for their ease of use and ability to get images onto the computer in an instant. However, many have poor flashes and the best work is often captured outdoors, unless you are lucky enough to have a photographic studio with state of the art lighting at your school or college!

Try and take a number of 'models' out with you when taking your photos. Try shooting them with a range of backgrounds, poses, shot types and angles so that you have a variety to choose from when producing your end product.

Top Tips
– Plain backgrounds.
– Photos taken in natural light.
– Vary angles and shot distances to add variety to your images.
– Don't be tempted to use blurry, camera phone images taken at gigs – they may be authentic but crisp, in-focus shots of your friends pretending to be the next big thing will score more marks.
– Take as many images as possible. OCR specify a minimum of four images and it is far better to be choosing from twenty than five!

The fonts of all knowledge

Your research should give you a clear idea as to which fonts appeal to your target audience and it is vital that you get this bit right if you want to make your work look realistic. Obvious fonts are 'Gothic' styles for rock/metal magazines; clear, simple, plain (sans serif) fonts for pop. A program like Photoshop or Illustrator will usually have enough choice to satisfy all genres. However, a free site like **www.dafont.com** can provide even more options for the font-obsessed student. See our article on using Illustrator (page 26) for further details.

Your fonts should be legible and should not mingle into the background image. 'Drop shadows' and 'outer glows' as well as text placed over blocks of colour can help here; but there is no substitute for a clear font that contrasts in colour with what is behind it. Keep this in mind when taking your photos too. Checked shirts might say 'Emo', but they can be difficult to incorporate with clear coverlines.

Top Tips
Try out different fonts:
– Do they appeal to your target audience?
– Does your research show that they are appropriate for your genre?
– Do they form part of any colour scheme you have created?
– Can you read them?

Layout – let's play noughts and crosses!

The way you set out your pages is crucial. The positioning of the masthead, main cover image and coverlines is pretty standard on all magazines. **Try drawing a 3 x 3 grid over an existing front cover** as if you're about to play noughts and crosses. You will notice that more often than not you will have the masthead in the top horizontal third of the page, coverlines in the left and/or right hand vertical thirds and the main image in the central vertical third. Not surprisingly, this is a technique known as **'observing the rule of thirds'** and is a key component of layout design.

You can often apply this approach to a contents page with three columns of information or an article with three columns of text. The key here is to produce work that **is appropriate for your type of magazine**. Often a more serious (highbrow) magazine will have more columns and more writing than one aimed at a younger audience expecting a more image-dominated piece.

Again this will show the exam board that you have a good understanding of what is expected in the 'real world' of magazine production and still allow you scope to be creative with your photography and written content.

Top Tips
– Where appropriate follow the 'rule of thirds'.
– Think carefully about where you place headlines in articles and mastheads (the eye is often drawn to the top left-hand corner of a page first).
– Make sure that on your cover you have a main coverline linked (anchored) to your main image. Ideally this will be in a larger font to distinguish it from the other coverlines and will be touching/close to your main image.
– Ensure that your article has everything you'd expect of an authentic piece – headline, byline, standfirst (brief explanation of what the article is about below the headline), grab/pull quotes (quotes from the article in a larger font placed within and around the article), picture credits and page numbers.

Some designers work on the layout of a page *before* they get their images – they place all their text in position before getting the photos. If you try this approach you may well find that you get much more appropriate, carefully framed images when you go out with your camera.

Above all, **have fun** when creating your pages. You can keep within the expectations of what a magazine should look like and still have room to add your own individual stamp with the images you choose and the words you write.

MoreMediaMag
You can see a more detailed breakdown of how Lauren's cover developed in our special online supplement.

Jayson Burns teachers Media Studies at Solihull 6th Form College, and is an A Level examiner.
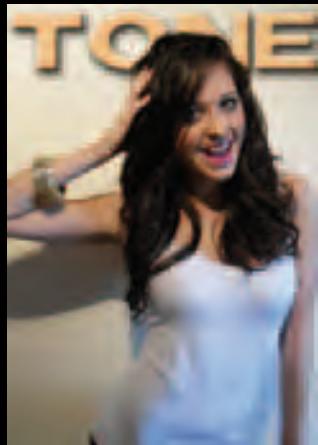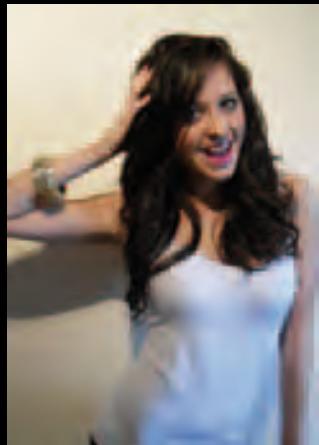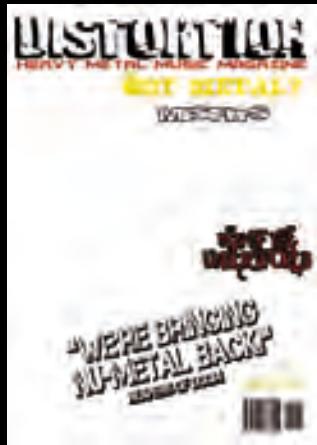
James's Front Cover

James began by putting in his text first. He took his masthead, which has the look of cracked concrete and is typical of 'rock' genres, from 'Dafont' and included all of his coverlines before adding in a picture. Notice how the 3D effect on the masthead again helps to make the text stand out.

Having taken a picture with the position of the coverlines in mind, and having carefully thought about the mise-en-scène – in particular props, costume and setting – he was able to drop his photo in without making any alterations.

Now all that was needed was a few minor alterations. See how he has put in blocks of colour behind some of the text that became 'lost' in the background.

Lauren's Front Cover

Lauren began with a photograph with a plain background and lots of room for coverlines. What she didn't give herself was lots of room for a masthead!

She began by putting in the masthead which she had given a 3D feel by using the bevel/emboss effect and then the eraser tool to give the effect of the text being placed behind the subject.

Her next task was to bring in the text. She has chosen simple fonts with black the predominant colour. However, she has some pink fonts to attract a stereotypical female audience and has used a drop shadow on these to lift them off the page.

Her final touch was to use blocks of pink behind the key areas of text to draw the reader's attention to them.

How to use illustrator

How to make outstandingly creative print work with Adobe Illustrator

At Reigate College we offer a Film Brief at A2 which require students to create a **film trailer** plus a choice of ancillary tasks: either **a film magazine front cover, featuring the film; or a poster for the film**. Other briefs require similar print-based ancillary tasks, as illustrated here.

– **Music promotion package for an album**: a cover for its release as part of a digipak (CD/DVD package); a magazine advertisement for the digipak (CD/DVD package).

– **A promotion package for a new computer/video game**: a magazine advertisement for the game.

– **A promotion package for a new soap opera**: a front cover featuring the new soap listings magazine; a poster for the soap.

– **A selection of materials related to an original children's TV drama**: the front cover to a magazine for the series; a DVD cover for the series.

– **An extract from a new documentary TV programme**: a double-page spread from a listings magazine focused on the documentary; a newspaper advertisement for the documentary.

– **A website for a new TV channel**: a newspaper advertisement for the channel.

– **A short film in its entirety**: a poster for the film.

– **The first level of a new computer/video game:** the cover for the game's package; a magazine advertisement for the game.

This article is based around the production of a film poster. But whichever specification you are studying for, and whatever the exact nature of your print-based task, the following tips will guide you through the tricky process of producing creative, well-designed and professional-looking artwork.

Planning and research

Obviously, as with any text, you would begin by analysing existing magazine covers/posters. We would advise you here to look at the **different range of film magazines aimed at different audiences** – *Empire/Total Film* are no doubt nestling in your letter box even as we write, but there is a far wider range of magazines aimed at niche audiences which may be more appropriate to your film including:

Sight and Sound published by the BFI is aimed at a cineliterate, academic audience and provides comprehensive coverage, including UK film. Perhaps if you were making an urban thriller like *Shifty* this would be a good choice.

Every month we deliver the most informative commentary on film and television, covering each new cinema release and extensive DVD reviews. (www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound)

little white lies (www.littlewhitelies.co.uk) is a bi-monthly, independent movie magazine that features cutting edge writing, illustration and photography to get under the skin of cinema. Because movies don't exist in a vacuum, we venture beyond the boundaries of the big screen, exploring the worlds of music, art, politics and pop culture to inform and illuminate the medium we love.

The focus here is on issues dedicated to a single film. Especially useful for us is the magazine's appetite for **horror** – a popular genre among our student film-makers; the magazine's focus on UK film is a bonus. We would also recommend using this magazine because as it will steer you away from glamorous 'star' type photoshoots, with over-posed and often quite revealing shots of students pretending to be Megan Fox/Robert Pattinson. The now sadly defunct *Observer Film Monthly* is another option. You can, of course, even make up your own mag – but that seems like quite a slog when

there is such a wide variety out there

To guide us in layout terminology we use an excellent article from the early days of *MediaMag* – Mean(ing) Machine: How to read a film poster, by Tom Brownlee, *MediaMagazine 6* (now in the archive on the website and in the special online supplement for this issue).

Layout and construction

Photoshop and **Illustrator** are both complex programs, with more features than we need to use for the ancillary task. A simple way of looking at them is to think of **Photoshop** in terms of **photo/image editing** – preparing your image for the poster/cover; and to use **Illustrator** as a tool for **laying out the elements that will make up your printwork**.

Most film posters will have the following basic elements: **Title, Tagline, Image and Billing Block**. Many will also have one or two of the starring actors' names prominently featured. The image may be a photograph, a drawing or a stylised logo. The **billing block** is essentially the credits for the film, featuring the names of the actors, producers, directors etc. Production company and film studio logos, and film classification logos will also be arranged as part of the billing block.

In order to create realistic looking billing block credits, I highly recommend downloading the **SteelTongs font**: **/www.dafont.com/steeltongs. font** – this assigns a job title to each lower-case key of the keyboard, and allows you to type your own names in capitals using the shift key. We've included two annotated examples here, and you should look closely at posters of films from a similar genre to your trailer to see what elements and ideas you can 'borrow' from their layout.

Now let's begin...

Photoshop tips

Before starting work on your poster or magazine cover, you should think carefully about the images you want to use. If you plan on taking a photograph, use the **highest resolution setting** your digital camera has. This will allow you to print the work at a large size and retain all the detail. Also think about how you want to use your image – will you be cutting out the actor(s) by removing the background? The annotated *Moon* and *Shifty* posters shown here are good examples of this, but to make life easier for yourself, you should aim to take the photo against a plain background – preferably a pale colour to contrast with the actor and their clothing – and beware of white shirts against a white backdrop! More on that in a moment.
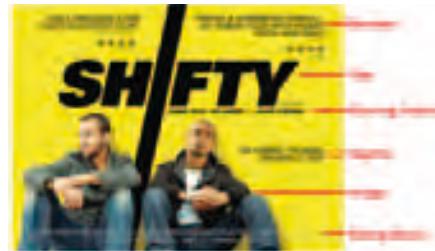
The **backdrop** to your photograph can be a wall, classroom projector screen, anything with a uniform surface that is fairly evenly lit. It's not necessary to have a full photographic studio set-up, although if you have access to this, so much the better!

Removing the background

The following steps will walk you through the process of removing the background from an image. We're working with Photoshop CS3 on Mac OSX, but the features we'll be using are available in many other image editors on both Mac and PC – see the links list at the end of the article for cheap and free alternatives to Photoshop and Illustrator.

Step 1 – Compose the subject against a suitably contrasting background. We've just used the white wall of a college building. Take the photo in **highest resolution possible**. **Copy** that file to your computer.

Step 2 – Open that file in **Photoshop**. Before doing anything else, **save** the file with a new file name by using 'Save As' from the file menu. This means your original photo is untouched and safe, should you decide you need it later. You'll probably be working with .jpg files, so remember to **set the quality to maximum** in the save dialog.
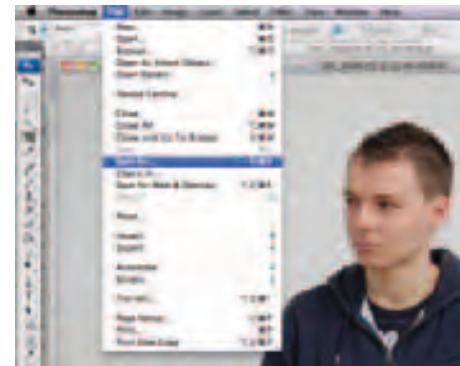
Step 3 – Make any adjustments to the image. It can help to **increase brightness and contrast** – in our example this gives a greater definition of the subject against the pale background. You can apply **effects** and **crop** the image at this point too, if required.
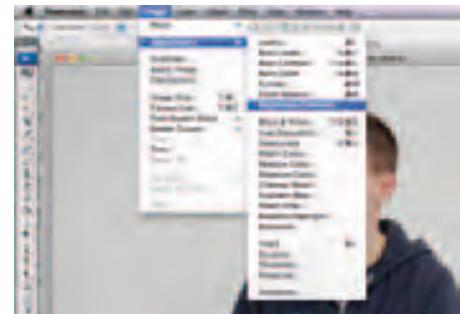
Step 4 – Select the **Magic Eraser tool** from the toolbar – it's in the same button as the standard eraser, so you may need to click and hold on the eraser for it to show the Magic Eraser option.

With Magic Eraser selected, click anywhere
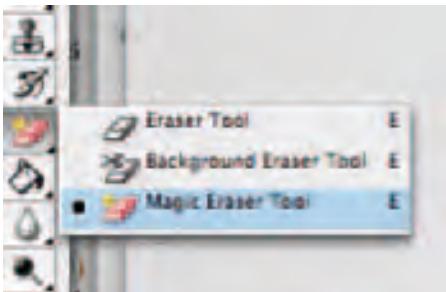
on your background and watch as it magically vanishes, leaving your character intact!

If parts of your subject also disappear, you

may need to rethink costume and background and retake the photo. Magic Eraser is not always perfect, and there are more detailed ways to cut out an object, but this is one of the fastest ways to transparent background gratification!

Step 5 – Save the file as a Photoshop (**.psd**) file – this will retain the transparent background when we take the photo into **Illustrator**, allowing us to place other images, designs and text behind our character.

Illustrator tips

When launching **Illustrator** consider the **orientation** of your design (portrait or landscape) – here I've selected **landscape A4** as the working size for our poster, although when we save our finished file we'll be able to print our poster at a much larger size than just A4.

If you're working on a magazine cover, or DVD sleeve, you may need to **set a custom size** at this stage, or use one of the installed **preset templates**, or the many free templates available online with custom dimensions for a variety of print products.

Step 1 – Choose a background colour; click on the **rectangle icon** and drag over your page. Making the rectangle slightly larger than the page dimensions ensures that colour will continue all the way to the edge when printing (known in the printing world as **bleed**). Click on the **fill colour drop-down** in the top left of the menu bar and pick a background colour.

The right-hand of the two-colour drop-down swatches is **the stroke colour** – this is the outline colour of your shape or object. Choose the white square with the red line through in the respective swatches if you want no fill or outline colour. You can adjust the width of the stroke in the **Stroke drop-down** just to the right of the two colour drop-downs.
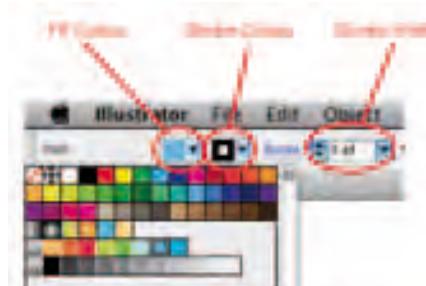
Step 2 – **Placing the photo image**. Select **File > Place** and navigate to your edited image. Hopefully the image will cover much of your A4 page. To reduce its size, click and drag the corner of the object whilst holding the SHIFT key – this will ensure it retains its correct proportions, and doesn't become squashed or distorted. Here I've placed the picture, and added a second dark blue rectangle above to act as a border for our title text.

Step 3 – **Adding text**. Select the **Type tool** from the toolbar, and click where you'd like to start typing. Once you've finished typing, ensure the text object is selected and choose your font and font size from the drop down buttons.

I've added my title, tagline (sadly there is no button for creating terrible puns in Illustrator – you'll have to think of your own!) and a block of '...101...' characters as a background pattern.

In order to get the '..101..' pattern behind the other objects, select the object and **choose Object > Arrange > Send Backward** until it

appears where you want it. You can use these arrange controls to move objects in relation to each other.
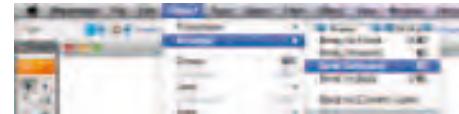
Step 4 – **Billing block**. Having studied other billing blocks, and worked out the roles you'll be assigning, select the **Type tool** and the **SteelTongs font**. I'm working on the billing block below the main poster area, having zoomed in the view to make the roles easier to read. Bear in mind that the billing block is only really designed to be read close up on a large poster, so you'll essentially need to make yours too small to read when viewing your whole poster on a computer screen.

When you're happy with the credits, **resize the text** and move it into place on the poster. Remember to **hold SHIFT** if you resize the text object by dragging the corners in order to maintain the correct proportions. I'm also going to add a BBFC classification logo of a '15' rating to the bottom right of the poster. See the resources section below for info on Wikimedia Commons, an invaluable resource for high quality logos from the BBFC amongst many others.

Step 5 – **Creating outlines from the text, exporting as a JPG for your website/blog and saving as a PDF for printing**. Now we've finished laying out our poster, we need to make sure we only export what we want to see. Select the **Crop Area Tool** from the toolbar and highlight the A4 area we created initially. You'll be able to see the crop marks in the corners of the selected area.

Now we can **export a JPG version**, for emailing, inserting into a blog page, or any other uses where a smaller file size is required. Select **File > Export >** and choose JPG. Set the quality somewhere around **6 or 7** – higher quality settings are fine here, but will mean a larger file size.
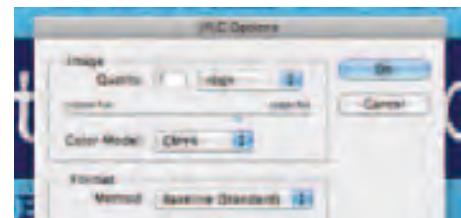
Now to save a print version. Firstly, save your file, then select all the objects in your artwork (**Select > All**) and choose **Type > Create Outlines**.

This basically turns each individual letter into a vector shape, and allows it to be scaled up for large size printing. Once you've created your outlines, the text is no longer editable, so ensure you've saved your original .ai document in case you need to make later changes!

Brian Mulligan and Simon Ward, Media and Film Studies Department at Reigate College.
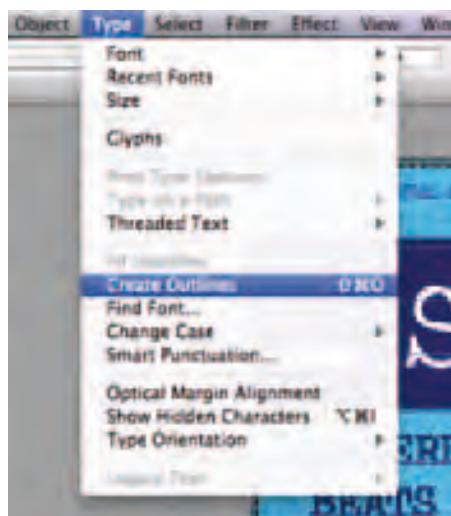
Now select **File > Save As ...** from the menu bar and choose **Adobe PDF** from the format drop-down.
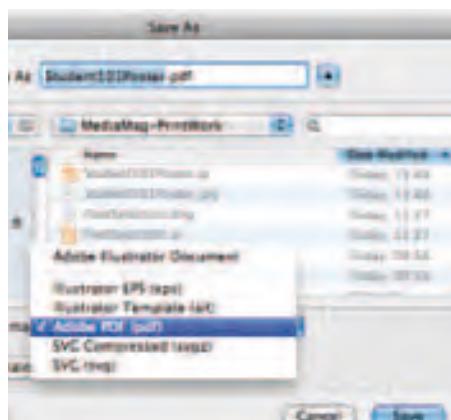
You should now have a .pdf file, viewable using **Preview** (Mac) or **Adobe Acrobat** (Mac or Windows) You'll notice if you zoom in on screen, the text characters remain smooth even at high magnification, meaning detail is retained when a large version. Here's Reigate College Media Studies student Stefan Corr alongside his group's 'Becky 16' poster and a selection of other student-created posters and magazine covers.

Some useful resources

GIMP – highly regarded image-editing software, it's open source and available for free on both Macintosh and Windows platforms: www.gimp.org

Graphic Converter – another well regarded image editor, Macintosh only, but has been bundled with Mac hardware in the past, so you may find you already have it installed on an older machine: www.lemkesoft.com/content/188/graphicconverter.html

Photoshop Elements – if the full version of Photoshop is overkill for you, try its cut-down sibling: www.adobe.com/uk

Create – longstanding page layout package, competitively priced, with free upgrades for life: www.stone.com/Create/Create.html

Wikimedia Commons – large number of logos/graphics/images, freely available for use under the Creative Commons licence. For example, BBFC classification logos for film posters/DVD covers etc. Use the .svg (Scaleable Vector Graphic) version where available, as this will give you a transparent background, allowing placement over other images/backgrounds without a tell-tale white border. e.g.: **http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:BBFC_15.svg**

SteelTongs font – for creating professional looking billing blocks on your film poster. Full map of the keyboard and the characters assigned available here: www.dafont.com/steeltongs.font

Full page versions of the annotated **Shifty** and **Moon** posters are included in the **MoreMediaMag** online supplement.

STOP MOTION START CREATING

Stop-motion animation is a thriving format for media producers, despite competition from traditional cartoon techniques and modern digital animation. **Pete Turner** discusses why this most creative of formats has managed to survive in the age of Pixar and Dreamworks, and looks at ten contemporary examples that show the range of creativity in this field.

Animation is basically displaying a sequence of images very rapidly in order to create an illusion of movement. It relies on the phenomenon of **persistence of vision**. This is when a series of images is flashed up in front of someone's eyes and each image is retained on the retina for at least a tenth of a second. Therefore if a series of images are flashed quickly enough (at least 12 frames per second) the subject of the images appears to move. Stop-motion animation involves physically manipulating 3D objects frame-by-frame to create the illusion of movement.

The development

The pioneers of the moving image developed technology that led to the development of cinema, cartoon animation and then stop-motion animation by early pioneer **George Pal**.

Joseph Plateau invented the **Phenakitoscope** which first used the persistence of vision principle to create moving images.

Later in the 1800s **William Horner developed the Zoetrope.**

Emile Reynaud next invented the **Praxinoscope** which was the first device to show cartoons on a public screen. These inventions all displayed drawn images, and were therefore the beginnings of cartoon animation.

Edward Muybridge, a biologist interested in movement of humans and animals, later developed the **zoopraxiscope**. Muybridge was using photographic stills of humans and animals moving to create moving images. This was a giant step towards stop-motion animation and the invention of cinema.

Thomas Edison later developed the **Kinetoscope** which introduced the basic approach to cinematic projection that is still used today (pulling a roll of film over a light).

The Lumiere Brothers then developed the **Cinematographe**. This is notable as cinema and stop-motion animation have always been similar in that both capture movement frame-by-frame and then the frames are played back so quickly that objects within appear to be moving.

Cartoon animation soon followed and early examples of this include the films of **Winsor McCay** and **Walt Disney**. Instead of cartoons, **George Pal** began using inanimate objects such as cigarettes in one advert, and wooden puppets in a series of short films which became known as 'Puppetoons'. These were made in the 1940s with many different wooden puppets or puppet parts placed in various different positions which could therefore be replaced between frames in order to create the illusion of movement. **Ray**

Harryhausen later became famous for his work with stop-motion animated models in live action films such as *Jason and the Argonauts*.

10 contemporary examples

Stop-motion animation has come a long way since the days of Pal and Harryhausen, as shown in the recent examples described below, which cover a range of media forms from big budget feature films to homemade digital exhibitions.

To see all these examples and more, go to **YouTube** and search for: **pturner1010 stop-motion** to find my stop-motion animation play list.

1. Music video 'Plan B, No Good'

This video was made by **Daniel Levi in 2005** and features the British rapper **Plan B** being animated, as well as a huge number of inanimate objects around his house. Objects such as kitchen appliances and food are made to appear as if they are moving by themselves and objects even move in time with the beat of the tune. Stand-out moments of creativity are the shaving of Plan B's head followed by his hair crawling away by itself, and the flipbook drawings that reference the origins of stop-motion animation. The video took seven days to shoot on a stills camera and is particularly creative for its use of lip-synching:

[This] was achieved by Levi shooting Plan B performing the track on a DV camera, then output the footage at 12 frames per second and printed a book of all 2,800 frames, which became their lip-synch bible. Daniel says: 'Every frame we shot we showed him the relevant page of the book and he mimicked the shape of his mouth on that page for the shot.'

2. Music video 'Oren Lavie, Her Morning Elegance'

Released in 2009, this video has become incredibly popular on **YouTube**. Co-directed by **Lavie** (the song-writer and performer) and **Yuval and Merav Nathan**, it features a woman (actress Shir Shomron) lying on a bed occasionally joined by her partner. Sounds boring? It's anything but. The creativity is astounding with the woman moving through an incredible journey that takes her to the clouds, through wind storms and falling underwater and swimming, all created with pillows, sheets and careful movements of the performers. The video consists of **'roughly 3225 still photos… using one camera, hanging from the ceiling'** and **'took only 2 days of shooting'**. Simply beautiful.

3. Television Advertisement 'Doritos Tribe'

Created by **Matt Bowron and John Addis**, this advert cost under ten pounds to make and demonstrates why stop-motion techniques can be so popular with companies that want (or need) to make cheap adverts. It consists of very few camera set-ups and simply has a bag of Doritos open itself and Dorito crisps doing a little sacrificial dance and one crisp sacrifices itself to a pot of dip. It is very simple but very effectively sells the product. Peter Charles, the brand manager at Doritos, said:

The imagination and talent put into 'Tribe' really made it stand out. Other consumers clearly connected with the ad, leading to an incredible response at retail level.

4. Television programme Robot Chicken

Aimed at adults and teenagers and created by **Seth Green**, Dr Evil's son and voice of *Family Guy's* **Chris Griffin**, *Robot Chicken* is different to the majority of television shows that use stop-motion which have been traditionally aimed at children. It features swearing, violence and coarse humour mixed with 1980's toys such as 'Transformers' and 'Star Wars' merchandise. Putting well-known characters from pop culture into mundane real world situations can produce

comedy, which can be juvenile but is sometimes satirical. The animating of children's toys was a great creative decision that has captured the imaginations of adults who had to stop playing with toys a long time ago.

5. Feature Film: Fantastic Mr Fox

Proving that stop-motion animation is still a viable creative choice in Hollywood even in the age of **Pixar**, this is the first stop-motion animated film produced by 20th Century Fox. **'Shot digitally using a Nikon D3…It was also shot at a frame rate of 12 frames per second, rather than the more fluid 24, so that viewers would notice the medium of stop-motion itself.'** Featuring a starry voice cast including George Clooney, and director Wes Anderson's usual themes of family dysfunction, the film is a creative mix that can please children and adults with its old-school animation and witty script.

6. Feature Film: Coraline

Directed by the man who never got much credit for directing **Tim Burton's** *The Nightmare Before Christmas,* this is **Henry Selick's** masterpiece. Pushing stop-motion animation forward in terms of length – at one hour and forty minutes, this is the longest stop-motion film to date – and dimensions, it is the first stop-motion animated feature to be shot entirely in 3-D. The story is terrifying and the animation will increase the fear of young viewers with an evil 'Other Mother' with buttons for eyes who turns into a spider near the film's climax. This is stop-motion animation on an epic scale!

7. Digital Exhibition: Tony VS Paul

Created by Paul Cummings and Tony Fiandaca, this features two fighting friends who seem to have telekinetic powers because they can move objects just by waving their hands. They can also 'fly' and go through walls by using stop-motion techniques. The creativity in this video extends to the music created by team, and the actions of our protagonists have spurred thousands of imitators on **YouTube**.

The video took two months to film and edit' and 'the camera…used was a Canon GL1 with both digital stills being taken, and footage being shot… there are 4,000+ still shots in the video.

8. Digital Exhibition: MUTO

A street artist from Argentina calling himself **'Blu'** has

taken graffiti to a whole new level, creating animations on walls and sidewalks.

A whole new creative direction for stop-motion animation, this piece of work is jaw-dropping for its creepy shape-shifting images and an appreciation of the technical achievement of its production. The trail left behind on the walls by the animation is evidence of the hard work put into this stunning effort. Each frame's graffiti image was erased to make way for the next image.

MUTO's **characters crawl, walk and transubstantiate along the walls of… two cities, creating a dream state atmosphere that will have the viewer transfixed for its seven minute running time.**

Trippy.

9. Digital Exhibition: Deadline

Directed by **Bang-yao Liu** as a college project in her senior year, *Deadline* (like many other stop-motion animations) involves a one camera set-up. Appealing to imaginative, distracted and over-worked students everywhere, post-it notes of different colours are manipulated into a wide range of images on the wall of a dozing student. The 'making of', which can be found at www.youtube.com/watch?v=ArJYvaCCB3c, showcases the incredible level of preparation that went into this small and incredibly creative production. It was also rated the number 9 viral video in *Time* magazine's Top 10 list of 2009 demonstrating the power of the internet in distributing creative ideas.

10. Student Project: Bracknell and Wokingham College advert

This video was made by four BTEC National Diploma in Media students for their stop-motion animation unit. Their task was to make a short advert for anything they wanted. Filmed by **James Riley** and performed by Leigh Edgecombe, Chloe Williams, Nicholas McFadzean and a cameo from myself, it took nine hours to plan and storyboard, twelve hours to film and six hours to edit. Each camera set up took almost three hours to get all the shots needed. Every second of footage used 12-15 still photos to make the motion look fluid. The finished product is made up of around 800 photos and was put on **YouTube** in January racking up over 1100 views since. Inspired by Plan B and Tony Vs Paul, the students of the college develop telekinetic powers to cause havoc in the classroom! Read a brief Q&A with the director in our online supplement.

What are you waiting for?

Stop-motion animation remains an incredibly popular medium for creative individuals to work in, despite the competition from digital animation. Budgets can be kept extremely low and the impossible can be made possible without the need for hours behind a computer rendering frames of computer-generated imagery and the expense of powerful software. With a limited number of camera set-ups, creative use of performers, and cheap props such as Post-it notes or everyday household items, animations can be created that are extremely imaginative and effective. Students who tackle stop-motion animation can experiment with set design, character design and lighting and work with no budget to create visually stunning pieces of coursework. It requires a great deal of patience and hard work but is ultimately an extremely rewarding experience.

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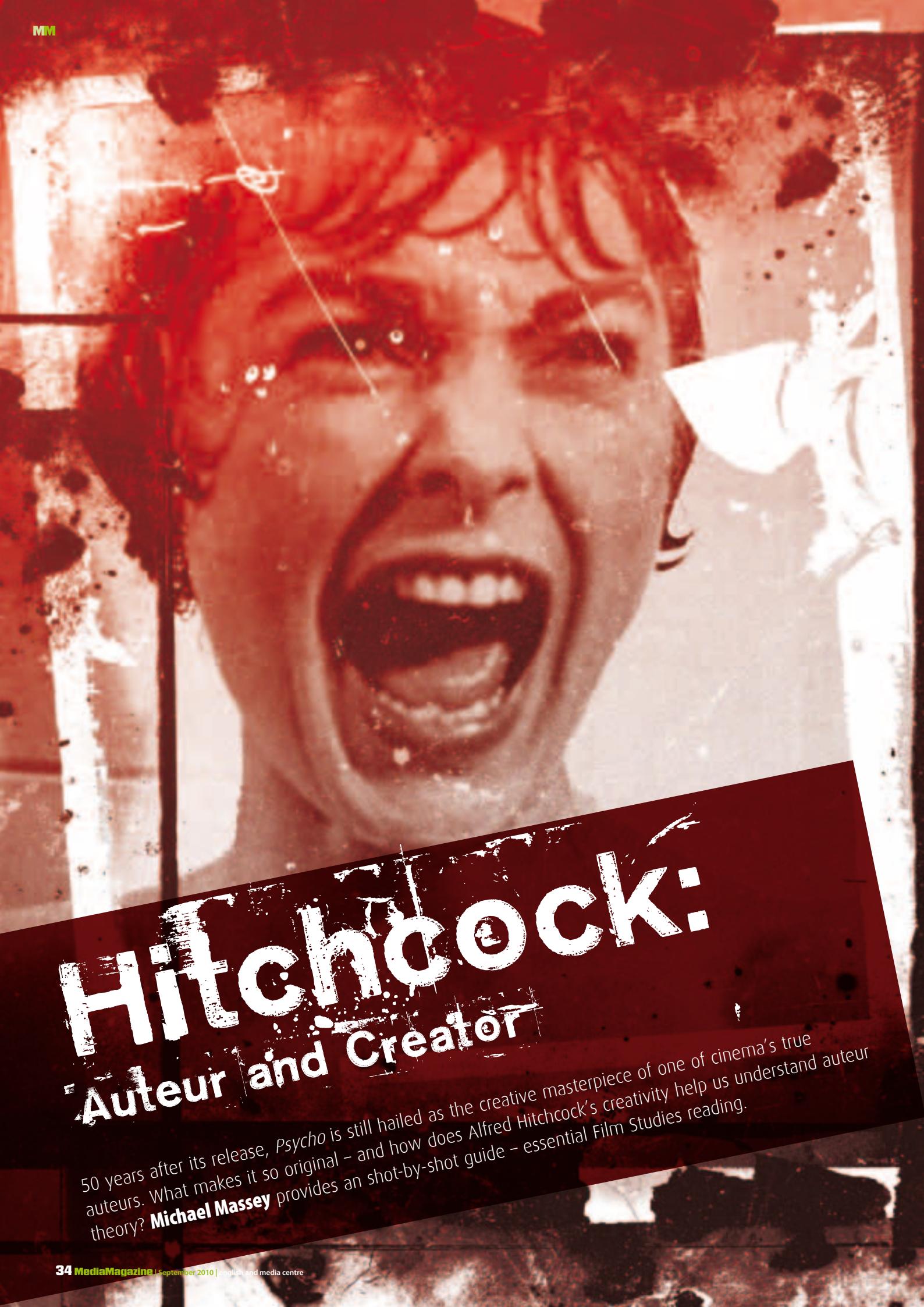
Hitchcock:
Auteur and Creator

50 years after its release, *Psycho* is still hailed as the creative masterpiece of one of cinema's true auteurs. What makes it so original – and how does Alfred Hitchcock's creativity help us understand auteur theory? **Michael Massey** provides an shot-by-shot guide – essential Film Studies reading.

For the young French film critics of the 1950s, **Alfred Hitchcock** was one of the great **auteurs**. You have probably encountered the term **auteur** in your studies of film, and you have no doubt been told that it means 'author' or 'creator' in English, and that it refers to the idea that some film directors should be regarded as the single creators of their films, much as a writer is regarded as the creator of a novel.

But what does it actually mean in practice? Why are some directors regarded as **auteurs** and others not? How do you know when you're watching a film directed by an **auteur**? This article will try to give you some answers to these vital questions, by looking at some aspects of Hitchcock's film *Psycho* (1960).

Spot the auteur

Those French film critics believed that film directors could – and should – impose a personal vision on their films. They argued that a director like Hitchcock stamped a number of creative features on his films, including:

- particular camera set-ups and movements, such as **very high angle shots** (*Norman carrying his mother downstairs; Norman's mother stabbing Arbogast*), **exaggerated POV shots** (*Marion's first glimpse of the traffic cop; Lila's long walk up to the house*)

- **single-take shots** (*the camera gliding across the cityscape to fly right through the hotel window; the camera moving away from Marion's body in the bathroom, across the bedroom, past the $40,000 in the newspaper, to the open window beyond*)

- creative use of **sound** (*the insistent and urgent non-diegetic music; the violin screeching sequence during the shower stabbing; the echoing, long-distance voice of Norman's mother coming through the motel room window*)

- exaggerated **lighting effects** (*expressionistic lighting of the house and the lighted windows; the swinging light-bulb in the cellar sequence*)

- very precise **editing** to create tension and surprise (*Marion stopped by the traffic cop; Lila's exploration of the mother's bedroom*)

- complex **montage** (*the 70-shot shower sequence*)

- the introduction of **false leads and misleading information** (*the $40,000 dollars; the suspicions of Sam, Lila and Arbogast; the quest for Norman's mother*)

- characters **trapped or imprisoned** (*Marion trapped in a relationship going nowhere; Norman trapped by his mother; Norman's stuffed birds trapped as mounted trophies; Norman's mother shut in the fruit cellar; Marion trapped by guilt after stealing the $40,000*)

- **misleading relationships** (*Marion as a trustworthy employee; Norman and his mother*)

- **false identities** (*Marion signing in at the motel with the name Marie Samuels; Norman and his mother; Lila and Sam pretending to be husband and wife to fool Norman*)

- personal **cameo appearance** of Hitchcock (*seen through the window of the real estate office where Marion works, standing outside the office – she walks past him into the office*).

Approaching auteur theory

One approach to studying the **auteur** theory would be to identify common **threads and themes** running through a film director's work. If it is possible to recognise a director's **signature** imprinted on a film in some of the ways outlined above, then it might be possible to argue that the director qualifies for **auteur** status.

For example, **Steven Spielberg** is often quoted in this context. Many of his films involve ordinary people having to confront the extraordinary, the other, the alien: *Duel* (*a motorist has to contend with the threatening presence of an invisible truck driver*); *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (*an ordinary telephone linesman is struck with a vision of the location for an encounter with benign aliens and joins them in their visiting ship*); *Jaws* (*a small fishing community and its local police chief confront a killer shark*); *E.T.* (*a young boy befriends an alien left behind on an alien planet – Earth*); *Schindler's List* (*a German factory owner stands up to the might of the Nazi regime and rescues over a thousand Jews from annihilation*).

Spielberg makes a very direct reference to the **auteur** theory in *Close Encounters*. He cast the French film director **Francois Truffaut** as the director of the whole alien encounter project. Truffaut was one of the original inventors of the **auteur** theory when he was a film critic. Spielberg was greatly influenced as a director by Hitchcock himself. It was as though Spielberg had completed the circle.

When *Psycho* was made, Hitchcock was already a very well-known and well-respected director, both in the UK and the US. He began his career in London in the 1920s, making silent films and the very first British sound film, *Blackmail* (1927). He was persuaded to move to Hollywood in the late 1930s and went on to make bigger budget movies, some in colour during the 40s and 50s, and a series of mystery thrillers for television. When *Psycho* was released in 1960 he was, therefore, a very well-known and well-recognised figure as a director of mystery thrillers involving espionage, theft, plots, betrayal and murder in both the film and television worlds. This personal link with his productions was reinforced in *Psycho* by a long, innovative trailer, featuring Hitchcock himself, in which the audience was taken on a conducted tour of the motel set, while Hitchcock scattered a series of unfinished sentences and tantalising clues connected with the story, guaranteed to whet their curiosity.

How does Hitchcock's creativity work?

Hitchcock believed that it was the director's responsibility to trigger the audience's emotional and psychological response by what he called **'pure film'**. In order to achieve this, he concentrated much of his attention on the preparation of his films. He created elaborate **storyboards** and planned every camera position and movement in painstaking detail.

So what is Hitchcock's 'pure film'? Certainly all the elements mentioned above, together with others designed to draw the audience right into the film's **narrative** and **plot**. One pivotal feature is Hitchcock's emphasis on **the audience as voyeur**. For him, the audience is always watching with a curious, prurient interest the behaviour of other people, especially that behaviour which is not usually on display to the world. As a cinema audience, we become privy to the private and personal secrets, desires and actions of the characters in a film, learning far more about them than any of the characters themselves. We stand outside the narrative as observers, but our emotions are engaged directly with the characters and actions, so we are both **subjective and objective participants within the action**. We empathise with the characters, but remain safe in the knowledge that what is happening is not actually happening to us. Hitchcock takes this idea and pushes it to the limit.

In *Psycho* we are brought eye-to-eye with some very uncomfortable truths about ourselves as voyeurs, both of ourselves and others.

At the very beginning we spy on Marion and Sam through the window of their hotel room, and we are rewarded for this invasion of their privacy by a vision of Marion in her underwear and Sam stripped to the waist.

When we see Cassidy in the next scene staring fixedly and lasciviously at Marion in the office, the audience are encouraged, by **camera angle** and by **shot-reverse-shot**, to stare just as hard at her.

When Marion decides to take the money and leave town to be with Sam, Hitchcock emphasises the apparent significance of the $40,000 by repeated close-ups of the envelope containing the money.

Marion also decides to exchange her car and counts out the necessary cash from the $40,000 in the ladies' rest room. Here Hitchcock uses the first of a series of creative 'mirror' shots to emphasise the duplicity of her actions.

This theme of double identity and reflected image is then continued. Marion tries to deceive Norman by signing in at the motel with a false name.

Arbogast, the private eye, tries to trick Norman into admitting he has seen Marion.

Sam also tries to trick Norman into revealing Marion's whereabouts.

Lila explores Mrs Bates' room and scares herself with her own reflection.

Hitchcock uses the 'mirror' motif to underline our **basic narcissistic voyeurism** – we love looking at ourselves. This is then extended and developed into the **'we love looking at other people'** theme.

Most significantly, when Norman removes the picture from the wall of his parlour and looks through the hole he has cut in the wall of Cabin 1, we see a profile of his eye staring at Marion undressing, then a cut to a **direct POV shot** of Marion undressing – we have become Norman, the voyeur.
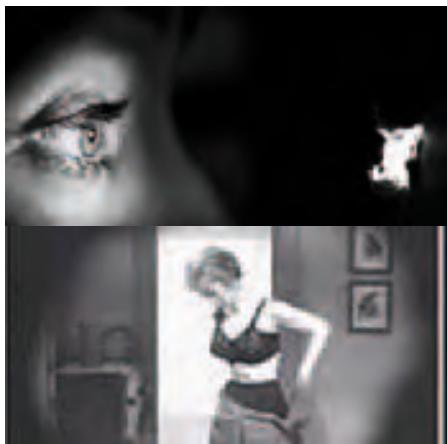
No coincidence, then, that the empty eye sockets of Norman's mother's stuffed corpse are made to 'see' her son's attack on Lila and his eventual capture by the effect of moving shadows created in them by a swinging light bulb.

Exploring Hitchcock's creativity in Psycho for yourself

- Investigate other uses and meanings of the 'eye' motif.
- Examine Hitchcock's use of close-ups and their purpose.
- How is the audience positioned during the shower sequence?
- Examine how the editing contributes to the shock of the shower sequence.
- Explore other examples from the film of the audience as voyeur.

Michael Massey is a former Media teacher, voiceover artist, swing musician and author. His book on TV Drama is published by Auteur Publications.

Auteur and Creator

Hitchcock

JACQUES THE LAD

How Jacques Audiard reinvented the crime thriller

Has Hollywood killed the creativity of the auteur? Is there anything new to say about genre? Film Studies examiner **John Fitzgerald** argues here that Jacques Audiard's *A Prophet* answers both these questions, and in our online supplement, offers a broader context for the debates.

It's been argued recently that the 'high concept Hollywood blockbuster' has had a detrimental impact on the role of the auteur director in America, despite recent attempts from the **Big Four American auteurs, Scorsese, Tarantino, Mann and Burton** to breathe new life into conventional genres.

However, the picture is very different in Europe, where for some years established auteurs such as **Almodovar, Haneke, and Jeunet** have been powerfully challenging genre conventions and reasserting the power of the director, albeit primarily to arthouse audiences and World Cinema enthusiasts. French cinema in particular has seen a resurgent interest in stylish thrillers which have re-invented the crime genre.

While such European films still lack the promotional clout and massive budgets of the English language blockbuster, they are unlikely to receive the mainstream attention they deserve; but a breakthrough French crime film recently released on DVD may well change audience opinions of World Cinema in the same way that *City of God* (Meirelles, 2002) did at the start of the decade. It is a gripping, nerve-shredding prison drama which puts recent efforts by the likes of Scorsese and Mann into some context. The film is called *A Prophet* **(2010)** and it was directed by **Jacques Audiard**. A former script writer, following in the footsteps of his prolific father Michel, this was Audiard's fifth film in a career which started in 1994 when he was already in his 40s. The themes which permeate his work are all revisited in this masterpiece: **reinvention, escape and patriarchy**.

A Prophet: the rise and rise of the gangster

The film took five years to bring to the screen and is, in many respects, Jacques Audiard's most ambitious and successful film to date. The French box office was **1.2 million admissions**. This was a major coup for a graphically violent film which clocks in at 155 minutes. The film also impressed at a number of film festivals, winning the Grand Prix at Cannes, being the inaugural Best Film winner at the 2009 London Film Festival and winning a BAFTA for Best Film not in the English Language.

Research was paramount in order to present a realistic view of the prison system in modern day France – a system that in many respects reflects the intense difficulties in French society as a whole, centring on **race, inequality and lack of opportunity**. A vast set to shoot the gaol sequences was constructed in an empty former warehouse in the Paris suburbs. To further add to the realistic feel of the film, ex-convicts were hired both as consultants and for a number of roles. France's prisons have been heavily criticised for overcrowding and high suicide rates, and are seen by the Council of Europe as among the worst on the Continent.

The racial dimension was one that Audiard also wanted to reflect in the film. While 10 percent of its population is Muslim, human-rights groups estimate that nearly two-thirds of prison inmates are Muslim, part of the North African/Arab diaspora in many French cities. The director decided to centre the film on a young Muslim character Malik El Djebena (**Tahar Rahim**), who, while serving a six-year sentence in a dingy French jail, goes through the process of reinvention characteristic of Audiard's films.

Rahim, a virtual unknown, brings the sort of intense performance associated with Audiard's other male leads. The film charts his rise from a 19-year-old hoodlum without friends, family or cliques to support him, to his reinvention as a major player in the criminal underworld. When we first encounter him in the film it is hard to believe this is where he will end up. He looks scared and worried. His back and face bear scars that suggest a troubled past. Shortly after arriving in the exercise yard his trainers are stolen and he is beaten. It soon emerges that he is illiterate and powerless. At the outset his Arab background is underplayed as he makes no real initial connections with the other Muslim prisoners. Audiard was keen to suggest that the representation of Malik went against the more standard way in which these characters are shown in French cinema:

> You see Arabs in one or two contexts, either naturalistically in a social realist context or in genre fiction playing a terrorist. And we didn't want to do that. We wanted our Arabs to be heroes.

Malik captures the eye of César Luciani (Niels Arestrup – who played Tom's father in *The Beat that my Heart Skipped*), who feels much more like a traditional Godfather-style boss, with his black overcoat and shuffling Marlon Brando gait. He is the leader of a small, but powerful group of Corsican mafia. They virtually run the jail with a complicated system of favours and clear links to their Italian gangster cousins. Despite their prestige in the prison pecking order, they are being outnumbered by the growing Muslim population – yet for most of the film they rule the institution, based on fear and reputation. Malik is identified as someone who doesn't fit in, and who is vulnerable to influence; and it is this that the wily old César exploits. He offers Malik a terrible bargain: that he kills Reyeb (Hichem Yacoubi), a homosexual Arab who is destined to testify against César. By doing this he would be taken under the protection of the Corsicans. But if he fails or refuses to comply he will be killed himself.

Malik cannot go to the governor or speak to the wardens; he has no choice but to follow Luciani's orders. The scene in which he murders Reyeb is foregrounded wonderfully by Audiard. We see Malik trying to conceal in his mouth a razor blade, the desired weapon of choice. In highly tense scenes, he practises the attack, cutting himself many times in the process. This is a horrific **rite of passage** and, rather than the event happening and being bypassed by the director, we see Malik consumed by guilt. What is very revealing in the film, breaking the normal realist stance of most prison films, is that we see Reyeb re-emerge in the narrative as a ghostly figure who dispenses advice in a stylised and surreal manner. There are also hints at other elements of the **supernatural** as the narrative progresses; the title of the film becomes apparent as there are indications that Malik has been **blessed (or cursed) with a form of second sight**.

A signature approach

In fact, this reinforces Audiard's approach to the film; he was keen to avoid presenting it as a sort of sociological, documentary-like treatment of French jails in much the same way as *The Class* (Clautet, 2008) became a starting point for discourses about the French educational system. In many respects he manages this in a highly filmic way by **playing with the conventions of the prison movie** combined with some of his signatures: **a roving camera style, a deep attention to detail in the mise-en-scène and the avoidance of any simplistic moralising**.

Malik's role as little more than a 'dirty Arab' under the tutelage of Luciani's gang sees him acting as a servant to the Corsicans. It is this **question of identity** that the director was quick to point out:

> When he first starts out in the film, he has no identity at all. He's a homeless person, neither Arab nor religious. The other people in the prison give him his identity. It's the Caucasians who give him an identity – you're an Arab, a dirty Arab.

The Muslims at first see him as a traitor, a snake in the grass; but he is slowly taken into the confidence of César and his henchmen. Secretly he learns to read and write. Crucially, he starts to pick up the dialect of the Corsicans, which pays dividends later on. To all intents and purposes, in the eyes of the prison authorities he is the model prisoner. This encourages the prison to let him out on day passes, which gives him the opportunity to pass messages and do further work for Luciani. As the Corsican mafia starts to be broken up, César's dependency on Malik increases. However, by now Malik has started to form other alliances.

Fellow Arab Ryad (Adel Bencherif) is a primary influence in improving Malik's sense of self worth by encouraging him to educate himself. He also has terminal cancer and a young family. Meanwhile Jordi the Gypsy (Reda Kateb) becomes an important connection into the world of drug pushing; and slowly but surely Malik starts to build up a highly lucrative criminal profile. But what is also vital is his growing ability to communicate between the prison's opposing factions. In many respects by not completely aligning himself with any one group, Malik is highly adept at **negotiation**. He is also used by the increasingly paranoid César to spy on the remaining members of the Corsican gang; and as the film progresses it is clear to whom the power is shifting.

The film can be seen to position **César as the old order and Malik as the new broom.** The understated way in which Rahim plays him contributes greatly to this, as do the subtly nuanced mannerisms, such as keeping his head down, glancing uneasily at other characters and never being entirely sure of breaking free of his outsider status. His 'education', his spiritual journey, is a complex one, and is directly the result of his incarceration. Without the clear structure that prison offers, Malik would be nothing. It acts as a school for him. Ideologically speaking, this is dangerous territory for any film director to take on. **Generally prison films deal with innocent characters dealing with the**

JACQUES THE LAD

corruption of the system – *The Shawshank Redemption* (Darabont, 1994) or *Sleepers* (Levinson, 1996) being two examples of this. *A Prophet* takes a completely oppositional route. It shows Malik's development from frightened teenager to criminal kingpin as being down to his talents in working the system. Despite the horror of the prison regime, Malik's growth as a character seems to counter the perceived role of prison as a place of either punishment or rehabilitation. His quick thinking and decision-making skills certainly develop greatly during his six-year sentence, from his clever setting-up of his hash-smuggling operations to his astute manipulation of César, who seems to age visibly as the film reaches its conclusion.

Uncomfortable truths

What Audiard's film does, that the big four American **auteurs'** recent work fails to do, is to **keep the audience totally gripped** for two and a half hours. That said, there are uncomfortable truths to be taken on board as we follow Malik's progress, as there are in the flawed men in his other films. This is a man who has brutally killed a fellow prisoner, who is involved in the drug trade, who seems to prize individualism above all else (apart from his relationship with

Ryad and his family) and mercilessly plays off his enemies against each other; and yet, throughout the entire narrative, we are willing him on. His ruthless nature is artfully developed and is presented in a justifiable manner with almost every action. By the end of the film he has skilfully manoeuvred the various racial groups in the prison and the Corsican gangs on the outside into positions where they want to tear themselves and each other to bits. When he returns late from his final and fateful day release, he is placed in 40 days of solitary confinement. His re-emergence happens after the various conflicts have burned themselves out. A major shift has occurred as we see him being embraced by his Arab brothers, rejecting the hunched and dishevelled figure of César in the prison yard. He leaves the prison, flanked by a flotilla of cars underpinning his new-found strength as a leading criminal light. He is also met by Ryad's widow and child which seems to suggest domestic closure as well as economic advancement. In the words of Britain's former Home Secretary Michael Howard, 'prison works'. In this case it seems to work in all the wrong ways.

But what Audiard's excellent film also does is to further underline the relative dearth of decent **auteur**-led recent efforts from Hollywood which

both move the viewer and make them think about their place in the world – with the possible exception perhaps of **The Coen Brothers' *A Serious Man*** (2009). Perhaps the way forward is a more open-minded approach to non American cinema by a mainstream audience. The final word should then come from Audiard regarding his films' position in the marketplace;

I'm very aware that if your films are in French, you need to promote them abroad to make people watch them, but cinema has globalised so I don't need to go places where cultural fear, artistic fear and aesthetic fear rule. These are exactly the barriers to break down with challenging new cinema.

Let's hope that audiences and Hollywood producers are taking note.

John Fitzgerald teaches and examines WJEC Film Studies. His new book *Studying British Cinema 1999-2009* has just been published by Auteur.

ON CREATIVITY IN WEBCOMICS by Goom

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I'VE NOTICED A REAL DECLINE IN CREATIVITY IN WEB COMICS

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

WELL, USING CLIPART OR STOCK PHOTOS OVER AND OVER!

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THAT?

IT'S SO LAZY!

NO, IT'S IRONIC!

HOW?

WELL, IT'S POSTMODERN – A COMMENT ON OUR MASS-PRODUCED CULTURE

ISN'T IT JUST AN EXCUSE TO JOIN IN PRODUCING MORE RUBBISH?

NO. BY MAKING THE REPETITION SO OBVIOUS, IT DRAWS OUR ATTENTION TO IT SO WE CAN QUESTION ITS PURPOSE AND VALIDITY

THAT'S SO PATRONISING!

THE MASS MEDIA ARE PATRONISING, BUT WE ACCEPT THEM!

THAT'S DIFFERENT. TV NEWSREADERS ARE PATRONISING BUT THEY DON'T SHOW THE SAME CLIPS OVER AND OVER... OH.

AND NEWSPAPERS! THEY'RE TAKEN SERIOUSLY IF THEY SELL MORE COPIES – THEIR CIRCULATION IS A MEASURE OF POWER

BUT IF MORE PEOPLE BUY A NEWSPAPER THEN ITS NEWS MUST BE MORE AUTHORITATIVE

NOT NECESSARILY. CROSS-MEDIA OWNERSHIP BY A MULTI-NATIONAL COMPANY LIKE NEWS INTERNATIONAL LENDS A POWER ALL OF ITS OWN.

SO YOU THINK WE'RE IMPRESSED BY THE NUMBER OF COPIES A NEWSPAPER SELLS, RATHER THAN THE CONTENT?

EXACTLY. IN THE MASS MEDIA IT'S PRESENTED AS A GIVEN THAT REPETITION MEANS POWER.

I SEE

OF COURSE, IT COULD JUST BE THAT THE PEOPLE WHO MAKE THESE WEBCOMICS CAN WRITE BETTER THAN THEY CAN DRAW.

THE JURY'S OUT ON THAT ONE.

END.

MEET THE CREATIVES

AN INTERVIEW WITH LEE CLEARY

Tom Moore interviews Lee Cleary, the First Assistant Director on *The Hurt Locker,* about his career, his work on the Oscar-winning film and the film industry in general.

Tell us a bit about your career and the part you played in the production of The Hurt Locker.

I left school at seventeen, I did my A Levels and I was then offered a place at Loughborough University to do English as a teacher. Football coaching was my backup because I was a football player when I was a kid. I played for Islington, London and the Arsenal youth but got kicked out of there when I was about sixteen; so that was the soccer career over. I kind of fell into movies and decided not to take the university place and I literally started on a film set making tea, which was my forté in those days. I realised that there were lots of people who had jobs to do; there were cameramen, special effects guys, editors and sound engineers. My job was to make the tea, and I figured that, as that was my job, I'd make the best tea that I could. That's where I really started.

The Hurt Locker is an interesting film. It's always hard to talk about a movie that you've done. I mean, we made it two years ago, so I've actually been on three other productions since *The Hurt Locker*. There are a couple of interesting things about *The Hurt Locker*, first of all the

director Kathryn Bigelow. Kathryn is one of those Hollywood movie makers who is in a league of her own because she doesn't make movies all the time; she makes probably one movie every five years and she really has to believe in the project she does. She did *Point Break*, as well as *Near Dark* which I think is probably one of the best vampire films ever made. It was the first time someone had made vampires cool. It was brought up to date, it wasn't black-cloaked villains, it was guys in Levi's and leather jackets and Ray-bans.

So, I was at home in Canada. Kathryn had literally $9 million to make this film. I had just finished *The A-Team*, where we'd spent $110-120 million on the movie, and Kathryn had $9 million. In *The A-Team*, we had about a hundred

and fifty days to shoot; Kathryn had thirty five. She had to get that all done, so what happened was they shot the initial part of the movie in Jordan with the assistance of the Jordan film commission. I had worked on one of the first films to use Jordan as a location; I shot there on *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. We had great assistance from King Hussein, who at the time was married to Queen Noor. She was very happy to have Stephen Spielberg, Sean Connery and Harrison Ford coming in, so they established a film commission to try and get films to shoot there. Jordan is probably one of the most stable places in the Middle East – certainly compared to Dubai or Israel. So Kathryn went to Jordan and basically six months after she'd finished the principal filming, she managed to get some more money and we ended up taking the film to Canada. We shot a lot more scenes and a lot more bridge material, which I was in charge of. We shot for another ten or fifteen days to make

the film work. And now I'm over here in the UK as we recently had the BAFTAs where we picked up six awards including Best Film and Best Director, which is about as good as it gets.

Did you have any idea of how popular The Hurt Locker would become?

No, I think that when you're making a movie for $9 million, you have to look at it **as an arthouse film**; there aren't many movies that can be made on that kind of budget and become this successful. However, in the industry, Kathryn has such a reputation as a film-maker that you could hope that at least the film industry people would see that movie. While she's not tremendously known amongst the general public, she certainly is well-known among the film and arts community. So you kind of know that it's going to be something special, but I don't think anyone in their wildest dreams could have imagined what would happen. It was only about three weeks ago that people started to talk about

The Hurt Locker and it was interesting in all sorts of ways because we're up against *Avatar*, which is the most expensive movie ever made. Then on a personal level, you've got Kathryn Bigelow, who used to be married to James Cameron, director of *Avatar*. The Director's Guild of America had never had a female director win their highest award, so it was time that changed. It harks back to Halle Berry, who was the first black actress to win the Academy Award for Best Actress. Kathryn got there at the right time, she's got a good movie, she's got a wonderful reputation and it all worked*. The Blair Witch Project* springs to mind when thinking about successful low budget films, because it was made on four bucks or whatever and it went on to gross something like $300 million worldwide. You can only dream of that sort of success. Critically, Kathryn couldn't have got better reviews than she did.

MEET THE CREATIVES

I've read Kathryn Bigelow wanted to ensure the final product was really authentic, so had no air conditioning in the trailers in the heat of Jordan. Was it a very different filming experience?

No. We all try to achieve things like that. Part of *The A-Team* takes place in Iraq as well, but we were shooting in Canada in the winter, so we had to just spraying the actors to make them look hot. Our problem in that film was that when they were supposed to be on the riverbanks at night in a hundred degrees, we were actually on the riverbanks at night in minus twenty, so you could see all the breath coming out; we had to take that out in post-production. Kathryn wouldn't have had the money to deal with that type of thing, so to take the time and make the actors look sweaty it was a wise decision to just keep them in packs and make them look authentic. But I don't think that's a big deal; I think getting their words right and their actions is most important thing. When [Private James] goes to take the bombs off the guy, he can't do it. That's a twist that you don't normally do. For a guy to just say, 'I can't help you,' it's one of the most dramatic pieces of film, and when he just walks away and leaves him to die, there is absolute silence in the theatre. Those sorts of things don't always have a happy ending and that's one of the things Kathryn was trying to show. It's very much an anti-war film. She shows how it affects people's lives and as she said at the BAFTAs, 'We must always look for an alternative to war.' It's certainly not a pro-war film; you know that it's trying to get the message across how much war destroys lives.

How would you respond to criticism that The Hurt Locker presents the conflict inaccurately?

You'll always find people who are critics – it's what people do. I know plenty of ex-military people and they've all written to me saying it's the best piece they've ever seen. It's hard to comment on criticism, there'll always be some criticism, regardless of the type of film it is – in a Western, you're bound to get someone complaining that the horses are the wrong breed. I think you sometimes have to look beyond the facts. After all, movies are entertainment and sometimes you have to take license. If the cowboy hat the guy's wearing looks cooler, then maybe you choose that one. Kathryn should be allowed to make certain choices as the director. We don't set out to make these errors, but sometimes they happen. There are certain things that we don't get one hundred percent right, but we do our best to make it right.

Which of the many films you've been a part of have you enjoyed working on the most?

I would probably have to say the *X-Men* series because it's been ten years of my life. I am one of only three film-makers in the world involved in all three movies. It's become like a family, watching some of those actors grow up. Anna Paquin, for example, was sixteen when I first met her and Halle went through changes, divorces and she won the Academy Award. Ian McKellen became Sir Ian McKellen and Patrick Stewart became Sir Patrick Stewart. In our industry it is pretty rare to be part of people's lives in that way.

Finally, do you have any advice for the budding film-makers of MM?

The film industry is a very difficult industry to get into, but it's not impossible. I did it. I had no connections whatsoever in the film industry. You just have to go and knock on doors whether you're an actor, an editor, a director, you just have to know that it's what you want to do and hopefully that passion will get you through the doors. You'll get a lot of doors shut in your face, but one day someone will come along and, if you want it badly enough, will give you a connection and say, 'phone this guy,' and you'll get a handshake and you'll be doing it for a living.

> Tom Moore was an A Level Film student at Reigate College; this interview was first published in *Daydream Nation*, the Reigate College student magazine.

MEET THE CREATIVES

AN INTERVIEW WITH

BEN PALMER, TV COMEDY-DIRECTOR

Ben Palmer has directed television programmes including *Bo Selecta, Star Stories* and Season 2 of *The Inbetweeners.* He talks to **Priscilla McClay** about the ups and downs of a career in television.

Did you always know you wanted to work in television?

No, I came to it gradually. I studied English Literature at Leeds University for three years, and after that I spent about a year temping, because I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. Then I did a postgraduate course in Broadcast Journalism, which was six months of radio and six of TV. Once I got to the TV part of the course, I started to really enjoy myself. I loved all the playing about with cameras, so I decided to aim for a career in TV journalism. That was what I originally wanted to do.

How did you go about looking for work?

It was very difficult, because the industry is a very closed shop. Once you're in, you're OK, because you've got the contacts, your mates know of other opportunities and as long as you do a good job you'll be OK. But it's very hard to get that first break.

I got lots of rejections, I had a big ringbinder full of letters saying 'thank you for your application, we'll keep you on file'. I got one job on a reality show, but once that was over, there was another dry spell. I was on the point of thinking that I'd had enough and that I should just pack it all in when I got the offer from a show called *Popworld* [a Channel 4 music programme which ran from 2001-2007, with presenters including Simon Amstell and Alexa Chung]. Once I got the job, I needed to convince them that I knew what I was talking about. They asked me if I knew how to use a particular type of camera. I had done some unpaid work experience with a production company, so I just said yes. Then I

got off the phone and I thought: 'Oh dear, I really need to know what I'm doing here.' So I bought some industry magazines and started learning the names of cameras so I could say that I'd used them. When I started work, I would ask to borrow equipment, saying I needed it for other filming that I was doing. Then I would take it home and try to figure it out.

It worked for me. I think there can be an element of blagging involved in getting your first job, but you have to be willing to back it up with hard work – otherwise you'll get caught out very quickly!

What was it like working on Popworld?

It was a very fun environment, with a lot of learning on the job. It was mostly young people like me, and it was not very structured. Everyone had to muck in and do different tasks. My first year, I learnt such a lot, probably because I was always having to do stuff that I wasn't really trained or qualified to do. My job was to direct and film sections of the show – things like interviews with bands, or 'behind the scenes' at pop video shoots. But they also told me they needed someone to work with this guy Leigh Francis, who did comedy sketches and was always in character. They said he was a bit of a lunatic, but I got on really well with him. He was a very funny guy. After a while, he went on to do his own show, and said I should come and direct it for him. And that was how I ended up doing *Bo Selecta*. I just fell into it, really, and since then I've always done comedy.

What is your working life like now?

As a director, I don't have a permanent job. I'm freelance, so I have to organise things on a job-by-job basis. That was very scary at first; I could never relax and enjoy what I was working on, because I was always worrying about where the next job would come from. But now I've got to the point where I know I can work steadily. While I am working on one thing, I'll hear about an opportunity and be able to organise the next thing. These days, if I'm not working, I can just enjoy my time off, because I know I will be doing something else soon.

MEET THE CREATIVES

At the moment, I am filming Season 3 of *The Inbetweeners*. It's a six-month project, and the first six or seven weeks I spent in the office, reading scripts, planning locations, working out what equipment we need, and so on. Then we move on to filming. At the moment, we're doing night shoots, so I leave the house at about 10am. A filming day is about ten hours, so it's hard work. We'll be filming in three or four different locations, with 70 to 80 people and seven or eight trucks.

I arrive and gather everyone together and tell them what we'll be doing that day. I tell the actors where to stand and we rehearse, while the cameramen watch. Then we set up the lights and equipment and for an hour or so everyone panics! Getting the filming done is always a sprint – there never seems to be enough time. But it's a lot of fun, too.

Filming will take about six weeks, and then there will be three months of editing, which means I'll be sitting in a dark room with a man, cutting things together and making it work.

What is creative about your job?

I don't do the writing for *The Inbetweeners*, but what I have to do is take a script and picture how it will look on the screen. Then I have to work out how to make that happen. I have to make decisions about what shots are needed, what angle to take them from, whether to use moving cameras or static cameras, or a crane, and so on. To work these things out, I create a storyboard, which I enjoy because I like to draw. I also really enjoy the rehearsals with the cast, which take place in a big empty hall, and are a lot of fun.

What is mundane about your job?

We work to a very tight schedule, which is demanding. Every day is broken up into time slots, with a plan for what we will get done in each slot. You have to stick to the plan, which means that when you are doing a certain shot, you know you have to finish it by a set time. Sometimes a shot has to be done in ten minutes, which can be quite restrictive. You have to be very organised and it takes a lot of maths to plan out the day.

What tips would you give to an A Level student interested in working in television?

Very few jobs go to people cold-calling or answering adverts in the paper. Unfortunately, it is often true that **it's not what you know, it's who you know**. So it helps if you can **cultivate contacts.** If you can, get **work experience**, then make sure you work very hard and show that you are determined and you will be looked after. You do need a lot of luck, but you also need to be very resilient because you will get a lot of rejections.

Another thing I would say is, you've got to work out what sort of TV you like. **You've got to watch TV.** That might sound kind of silly, but it will help you to target the right people. Employers get a lot of people doing work experience, saying vaguely that they think they want to work in TV, but it will be more impressive if you have thought about exactly what you want to do and how you might get there.

It is a very competitive industry, and it can be hard for people just starting out, so it helps if you have a passion for what you do. For example, I really enjoy comedy. Leigh and I loved 80s film and comedy, and when we were working on *Popworld*, we would stay behind in the evenings to work on our own pilots and comedy stuff we'd done. We'd tempt some poor editor in to help us, buy him a couple of beers and sit there until 3 in the morning editing them. Then, when everyone else came in the next morning, we'd have left videos around on their desks. And they'd probably say, 'This is rubbish, we don't want this'. But we did it anyway because it was our passion.

> Priscilla McClay is a journalist who has been sub-editing *emagazine* and *MediaMagazine* as part of an internship.

Tips

- If you are choosing a course in broadcasting or media, try to **talk to people in the industry** to see how your qualification is regarded. Find out what previous graduates have gone on to do.
- Make sure your chosen course uses **industry-standard equipment**, so you can learn the right technical skills.
- Does your chosen university have a TV station? That would be a great place to **start to learn your trade**. If not, try the university radio station, or do technical work for the drama society – anything that can help you develop relevant skills.
- **Do as much work experience as you can** while you are at university – it will show employers you are keen and help you make contacts.
- While on work experience, **have a positive attitude**, and put yourself forward for any task, even boring ones – make a favourable impression so that people will remember you.
- **Keep a portfolio** of film recordings, sound recordings and pictures to demonstrate what you have been involved in.
- **Be prepared to start at the bottom**. A 'runner' is the person who does administration, goes on errands, organises equipment and makes the tea – a general dogsbody. It might seem dull, but it's the first rung on the ladder for most TV careers.
- **Think about your specific career path** – do you want to be an editor, a camera operator, a production manager? Check out **www.prospects.ac.uk** for descriptions of what different jobs entail.
- Very few TV jobs are advertised, so **learn to network** and don't be afraid to make the most of any contacts you have.
- Getting your first break can be difficult – it will take **determination, a thick skin, and a real love for your chosen career**.

CAPTURE THE OBJECTIVE

POSTMODERNISM, CREATIVITY AND CALL OF DUTY

How can playing one of the most controversial and popular videogames of all time become an act of resistance, an example of postmodernism in action, *and* contribute to your theoretical understanding at A2? **Lisa Fortescue-Poole** explains.

Guerrilla postmodernism

Postmodernism initially seems to be a challenging subject, but perhaps this is because of the elitism associated with the intellectual definition of the term. It is significant then, that such popular texts as **Infinity Ward and Activision's** *Call of Duty 4* (2007) and *Call of Duty Modern Warfare 2* (2009) can be used to explore the **media concepts (AO1)** and topic prompts for OCR's A2 Unit G325 Section B Critical Perspectives, AQA's Mest3, or WJEC's MS4.

The very act of studying a videogame is a postmodern one. To step away from the 'high culture' choices of Tarantino and the Coen Brothers and embrace a 'popular' text may be an act of resistance against what the German cultural theorist **Andreas Huyssens** has called 'the relentless hostility to mass culture'. Not only is teaching *Call of Duty* an act of guerrilla postmodernism, it is a particularly engaging area of study for students who can validate their wealth of prior knowledge on the subject. The creativity process of game play is an essential component of its appeal.

Postmodernism and Call of Duty

According to Activision, Infinity Ward's highly successful videogame *Call of Duty 6 Modern Warfare 2* **earned $550 million in five days**. In November 2009, gamers booked time off work and skipped school to complete the campaign, thus developing the competitive advantages,

(knowledge of maps/weapons) for online play.

This playing frenzy was coupled with media scare stories about the optional amoral campaign level 'No Russian'; predictably these were based on the **hypodermic theory of audience**. This may fuel the postmodern argument that our lives are becoming dominated by 'the text', but it would certainly be too simplistic to dismiss the fascination with this game as mere addiction. There is something ultimately intellectually compelling about the creative process of gaming, known as **ludology**; and the element of immersion into **the world of the game** is based on many postmodern features.

Objective: Explain how videogames can explore the changes in the relationship between the audience and the text

The blurring of the boundary between text and audience is a characteristic of all videogames. The audience becomes an active participant in the text itself. Even in the two-dimensional arcade games of the early 1980s, the player is involved in the text by moving a cumbersome black lever to shoot the 'Space Invaders'.

It is **the level of immersion** that characterises modern gaming. There are three main elements in *Call of Duty Modern Warfare 2* that involve the player further with the text.

1. The first person perspective. As with other 'first person shooters', the player sees his 'hands'
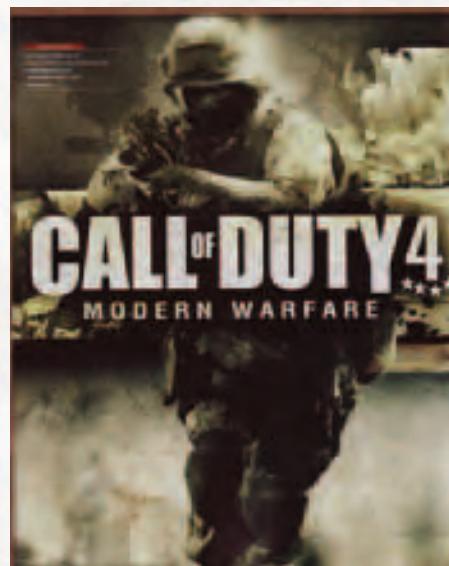
and the various weapons selected in the course of the game. The level of immersion becomes even more compelling when you are required to do more unusual tasks: for example, climbing a snowy mountain with ice-picks ('Cliffhanger') and pulling a knife out of your own body ('Endgame'). This perspective demands your participation in the text.

2. The detailed three-dimensional mise-en-scène also works to immerse the player in the game. In terms of graphics quality, a comparison with *Wolfenstein 3D* (1992) reveals how much more sophisticated modern gaming is. It is also **the detail within the mise-en-scène** that renders the game 'realistic'. On the campaign level 'No Russian', *A Winter's Tale* appears on the shelves of the book shop. The layout of this level is based on a real Moscow airport.

3. The diegetic sound is the third element that encourages further participation in the text. Each shop has a different type of 'elevator music'

on this level in the campaign. The 'believable' dialogue of Captain Price in *Call of Duty 4,* shows that he 'cares about you', compels you to continue with the game and satisfies the audience need to belong.

The engagement of the player through the combined use of these elements shifts the relationship between an individual player and a stand-alone text, where, traditionally, there is no connection.

Significantly, when I used a **YouTube** video to show the 'All Ghilled-Up' level of *Call of Duty 4* to my students, their comments were revealing. The gamers among them concluded that 'simply watching' was nothing like the real experience of immersion in the game. It is clearly **the act of creative play** that is essential to the gaming experience.

Objective: explain how hyper-realism can be applied to videogames

Any analysis of the text-audience relationship must include a consideration of **hyperrealism.** In the act of gaming, the player is immersed into **a diegetic world which represents a more intense and exciting 'reality'**. This hyperreality is extremely seductive.

The hyperrealism of *Call of Duty* allows us to become someone different, be 'respawned' after we 'die', control the outcome of events and be successful (if not heroic), all in one gaming session. This could not be echoed in the non-diegetic world. Ultimately, the hyperrealism of the game is a liberating experience for the player. **Baudrillard's** concept of hyperrealism, however, is laced with negativity. The time spent in our hyperreal states means we are ignoring the loss of the 'real' and the world's shift into simulation.

Objective: use videogames to explain postmodern identity

The boundary-blurring between text and audience obviously raises the question of **identity**. Within the text itself, you play as either Gary 'Roach' Sanderson, a British soldier, part of Task Force 141, or as Joseph Allen, an American Ranger who also works for the CIA. You are also, but only for a few minutes, an unnamed astronaut who dies spectacularly because of the nuclear warheads.

Even though in this game you do not choose your identity there is still a sense in which the postmodern gaming identity is not static. **For the postmodern female player**, the hyperreal state of maleness presents an intriguing variation. The modernist definition of a fixed, impenetrable single identity is completely challenged.

During online play, we have a **social 'identity'**; we often play as part of a team and can join the various clans for a more permanent identity. The fact that identities can be swapped, invented and multiplied is essential in understanding **the postmodernist representation of the self**.

Objective: explain how the gamer has become the author

Lyotard's 'death of the grand narrative' highlighted the need for the **micro-narrative:** a story appropriate for each individual in the diverse postmodern world. The various routes across the Russian field in 'All Ghilled Up' (*Call of Duty 4*) symbolise the micro-narrative. Following Captain Macmillan's lead, the player can cross the field in several ways, providing the patrol is not alerted and the radio-active areas are avoided. Although there is an overarching narrative to this level – the checkpoint must be reached – the micro-narrative is the player's individual chosen

route. This compelling creative component accounts for much of the appeal of the game, a component which is directly sourced from postmodernist belief that we are all 'authors'.

The online experience allows even more freedom. Providing you achieve the game objectives, such as capturing the flags in 'Domination', as a player you are free to move to any area on the map, and use any weapon against the enemy you have acquired. There is a 'sandbox' feel to online play, encouraging more creative freedom. Similarly, each decision made during game-play forms the gamer's own micro-narrative or story of success in this session.

Objective completed

The analysis of *Call of Duty 4* and *Call of Duty Modern Warfare 2* in an academic context proves how useful postmodernism is in accounting for the popularity of texts in our contemporary world. It heralds the emergence of **an audience who functions creatively within the text**. The evolving and exciting sphere of video games is a source that we should embrace, as **Julian McDougall** has argued. It provides a wealth of media that is accessible and enjoyable and because of its 'popular feel' provides us with an accessible basis from which to explore some of the more challenging concepts for A2 Media.

Lisa Fortescue-Poole teaches Media Studies at Countesthorpe Community College, and is a serious gamer.

Sources:

Appignanesi and Garrat: *Postmodernism*

Brooker: Gameswipe (BBC4)

Butler and Ford: *Postmodernism*

McDougall: 'How to Teach Videogames' (Lecture)

Glossary of terms

Hyperrealism: a more intense and 'improved' reality

Hypodermic theory: the idea that audiences consume media passively, and are 'injected' with information or ideas

Ludology: theory of game play

Micro-narrative: an individual truth or story that is one of many possibilities

People

Baudrillard, Jean, postmodern theorist – argues that our media saturated society offers only a representation of reality, not reality itself

Huyssen, Andreas, critic – believes the arts in Modernism viewed itself as superior to the rest of society. (quoted in 'Postmodernism' by Glenn Ward)

Lyotard, Jean-Francois, postmodernist theorist, argues that there is no single unifying truth in the postmodern world, but different truths and different stories

COME DINE WITH ME
FROM DAYTIME OBSCURITY TO PRIME-TIME HIT

Cookery programme, game show or reality TV? Student **Lee Garrett** finds creativity in the rise and rise of *Come Dine With Me.*

A few years ago, at the obscure time of 3:25pm on Channel 4, a new show began. It was a new show that was to become a staple part of the schedules for Channel 4, and lead to a cult following with thousands of fans on social network sites such as **Facebook** for both the show and for its **narrator Dave Lamb**. This show, of course, is *Come Dine With Me*, the cookery show with a twist: the combination of a cookery show with reality TV. This combination would lead to a rip-roaring success of a show, which would eventually spawn into various different forms – Celebrity Specials, 1-hour editions and *Come Dine With Me Extra Portions*.

The format

If you're unaware of the format, it is quite simple: four or five people cook over the course of a week, with a different host per night. Then, their guests mark them out of 10 on the night. At the end of the week, the person with the highest overall score wins £1,000 (a nice bit of 'dosh' then!). This simple format has worked wonders. It has established the show as cult viewing, with celebrities admitting that it is one of their 'must-watch' shows; indeed, it has become a 'guilty pleasure'.

From its humble beginnings in 2005, when the show was as plain as a blank canvas and focused entirely on the cooks, to the present day where the USP comes from **Dave Lamb's** bitingly sarcastic commentary, the show has blossomed wonderfully and has developed into a brand of its own. At first, when the show was all about the cooks, the format lacked some 'oomph' and even Channel 4 admitted that the commentary was a damp squib. So when it returned for its second run a year later, the narrator Dave Lamb was allowed free rein over the proceedings, which meant he could ramp up the 'campness' of the show, and of his narration. This is what the show needed; it was promoted to a 5pm slot every weekday and immediately gained a cult following. The commentary provided the comedy factor the show needed. The first series was too much about watching the contestants enjoying each other's food, which to be honest doesn't make for brilliant telly. So with the commentary providing laughs aplenty, it was time for the contestants to advance too.

The contestants

This is where the producers thought cleverly about who they allowed onto the show. This has led to the combination in pretty much every show of a Foodie, a Shy Reclusive one, a Loudmouth, a 'Me Me Me' one and of course a Villain of the Piece. This has meant it is now easy for viewers to identify who to like or hate over the course of the programme. This also means there is the chance of a flare-up between contestants, and has led to the now traditional 'bitchiness' which has made the show depart from its cooking roots and delve into the popular **reality TV sector**.

It is, of course, the reality factor which has led to the increased success of *Come Dine With Me*. It is simply cringeworthy TV at times, but it's precisely that which makes it unmissable. Without it, the show would be back to its roots, and struggling to compete with gameshows or property programmes on the other channels. Key to the programme is the representation of the contestants. By making the shy ones Dave's favourite, and the loudmouths the ones he talks over, the editing creates a relationship between the viewers and Dave. Often he is saying what we are all thinking.

Celebrity dining

While the original 3:25pm slot only got just over 1 million viewers, the 5pm slot was getting around 3 million viewers, on a par with *Richard & Judy* (which was on its summer break at the time). So Channel 4 experimented with 'Celebrity' specials which included the likes of Anneka Rice

and Rodney Marsh. These proved an instant hit, with viewing figures of around **four million** – great news for the big-wigs at Channel 4. This meant the fan base for the show grew and grew, and the demand for more shows increased.

Adjusting the recipe

Channel 4 obliged, but with a slight twist this time. They would cut down the contestants to 4 and incorporate all four dinners into 1 hour. This format change was then given an even bigger accolade: **a prime-time slot of 8pm** on a Sunday. Although up against Sunday night favourites such as *Heartbeat* and *Foyle's War*, the show kept going strong. Eventually, the calibre of celebrity guests increased to incorporate the z-list, so that the likes of Peter Stringfellow and Linda Barker had their go at cooking. Once again, the success of the show increased as its 'easy watching' reputation spread. TV critics loved the show and praised Dave Lamb for his commentary; it has even been suggested that one day he should take the reins of commentating on the Eurovision Song Contest, in the satiric tongue-in-cheek vein of Terry Wogan. Neither the fans, nor the producers, nor the critics want him to leave. The feeling is that, without the commentary from Dave, the show is nothing. So if – or when – he does go, the show may have to go as well.

As we move into the present day, *Come Dine With Me* has evolved even further, and has given us *Extra Portions* – the 1-hour episodes cut up into individual episodes with plenty of extra bits too. Back in its weekday slot at 5:30pm, the show feels as if it has come full circle, and yet it

is still looking fresh as a result of its variety. The concept has become so recognisable now that other broadcasters are copying it, albeit very badly. Copycat shows such as *House Guest* have only made it more successful; Harry Hill even asked 'Why is everyone copying *Come Dine With Me*?' in his most recent series of *TV Burp*. This, along with support from other broadcasters and celebrities who call it their 'guilty pleasure', have boosted its profile beyond belief, and Channel 4 are taking it very seriously. Could the show be the

next *Big Brother*? Certainly it is more than likely to be put at the forefront of their broadcasting schedules for a long time to come. The show is so successful that over **200,000 people are fans** of the show on Facebook; over 85,000 people are fans of Dave Lamb, some calling him a TV genius.

When you consider the show was a fill for *Countdown* during its summer break, the rise and rise of *Come Dine With Me* is quite astounding. Polls taken at the end of 2009 indicate that *Come Dine With Me* is now one of the most popular

shows of the last decade, despite being around for just five years. The show has not merely impacted on TV either; the official website now houses all the recipes from all the series, and now includes the *Come Dine With Me Homemade* where viewers of the show can upload their dinner party photos, and have a selection of Dave Lamb comments dubbed over them – a great example of interactivity. **YouTube** has also gone into collaboration with Channel 4, and classic *Come Dine With Me* episodes are available to

watch whenever you want. Let's face it, with the popularity of both format and commentator increasing, and the show looking fresher than ever *Come Dine With Me* is a show that is here to stay. Bon appetit!

Lee Garrett is an A Level student at King Edward VII Science and Sport College in Coalville, Leicestershire.

CREATIVITY AND GENRE IN TV CRIME DRAMA

Nick Lacey explores the creative potential of genre television, and shows how crime drama – one of the oldest forms of TV fiction – can still surprise, challenge, and innovate.

Students of media have long rejected the idea that genre formulae preclude creativity. If texts of a particular genre are too similar to one another then they are unlikely to be popular, something producers are aware of, and so new generic texts are usually constructed to be 'the same but different'. As genre theorist Steve Neale puts it:

> the repertoire of generic conventions available at any one point in time is always in play rather than simply being re-played...
> **Neale, 2000: 219**

It is the difference (the 'in play') that allows genres to evolve, and if the variation is popular then other producers are likely to incorporate it in their texts. In **recent years the TV crime genre** has been reinvigorated by **CSI** (2000-) whose innovations were so successful that it was able to spin off into two other locations, *Miami* (2002-) and *New York* (2004-). It has been argued that 'Police dramas have been in the forefront of stylistic innovation in television' (Mittell 2004:

196) and so they are a useful case study to consider **the creativity of generic innovation**.

Creative geniuses – producers or writers?

Where does the creative spark for the innovation come from? A common explanation is the 'romantic' idea of the 'creative genius' such as the **producers Steve Bochco** (*Hill Street Blues*, 1981-87, and *LA Law*, 1986-94) and **David Milch**, (*NYPD Blue*, 1993-2005, and the Western *Deadwood*, 2004-06). In Britain, **Lynda La Plante's** *Prime Suspect* (19991-2006) and **Jimmy McGovern's** *Cracker* (1993-2006) are also often cited as seminal TV crime series (Duguid, 2009: 2).

CSI's producer **Jerry Bruckheimer** is an important creative force. He is well known as a film producer who focuses on blockbuster films such as the *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise (2003-) and was influential in the development of **the High Concept film** (see Wyatt, 1994). The High Concept film is characterised, among others things, by a glossy look that derives from advertising. As Roy H. Wagner, the director of photography on the first *CSI* series, explained:

> Bruckheimer had demanded a show so stylistically different that a channel-surfing audience would be forced to stop and view the unusual looking image.
> **quoted in Lury, 2005: 38**

The High Concept look is highly stylised and each of the *CSI* programmes is **colour coded**: '*Las Vegas* (neon reds and electric blue), to *Miami* (coral, yellow and white) and *New York* (graphite, black and gold).' (Turnbull, 2005) A producer's creative intervention isn't necessarily only commercial in nature, it can also be aesthetic, such as **Barry Levinson's** use of French **nouvelle vague** (New Wave) film influences in *Homicide: Life on the Street* (!993-99). The programme was based on **David Simon's non-fiction book** *Homicide: A Year on the Killing Streets* (1991).

Tapping into the zeitgeist

It is highly unlikely that the success of the *CSI* franchise can be wholly attributed to its visual style. If a generic variation is going to appeal to audiences, it is also likely to express the **zeitgeist** ('spirit of the times'), so a genre text can seem both *novel* and *relevant* to its times. We should of course be cautious of treating texts this way; we cannot simply 'read' society off a TV crime programme. However, many genre texts attempt to express the zeitgeist such as the BBC series *Juliet Bravo* (1980-85) that placed a female police officer at the centre of the narrative; this was a conscious response to the advances in women's rights during the 1970s. *Prime Suspect* Series 1 also focused on **the role of a woman** in the male-dominated (patriarchal) institution of law enforcement; Series 2 considered the issues of

DIXON
of
DOCK GREEN

racism in the police, picking up on the 1980s inner city riots, and deaths of Afro-Caribbeans in police custody. Like the Warner Brothers' gangster movies of the 1930s, *Prime Suspect* was courting popularity by dramatising the news of the time.

It could be argued that the vulnerable bodies of *CSI*, emphasised by the forensic nature of the investigations, are in tune with **a post-9/11 sensibility**. Certainly *CSI*: *NY's* first episode makes the connection explicit at its end, when we find out that the protagonist, Mac (an American 'Everyman' name) Taylor, lost his wife in the destruction of the Twin Towers.

In Britain the evolution from the perfect copper of *Dixon of Dock Green* (1955-76), through the rule-bending *The Sweeney* (1975-78) to the cops who catch corrupt policemen in *Between the Lines* (1992-94) reflects the changing public perception of the police during the latter half of the 20th century. Ideologically, however, all these TV crime series serve to reassure audiences that the police are an effective, if not always perfect, bulwark against crime. One American text that has challenged this ideological notion is *The Wire* (2002-08).

The Wire: TV crime drama becomes political

The Wire is amongst the most acclaimed of TV crime programmes, and was created by **David Simon** of *Homicide*. *The Wire's* innovation consisted of portraying a city (Baltimore) through crime focusing, in different series, on the illegal drugs' trade, workers and unions, government, schools and the news media. In doing so it emphasised **the political dimensions of crime** rather than simply defining criminals as villains.

The Wire is characterised by **moral ambiguity**. In Series 1 it is clear that the drug dealers are simply trying to make a living as their opportunities for legitimate work are severely limited. Its **narrative is also complex**, rewarding repeat DVD viewings, which would not appeal to the mass audience that mainstream television requires. The **generic innovations** of *The Wire* were enabled institutionally; the programme was sheltered from commercial pressures by the American cable network **HBO**, whose subscription-based programming doesn't have to generate advertising revenue (see 'State of Play: Television Drama vs Cinema, a fair fight?', *MediaMagazine* 29, September 2009). Its audiences are happy to pay for challenging programming uninterrupted by ad-breaks.

Creative narratives, corrupt protagonists

As the market for television programmes has become more **global**, there has been an increase in **co-productions**, particularly of expensive drama. The BBC has joined HBO in a number of productions such as *Rome* (2005-07) and the TV crime series *Five Days* (2007-). The latter focuses on five (non-consecutive) days of a single investigation and **is stripped across the schedule on five weekday nights.** Whilst the content of the first series (I haven't seen the second) is conventional for the genre, its narrative structure marks it out as innovative.

Another innovative text is *The Shield* (2002-

08), in which the protagonist Vic Mackey is portrayed as monstrously corrupt. In the first episode of Season 1 he kills, in cold blood, a fellow officer who is spying on him; Mackey doesn't so much 'bend the rules' as break them, albeit successfully in terms of capturing felons. However, as the first season progresses, he's shown to be a complex character who is more than just a macho bully. Indeed, his police captain, who's trying to rid the force of Mackey, is shown to be doing so only in the interests of his own career. Like *The Wire*, *The Shield* was originally shown on cable television in America (Fox's FX); in Britain it was more mainstream, being broadcast terrestrially on Five.

Unlike *The Wire* with its serial narrative, *The Shield* has much more narrative pace. It resolves crimes within one episode as well as having narrative arcs running across several; presumably this is why Five felt able to programme it during prime-time. Such edgy fare enables genres to develop further but are also, obviously, linked to their generic roots; *The Shield's* handheld, febrile, camerawork shows its lineage traces back to *Hill Street Blues* (1981-87) and *NYPD Blue*.

Creative hybrids

The classic *Hill Street Blues* is a good example of how mixing genres can create something new. In its 'day in the life of a police station' **multi-stranded narrative,** its **ensemble cast** of at least a dozen lead characters, and its **focus on the domestic lives** of the police, *Hill Street* introduced elements of the soap opera to create a TV **crime-soap hybrid**. Although the programme was aired on network television (NBC) in America, it was produced by the independent MTM, again suggesting that non-mainstream institutions are the more creatively risk-taking. More recently, *The Sopranos* (1999-2007) successfully hybridised the gangster genre with soap opera.

Not all generic innovations, however, are successful. For example *Boomtown* (2002-03) was cancelled midway through its second season. Like *Five Days*, *Boomtown* tweaked genre conventions narratively: events would be shown several times from the perspective of different characters so the programme was full of flashbacks which created a clearer picture of what actually happened.

Creativity in genre comes in a variety of forms. But possibly the most important aspect is the **institutional context**; non-mainstream producers are far more likely than the big networks to embrace difference and give creative talents the autonomy they require. The changes brought to genres, for TV crime at least, are likely to tap into the zeitgeist and/or mix with other genres to create a hybrid form. Genres that are not creatively developed will inevitably atrophy and lose their popularity.

Nick Lacey teaches Media Studies at Benton Park Technology College, and is the author of several Media and Film Studies textbooks.

Follow it up:

ed. Michael Allen (2007) *Reading CSI: Crime TV Under the Microscope*, I.B. Tauris & Co

Mark Duguid (2009) *Cracker*, BFI TV Classics

Karen Lury (2005) *Interpreting Television*, Hodder Arnold

Jason Mittell (2004) *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture*, Routledge

Steve Neale (2000) *Genre and Hollywood*

Sue Turnbull (2007) 'The Hook and the Look' *CSI* and the Aesthetics of the Television Crime Series' in ed. Allen, I.B. Tauris & Co

Justin Wyatt (1994) *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood*, Texas Film and Media Studies Series

Images courtesy of image.net

There's no business like show business

Why I have become a

gleek

Old as the hills, or a genuinely creative TV innovation? **Caroline Burgess-Allen** *Glee*-fully argues the toss.

Whenever something becomes hugely popular, I have to fight a strong aversion to following the crowd that instantly makes me want to dislike whatever the latest fad is. However, I have been unable to deny that the latest craze to hit the small screen, Fox's new series *Glee is* deserving of the hype that has surrounded it.

The show focuses on a set of niches or cliques that fight for control of a high school. These cliques consist of **cheerleaders, nerds, jocks, and even subsets of various teacher stereotypes**. Not *that* original then. So how creative are the makers of *Glee*?

A friend recently argued that it is the least original show on television: all it does is cover old songs and follow the trend started by *High School Musical* and Simon Cowell's string of talent TV reality shows. I'd like to think that there is slightly more to the show than that. *Glee* gives us social truths mixed with **humour, frivolity and camp over-the-top melodrama** – if this was the late Victorian era we'd be mistaking the series for an Oscar Wilde play (after we'd got over the shock of that bit of hocus-pocus we call the invention of the television).

Glee as recession-buster?

OK, so maybe that is a bit of an over-statement but I do think *Glee* deserves credit for its combination of **sharp mockery of high school stereotypes and modern culture** on the one hand, and the hugely **entertaining, cheesy song and dance numbers** on the other. *Glee* provides the perfect level of light-hearted optimism to allow us to momentarily escape the doom and gloom of the recession, plus, unlike some other high school dramas (*cough* *90210* *cough*) and talent-focused television shows (*Britain's Got Talent* anyone?), it is intelligent enough that we don't have to feel embarrassed that we enjoy it. Media buffs will be well aware that the musical genre itself surged in popularity following the **Wall Street Crash in 1929,** when stars such as **Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers and Busby Berkeley** helped to deliver a much-needed morale boost to audiences during the depression of the 1930s. Now, during the longest UK economic recession since records began, audiences are turning to the same brand of fantasy and escapism.

The producers of *Glee* could not have anticipated the phenomenal success that the series enjoys. Although the show was mostly targeted at teenage girls and gay people, it has captured a wider audience through its use of dark humour and intelligent witticisms, mainly focused on the character of **Sue Sylvester. *Glee*** does address real personal and social issues throughout; one episode revolves around Kurt's homosexuality and the personal conflict he faces when he almost pulls out of a show to spare his father from homophobic abuse. However, these topics are always balanced out by upbeat humour and energetic performances, never dwelling on serious issues for too long – unlike many UK teen offerings.

Gleeful music?

It also employs a broad range of popular music, ranging from the 60s to the current charts. The unlikely 'mash-up' that is Beyoncé's 'Halo' combined with Katrina and the Wave's 'Walking on Sunshine' helped to transfer the TV show's success to the music charts, with the release of the first *Glee* album. There are now two albums on release, which at the present time are the **No.1 albums in both the UK and America**.

The **Glee** club itself is all about **creativity**; the club is assigned a different theme each week, often celebrating figures of creative music talent, as in the Madonna episode; and the teams are encouraged to use their own experience to create the winning performance. The result usually is temporarily to unite the various high school cliques through the spirit of putting on a good show, excepting of course the *Glee* club's arch nemesis Sue Sylvester who, despite her mission to shut the club down, fails to stifle the students' creativity.

The talented cast embrace (rather than deny) their cardboard cut-out characters to deliver pithy lines such as

What you call insanity, I call inspiration

Sue Sylvester

and close-to-the-mark observations on modern culture:

being anonymous is worse than being poor. Fame is the most important thing in our culture now

Rachel Berry

Personally, I feel that this cocktail of clever comedy and entertainment makes *Glee* more than just another teenage TV drama.

Caroline Burgess-Allen is a former student of English Literature and Film at University of Sussex.

Top 10 Glee quotes

Sue Sylvester (played by Jane Lynch): What you call insanity, I call inspiration.

Kurt Hummel (played by Chris Colfer): Mercedes is black, I'm gay: we make culture.

Will Schuester (played by Matthew Morrison): There is no joy in these kids, they feel invisible. That's why every one of them has a MySpace page.

Sue Sylvester: I won't be burying any hatchets, William, unless I get a clear shot to your groin.

Sue Sylvester: You think this was hard? Try auditioning for *Baywatch* and being told they're going in another direction. That was hard.

Sue Sylvester: I got a satellite interview. That's lingo for an interview, via satellite.

Brittany (played by Heather Morris): I'm pretty sure my cat's been reading my diary.

Sue Sylvester: Hey William, I thought I smelled cookies wafting from the ovens of the little elves who live in your hair.

Kurt (talking to Finn about tryouts): My body is like a rum chocolate souffle. If I don't warm it right, it doesn't rise.

Sue Sylvester: I always thought the desire to procreate showed deep personal weakness.

There's no business like show business

ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF THE CREATIVE MIND:

the creativity of Charlie Kaufman

Student **Michael Ewins** explores the extraordinary creativity of screenwriter and director Charlie Kaufman.

In 1991 **Quentin Tarantino** changed everything. *Reservoir Dogs* gave a whole generation of film-makers a fresh voice – and an audience willing to listen. His hip, pop-cultural gabfests and unique brand of crime drama inspired a slew of Tarantino-esque thrillers, from *Things To Do In Denver When You're Dead,* (Gary Fleder, 1995) to *Lucky Number Slevin* (Paul McGuigan, 2006); and encouraged the movies to talk again. Indeed, film-makers like **Kevin Smith**, **Wayne Wang** and **Richard Linklater** followed the 'talky' mould with *Clerks* (1994), *Smoke* (1995) and *Before Sunrise* (1995) respectively.

In the beginning it was easy to tie films like *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994) and *Clerks* in with the hipster crowd. Dan Fletcher of *Time* summed them up best when he said:

> Hipsters are the friends who sneer when you cop to liking Coldplay. They're the people who wear T-shirts silk-screened with quotes from movies you've never heard of and the only ones in America who still think that Pabst Blue Ribbon is a good beer

Although films like *Pulp Fiction* didn't quite have the sarcastic, rebellious self-absorption of the true hipster movement (see *Ghost World*, Terry Zwigoff, 2001), it was definitely the mainstream thread of the subculture to which they belonged.

By the mid-nineties however, this trend was becoming somewhat stale, and more than a little predictable. The sharp-suited gangsters were becoming weary, their conversation had almost become a parody, and the genre lost some of its hipster angle. By 1999 the change of gears that seemed so fresh just eight years earlier was now totally burnt out. The movies needed another change of voice, far away from hipsterism. And they got one – in the form of **Charlie Kaufman**.

1999 & American New Wave

Of course, 1999 was a great year for cinema anyway. Suburbia was attacked with the sublime *American Beauty* (**Sam Mendes**), the **Wachowski brothers** reinvented action with *The Matrix*, **Stanley Kubrick** released his final masterpiece *Eyes Wide Shut*, **David Fincher** courted controversy with the now classic *Fight Club* and horror made popular the shaky-cam with *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick, Eduardo Sánchez). And this is ignoring the emergence of film-makers like **Alexander Payne** (*Election*) and **Kimberly Pierce** (*Boys Don't Cry*) who could be grouped into the same movement as Kaufman and his regular director **Spike Jonze.** The movement is called the **'American New Wave'**.

This movement, influenced in part by the **French Nouvelle Vague of the 50s/60s**, would later take in film-makers like **Wes Anderson** (*The Royal Tenenbaums,* 2001), **Noah Baumbach** (*The Squid And The Whale*, 2005) and **Sofia Coppola** (*Marie Antoinette*, 2006). But riding the crest of this wave was **Charlie Kaufman**, a New Yorker with the most creative mind Hollywood had seen in years. His first screenplay was *Being John Malkovich* (Spike Jonze, 1999).

Defining creative cinema: Being John Malkovich

Firstly though, let us define what we mean by creativity. When people think of the word 'creative' in relation to cinema, they too often think of the visual elements. Of course, it's easy to see why the grand Art Deco-inspired landscapes of *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927), the camera techniques employed to visualise James Stewart's condition in *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958) or the recent innovations by James Cameron (*Avatar,* 2009) spring to mind, but let's get back to what the word really means. Different dictionaries may have slightly different variations, but in mine 'creative' means,

relating to or involving the imagination or original ideas, esp. in the production of artistic work

Being John Malkovich is the story of Craig Schwartz (John Cusack), an unsuccessful puppeteer who, after taking a filing job in New York, finds a portal into the head of actor John Malkovich. How and why the portal got there nobody knows – but it soon becomes a business for Schwartz, who lets people into Malkovich's head for the price of $200. It's a bizarre, truly original concept that ties in with Kaufman's recurring themes of **identity, fantasy versus reality and self-criticism**. The imagination needed to create such a concept is fascinating, but the real genius lies in the fact that the screenplay is as much a portal into the head of its *writer* as it is of Malkovich.

Kaufman once said:

I think it's impossible to not write autobiographically. I think you can try as much as you want, you're still going to reveal yourself. I choose to do that, and do it as much as I can and reveal as much as I can about myself and my experience of the world in my work.

This goes some way to explaining why Kaufman is so creative. He allows his mind to have free rein over the page. He doesn't think about convention, he simply allows his consciousness to speak truthfully. He's a writer who cares about his characters and wants them to be alive, to feel different every time you visit them. Kaufman has also gone on record a number of times declaring that he struggles with writing and puts his success down to luck. One quote has him declaring:

I don't know what the hell a third act is

This quote can be linked to his next important screenplay: *Adaptation* (Spike Jonze, 2002). There were actually two screenplays in-between: *Human Nature* (Michel Gondry, 2001) was generally seen as a failure despite having some interesting, Kaufman-esque elements; and the writer chooses not to speak about *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind* (George Clooney, 2002) after the director changed his script considerably.

Adaptation

Adaptation tells the story of twin screenwriters Charlie and Donald Kaufman (both played by Nicolas Cage, on twitchy form). Charlie has just come off the success of *Being John Malkovich,* and is struggling with the penning of his next screenplay (an adaptation of a book called *The Orchid Thief*). So instead of re-evaluating the story, Charlie writes himself in as a main character. Eventually his life interweaves with that of Susan Orlean (Meryl Streep), the author of *The Orchid Thief*. Needless to say, it's a very complex film, full of wit and containing all of Kaufman's key themes. The idea of a struggling screenwriter writing a script about a struggling screenwriter is obviously drawn from a very real and personal place, but Kaufman also takes time to attack Hollywood clichés. In the film Kaufman (Cage) voices what could be Charlie's most honest confession,

Okay. But, I'm saying, it's like, I don't want to cram in sex or guns or car chases, you know… or characters, you know, learning profound life lessons or growing or coming to like each other or overcoming obstacles to succeed in the end, you know. I mean… the book isn't like that, and life isn't like that. You know, it just isn't. And… I feel very strongly about this.

Kaufman, the writer, has used creativity in possibly the most unique way Hollywood has ever seen. There are **intelligent writers** out there, such as **David Mamet**, and writers who challenge their audience with **unconventional narratives and weirdness,** such as **David Lynch**; but none have mixed the two and done it with such drollery and affection as Kaufman. His creativity lies not in working with pre-established materials, but rather unleashing his own mind, without reservation.

Consider **David Lynch's** *Mulholland Drive* (2001). Don't worry if you haven't seen it; nobody knows what it's really about anyway. Lynch delves deep into small-town surrealism, painting highly inventive mysteries that blur realities, fantasies and identities. *Mulholland Drive* is arguably his masterpiece: the story of an actress trying to help an amnesiac uncover her past. The film soon unravels into a nightmare-like conspiracy taking in a mysterious Blue Box, a club named Silencio, director Adam Kesher (Justin Theroux) and a witch-like woman behind a diner. Lynch's brand of creativity is just as challenging as Kaufman's but, believe it or not, lies in a familiar cinema. **Surrealism** is nothing new – travel back as early as Luis Buñuel's *Un chien andalou*. Nor is the idea of **overlapping narratives:** see **Christopher Nolan's** *Memento* (2000). Nolan's stories may be original (although a lot of his work makes great reference to *The Wizard Of Oz*) but his presentation is simply a strong example of genre film-making. Kaufman lies elsewhere. His ideas may all be rooted in the ideas of love and death (again, not exactly new in cinema) but his presentation of ideas can't really be pinpointed elsewhere in contemporary American cinema.

Eternal Sunshine

Take Kaufman's next screenplay for example. *Eternal Sunshine Of The Spotless Mind* (Michel Gondry, 2004) is a romantic comedy for which he won a Best Original Screenplay Oscar. The romantic comedy genre is a tried-and-tested one, and *Eternal Sunshine* is not the first to focus on break-ups as much as falling in love (see *Annie Hall*, Woody Allen, 1977). But how many of these movies are about *literally* erasing memories, turning the process of getting over a past lover into a nightmarish jigsaw? By using a premise that borders on sci-fi, Kaufman creates a love story for the ages. As Joel (Jim Carrey) realises that he doesn't want to forget his time with Clementine (Kate Winslet) he escapes into his own memories and attempts to save them. The story catapults through his memories of her – in one scene Joel chases Clementine down a street,

only to realise that, upon reaching the end, he's back at the beginning. Desperately trying to find her he runs up and down the same street, falling deeper into his own emotions. It's like something from *The Twilight Zone*. And it again finds Kaufman exploring the key themes of identity and fantasy versus reality.

If *Eternal Sunshine* is an artistic work (and it is) then writer Kaufman, not director Gondry, is its creative centre. His apparently limitless imagination has taken an idea that could be played straight and turned it into an intimate drama of epic proportions. But this is merely a splash in the ocean when compared to his directorial debut *Synecdoche, New York* (2008).

Synecdoche, New York

I know how to do it now. There are nearly thirteen million people in the world. None of those people is an extra. They're all the leads of their own stories. They have to be given their due.

Caden Cotard

I will be dying and so will you, and so will everyone here. That's what I want to explore. We're all hurtling towards death, yet here we are for the moment, alive.

Caden Cotard

Synecdoche, New York is pure Kaufman. It follows decades in the life of theatre director Caden Cotard (Philip Seymour Hoffman) as he attempts to make a play about life – an honest portrayal that takes in love and death, friendship and loss. He builds a fake city on a stage and eventually the city takes on a life of its own, becoming like a fantasy world, a production that

will never be performed, but stuck in a constant rehearsal. As actors begin to have other actors playing them, the world expands beyond the director's control and his own life falls in on itself.

It's a film that's hard to follow and hard to forget, such is its complexity, depth and, ultimately, feeling of depression. It's also Kaufman's creative magnum opus. It's a work that every audience member can relate to on some level – whether it be fear of death, the feeling of loss, a creative ambition left unrealised or the pleasure of a moment spent with a loved one – yet it's a work of magnificent obscurity and dazzling discomfort. Kaufman, the imagineer, has laid himself bare, and it's a scary vision. Because somewhere, deep in the story of Caden,

is a horror movie. The horror of mundanity and routine. Something that Kaufman obviously feels and we all experience at some point in our lives.

Creativity, ultimately, is as subjective as anything else. Whereas I see Kaufman as a genius, and the most fresh, inventive talent working right now, some may find him simply tedious and indulgent. But for me his vision is the very definition of creative, his mind will continue to be a source of unparalleled imagination and originality. At the end of the day, if Tarantino taught the movies to talk again, Kaufman taught them to think.

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BACKWARDS AND FLASH FORWARDS

The Power of Time

The ability to play with time and space in a non-linear way is a unique property of the moving image, and one of the most innovative and challenging aspects of contemporary cinema and TV. **Emma-Louise Howard** identifies a range of big and small screen narratives which have exploited chronology with groundbreakingly creative outcomes.

I just get the feeling my life lacks forward momentum, y'know. That everything moves by so quickly, time seems to stop.

Paul Denton, The Rules of Attraction

Imagine a world without time. You simply can't. Everything we do every day, in all walks of life, relies upon it. Even my use of the word 'day' signifies time's importance, and it cannot be controlled. So it makes perfect sense that stories – written, filmed or serialised – created by humans whose lives depend on time, are themselves governed by time within the narrative. Every story has a beginning, middle and end... right?

Not always. What happens when a TV show or a film brings time to the forefront? It can be so central as to be almost incorporated as a character itself, or it can be subverted, altering the story and its effect on the viewer. Take, for example, the sheer volume of texts dedicated to **the concept of time travel**: the *Back to the Future* trilogy, various episodes of *Star Trek*, even films such as *It's a Wonderful Life* suggest **alternative realities** that could be travelled to and allude to the theory of a **'butterfly effect'** – the past controls everything. Likewise, the recent movie *The Time Traveler's Wife* (Robert Schwentke, 2009) incorporates dual narratives and inadvertent metaphysical time travel to

emotional effect. In media texts, time is a creative tool like any other.

Time and Pulp Fiction

Perhaps one of the earliest films to achieve mainstream status despite its unconventional format was **Quentin Tarantino's** *Pulp Fiction* (1994), which took a story and divided it into character-driven sequences instead of representing it temporally.

1 Prologue – The Diner (i)
2 Prelude to 'Vincent Vega and Marsellus Wallace's Wife'
3 'Vincent Vega and Marsellus Wallace's Wife'
4 Prelude to 'The Gold Watch' (a – flashback, b – present)
5 'The Gold Watch'
6 'The Bonnie Situation'
7 Epilogue – The Diner (ii)

As you can see the prologue and epilogue happen **in the same place... but also at the same time.** It is the **character focus-shift** which makes them differ; we don't realise that two key characters, Vincent (John Travolta) and Jules (Samuel L Jackson) are present there until the epilogue. Events occur at different times, yet the overall story arc is the same, meaning that certain characters 'cross over'. One example is the scene in 'The Gold Watch' where Vince is killed by Butch

(Bruce Willis). Vince and Jules's main chapters, 'The Bonnie Situation' and the prologue, take place 'chronologically' before 'The Gold Watch', yet are shown after, thereby allowing Vince to be depicted alive 'after' his death.

This strange timeline emphasises just how differently events can look from another perspective, symbolising the 'scrapbook' feel of a film that is predominantly a **bricolage** of pop culture references. It also lends a particular poignancy to Jules's religious revelation, causing him to quit his hitman job – if Vince had listened to him, he might have survived, and we are aware of this imminent death at the film's conclusion. *Pulp Fiction* set the ball rolling for a number of high-profile films and television shows to **destabilise the conventional linear narrative**.

Flip it and reverse it

But what if we know the end right from the beginning? Can there be any sense of ambiguity or intrigue? If anything, certain films have proved there can be more, heightening the impact on the viewer. Take both **Christopher Nolan's** *Memento* (2000) and **Gaspar Noé's controversial** *Irréversible* (2002). In ways, they are remarkably similar. Both revolve around **emotionally-charged revenge and retribution**, both plots feature a great deal of **misinformation and**

PULP FICTION

A FILM BY QUENTIN TARANTINO / PRODUCED BY LAWRENCE BENDER

some fatal mistakes made by justice-driven protagonists, and both are told in **reverse chronology**. *Memento* and *Irréversible* begin with their 'linear' final scene and end with their first. As stated earlier, one might instantly think that seeing the conclusion destroys any sense of viewer interest in the story; but these films manage to intensify their central mysteries by manipulating temporality.

Memento's Leonard Shelby (Guy Pearce) suffers from anterograde amnesia, the result of specific brain damage meaning the subject is unable to form new memories. They recall their 'previous lives' but essentially wipe their short-term memory every few minutes. Leonard's condition was caused when his home was attacked. He wishes to avenge his wife's death by finding a man known to him only as 'John G', and tattoos potential evidence against suspects upon his body. The film confusingly presents two timelines (colour scenes shown in reverse order with interspersed conventionally sequential black and white snippets), which facilitates audience empathy by placing us in Leonard's shoes – our state of chronic bewilderment mirrors his. As the two timelines collide we cease to be 'Leonard' and one common narrative is revealed, affording the viewer an omniscient perspective. The characters of Teddy (Joe Pantoliano) and Natalie (Carrie-Ann Moss) are manipulating Leonard's condition, supplying him with their own 'John G's to assassinate. Leonard has confused the details of his own life with a fraudster named

Sammy Jankis, a man he believed he met during insurance investigation work. Supposedly Sammy had anterograde amnesia. However, deeming the condition to be psychosomatic, Sammy's diabetic wife repeatedly requested insulin injections in the hope that he'd remember administering the previous one, eventually falling into a fatal coma. It is later disclosed, however, that Leonard's diabetic wife survived the attack and it was in fact her that performed the insulin experiment, resulting in her death. According to Teddy, Leonard, unable to recall the nature of his wife's death, deliberately created an unsolvable puzzle to give his life meaning. His tattoos are falsehoods, and Leonard, aware of his condition, confirms this by burning a photograph of one of his victims, noting Teddy's number plate to give himself another 'John G'; another mission.

Irréversible begins with an arrest of two men, Marcus and Pierre (Vincent Cassel and Albert Dupontel), outside a nightclub. Earlier they went there in search of a man nicknamed 'le Tenia'. Attacking their suspect in one of the film's controversially graphic scenes, it is revealed that they were seeking revenge for the rape of Marcus's girlfriend (she is left in a coma). The sexual attack is then shown in its entirety; another notoriously disturbing scene in which Alex (Monica Bellucci) falls victim to the same man we saw a few scenes ago standing and watching the fight; they had the wrong man. Prior to that, Marcus, Alex and Pierre were at a party in which we discover that Alex was upset

with her boyfriend's flirtatiousness and drug use, and left, leading to her attack. Before this, Alex told Marcus she might be pregnant. Pleased, he left to buy wine for the party, and her test confirmation leaves her overjoyed. The final scene depicts Alex reading *An Experiment with Time* in a park, then the phrase 'time destroys everything' appears on-screen. Both Alex's book and these closing words are an obvious nod to the film's theme.

In both films ominous, unnerving music, unusual camera angles and violence are used to create an unsettling atmosphere; however, it is arguably the manipulation of time that has the strongest impact. It's not so much the climax of particular plotlines that creates a sense of unease as the revelation of the events that led up to them. The manipulation of time in *Irréversible* bestows an unwelcome omniscience upon the audience. There is a deep sense of poignancy associated with Alex's elation at being pregnant because we know what is to come. Similarly, not discovering that Leonard killed Natalie's boyfriend until later in the film, lulls us into believing that she sympathises with him, and we're left despondent as her scheming is slowly revealed. Just as *Irréversible* shows us that 'time destroys everything' and that we cannot reverse it, *Memento* turns that idea on its head and reveals that in Leonard's world of five-minute memories, time can be destroyed as easily as a Polaroid.

… and it's a story that might bore you…

Manipulating conventional narratives doesn't get much more creative than Bret Easton Ellis' novel *The Rules of Attraction* which begins and ends mid-sentence and employs no less than twelve narrators. The 2002 film adaptation from **Roger Avary** (who worked on *Pulp Fiction*) replicates this via unusual filmic techniques, from split-screen scenes to physically rewound moments, such as the reverse seasonal change in the opening credits; snow travelling upwards, students walking backwards, clock-hands spinning the wrong way and leaves reforming and floating up to their trees. Revolving around the on-campus debauchery of a group of wealthy and directionless students, it begins with an already subversive narrative technique, reverse chronology, and further destabilises it, playing the opening (final) scene three times from the perspective of its principal characters.

We are introduced to Lauren Hynde (Shannyn Sossamon) through internal monologue, unrequitedly desiring Victor (Kip Pardue) and alluding to 'how time distorts things' while seducing a film student. She collapses and wakes to find herself filmed by the same student but raped by a 'townie', losing her virginity. The film pauses on her close-up and rewinds, the camera panning across a party as everything happens backwards. Paul Denton (Ian Somerhalder) takes over, musing about 'all the things in life that

never were, and all the things that could have been', looking longingly at Sean Bateman (James van der Beek). 'Everything is pre-ordained,' he says, 'manifest destiny. You can stop time from happening no more than you can will the oceans to overwhelm the world and to cause the moon to drop from her outer sphere.' Again, the scene is reversed, falling to the viewpoint of Sean, who meets Kelly (Kate Bosworth) and mentally time-travels, imagining three different scenarios – go home alone, or play quarters with friends, or take Kelly to a café and 'ditch her with the bill'. He chooses a somewhat obvious fourth option, but shifting into third-person narrative during their intimate encounter his words are, 'He can't remember the last time he had sex sober.' Like *Irréversible* before it, the frequent mention of time's power in *Rules* – memories, distortion, destiny, moving by quickly – is paralleled via the film's manipulation of it. Showing the last scene first suggests that the present is 'irreversible' because of past events, contrasting sharply with the character of Leonard in *Memento*, for whom time means nothing and the present is constant.

Day after day

Between *Memento*, *Irréversible* and *Rules*, a TV show was born that didn't look right on paper. Told in real-time, each season of the groundbreaking *24* would literally depict a day in the life of special agent Jack Bauer (Kiefer Sutherland) with hour-long episodes. Scepticism was rife… would it be like *Big Brother*? Would

we sit through Jack's showers and lavatory visits and watch him eat dinner while he saved the world? Of course not – Joel Surnow and Robert Cochran were far cleverer than that. Signified by an on-screen digital clock anchoring commercial breaks and appearing frequently throughout the narrative, we are offered a sense of time as it appears within the universe of the show. It just happens to match our own.

In *24*, **time is a central character, not just a concept.** The clock's presence can be heroic or villainous depending on the task Jack must undertake, with tension building as the hour slips away. On his behalf we find ourselves willing time to speed up or slow down, but of course it is fixed, and irreversible. The answer to the issue of mundane events is that they often occur off-screen, within commercial breaks, during which time continues to elapse in the *24* universe. Any one character is only seen for a certain portion of time, meaning the overarching storyline continues and there are sections of unseen narrative for a particular person or situation. The ominous clock ordinarily beeps, yet remains silent following traumatic events, in the same way that soap opera credits play without music after the death of a character or a serious occurrence. Eight seasons and many accolades later, anyone who doubted *24* is feeling shamefaced. Popularity proved, it signifies that bringing time to the forefront makes for a gripping and impactful brand of entertainment.

Flashbacks and flashforwards

The flashback technique is a staple of the conventional linear narrative. It's not unusual to have a character ponder their past and for memories to be presented for our viewing pleasure. But what if a TV series relies on them so heavily, the present virtually ceases to exist? In **Carter Bays and Craig Thomas's** sitcom *How I Met Your Mother* (2005), each episode begins with a present-day unseen Ted Mosby (voiced by Bob Saget) addressing his children. He is conveying the titular story, but as with all colloquial narratives, Ted waffles and veers off the point. Five seasons on and a sixth confirmed, we still don't know who the mother of Ted's children is. Told entirely in flashback, a younger Ted (Josh Radnor) and his friends undergo the trials and tribulations of twenty-something life, but due to the central mystery, we follow Ted's every romance closely and carefully. We suspect it could be Robin (Cobie Smulders) until older Ted describes her as 'your aunt Robin'. The flashbacks allow for many narrative discrepancies, such as moments unseen by Ted, which he 'imagines' instead. Similarly, short scenes will recurrently appear followed by older Ted's voice declaring, '...is what should have happened', after which the 'real' scene will be disclosed. This confusion allows additional comic opportunities and the question at the story's centre maintains audience intrigue, hence its success.

One could argue that *Lost* (**JJ Abrams**, 2004) does something rather similar. Because the characters''present' state is so puzzling (the riddle of the island on which they're stranded), viewers attempt to piece together something tangible from the flashbacks depicting their lives prior to the plane crash. Or so we think. In a TV series that has incorporated everything from the scientific to the supernatural, the philosophical to the religious, the conspiratorial to the mythological,

writers proceeded to obscure matters more by suggesting that the flashbacks audiences had relied upon for three seasons were in fact flashforwards, jumping the individual characters' narratives to the future and depicting imagined, expected or projected events. This further destabilised an already complex narrative and led to many more creative experiments with time and alternative universes, with characters able to hop between different dimensions and eras.

Taking the flashforward phenomenon to its mysterious conclusion is **Brannon Braga's** aptly-titled *FlashForward*, which premiered last year. Revolving around a global blackout in which the world's population lose consciousness for 137 seconds and see visions of their lives six months from then, the series prompts many philosophical questions, such as whether life is indeed pre-ordained or if its characters can in fact change what will transpire based on their current behaviour. Some flashforwards can be traumatic, some useful; central character Mark Benford (Joseph Fiennes), a special agent, uses his to contribute to the FBI's investigation of the blackout for example.

The manipulation of time and alteration of conventional linearity are creative narrative devices; a means of keeping the audience intrigued, and confounding their expectations via the **disruption of traditional structures**. Attracting, engaging and retaining an audience is paramount, particularly with so many media choices nowadays, and chronological play offers a sense of ambiguity and intrigue. The likes of *Pulp Fiction*, *Memento*, *Irréversible*, *The Rules of Attraction*, *Lost* and *FlashForward* are certainly cryptic – even the light-hearted sitcom *How I Met Your Mother* captivates the audience with its central flashback-driven mystery, and real-time titan *24* captures an atmosphere of tension and rigidity, encouraging viewers to covet knowledge

of the next hour's occurrences. Time may be 'irreversible'; we may never achieve time-travel or obtain the ability to study 'the butterfly effect' first-hand. But in the world of film and television, creatives can manipulate time any way they see fit, and whatever the intended effect upon the viewer, subverting a narrative timeline will always intensify it.

Emma Louise Howard is training as a Media Studies lecturer.

Glossary

Bricolage: a text or work of art patched together from a diverse range of sources. E.g. *Pulp Fiction* is a 'bricolage' of film genres (blaxploitation, gangster movies, dark comedy, farce) and nostalgic pop culture references (the 1950s, fast food, calling someone 'Flock of Seagulls' because of their haircut etc.)

The butterfly effect: the idea that in time travel, sensitive dependence on initial conditions exists; small differences can produce larger variations, e.g. stepping on a single butterfly in the prehistoric era could change evolution

Destabilisation: to undermine, weaken or manipulate something, for example a narrative convention

Linearity: the behaviour of a 'conventional' story – a discernable beginning, middle and end

Reverse chronology: an ordinary story with a beginning, middle and end which has split down its respective parts and reversed their order, thus essentially being told backwards

Subversion: to change or disrupt something recognisable, such as time. *Memento* and *Irréversible* 'subvert' the 'linear' narrative by telling their stories backwards

Can analysis be creative?

You should have gone to Specsavers

AQA examiner **Tina Dixon** argues that with a bit of vision and a pair of silly glasses, textual analysis can indeed be truly creative.

Can analysis be creative? I would argue 'yes' because it is so open. For me the great thing about Media Studies is that it is open and interpretive. It is not a natural science; there are no set answers and conclusions. So my argument is that any analysis we do in Media Studies is creative because it is open. If, as Media students, we try to think creatively when we conduct analysis, it can be a much more positive experience. So, let's be creative!

When asked to analyse a media text we know that usually it needs to be conducted through the framework of the **Key Concepts**, and this holds true for all of the A Level specifications. Here, I'm going to look at a contemporary television advertisement for Specsavers, also seen on the internet on ITV Player.

Analysing the Specs effect

The *denotation*, or what is signified, is a relatively unattractive man on a tropical beach spraying himself with a deodorant. Meanwhile, literally hundreds of young women in skimpy bikinis start racing towards him. All are young, all are beautiful and all are slim. The camera follows them running towards him in slow-motion. As they reach him, he puts on a ridiculous pair of glasses; and the women then turn around in disgust and run away. The camera follows them for a little while. The caption reads: 'The Should have gone to Specsavers Effect'.

At a **connotative** level, there is a great deal to analyse within this advertisement. Firstly, I find it personally baffling that, even if the man was a cross between Johnny Depp, Brad Pitt, Jude Law and Orlando Bloom, these women would be selling themselves short by mindlessly pursuing him. I'm aware, though, that there is a direct intertextual reference to the **Lynx** advertisements going on here. So, from a **traditional feminist perspective** we see a scenario where man has power and women are mindless puppets. However, from a **post-feminist perspective** it could be argued that this text takes a playful and irreverent attitude towards traditional gender divisions.

Who is the **audience** for this ad? I think that it is trying to appeal to both genders through humour. There is a joke to be had on both sides: that anyone who looks like the man in the advertisement could attract hundreds of beautiful women; and that for women, the glasses are the straw that broke the camel's back, giving women the last word. I would also argue that it is aimed at a relatively young audience – 18-30-year-olds – as it is playful and irreverent.

Of course, all of this renders the text **polysemic,** as it is open to different readings by different demographic groups. As an older woman I perceive it differently to a younger woman, and differently again to a man.

Ideologically the advertisement troubles me, as I think it belongs in the same camp as those who argue that the topless Page 3 Girl in *the Sun* is 'just a bit of fun'! Fun for whom? The ad assumes that the audience will find it funny, and of course humour is subjective and not ideologically free. It is a very **hegemonic** ad, as the women are all conforming to a stereotypical femininity, and the man is conforming to the stereotype that affords men 'character' if they lack conventional good looks.

The **narrative** of the advertisement is quite traditional in that it conforms to **Todorov's** model. The pre-existing **equilibrium** is an ordinary day on a beach. **Disruption** comes when the man sprays himself with deodorant, which propels the narrative forward, as it unleashes the women who run towards him. **Resolution** comes with the man putting on the ridiculous glasses, which sends the women back to where they came from, closing down the narrative.

So where's the creativity?

Up to this point you might think that this analysis has not been overly creative, but I have been trying to adhere to the Key Concepts, at the same time having some (limited) fun with pulling the ad apart. An important aspect of analysis though, from a Media Studies perspective, is to bring in **theory and contexts** – and you might argue that they sound like the least likely contenders for creativity imaginable.

But theory and contexts will allow you to take a standpoint, to stack the arguments however you want, possibly even to rant about something you feel strongly about. Remember: good Media Studies analysis is, or certainly should be, showing evidence of **critical autonomy**. This means that you can move away from any rote learning that has taken place, and truly stand on your own two feet. Take control of the arguments, be creative!

Adding theory and context

So, for me, the truly creative part begins when I start adding theory and contexts to the analysis – and, to this particular advertisement, a good old fashioned feminist rant, where I can bring in everything at my disposal.

Contextually, there have been *laws* passed in this country to address issues of inequality, for example The Equal Pay Act (1970), Sex Discrimination Act (1975), amended in 1986, Employment Act (1989), and Equality Act (2006), all of which exist to protect people from discrimination or from being treated unfairly. So when I see a group of women behaving like pack animals, I would argue that inequality is still very much used in advertising, particularly ideologically, as in this case it is hidden under a veil of humour.

Along with changes to the law, I would also bring into the analysis **the long history of feminism in this country,** and point to the fact that the Suffragettes (from the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century) fought hard for women's suffrage, and were prepared to suffer incredible hardship, pain and even death to win the vote

for all women in 1928. Whether they would have been so happy to do so if they had known that a century later they would be treated like a herd of untamed cattle, is debatable.

In 1981 the feminist **Gay Tuchman** conducted some research from which she concluded that women were subjected to **'symbolic annihilation'**, and that this symbolic annihilation occurs through the **absence, condemnation and trivialisation of women**. They are, she argues, rarely seen in positions of power or status (think about the three main party leaders in the recent General Election: Gordon Brown, David Cameron and Nick Clegg, all male, and the secondary roles their wives all played when represented in the media), and they are **trivialised** by being presented in subordinate roles as **either domestic workers or sex objects.** Certainly in the Specsavers advertisement the women are very much trivialised, very much shown as sex objects; why else have them running in skimpy bikinis?

I will finish with my 'big gun' **Laura Mulvey,** who argued in 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975) that the camera was very much a 'male eye', and that women therefore slowed down the narrative; and who could argue otherwise? In this ad we see hundreds of young, slim, beautiful women running in slomo in skimpy bikinis, the narrative completely slowed down to focus on their breasts, faces and backsides. Mulvey's article was written in 1975 – thirty five years ago. How can it still be so relevant? Has so little changed?

Check out the ad on YouTube, (www.youtube.com/watch?v=x89xAXHd2l8) and decide whether you think my analysis is similar to what you would write, or whether you would take a completely different position – a **post-feminist, or even a post-modern** stance for example?

Whatever decision you make on that, the fact remains that analysis can be creative: it's a likely assumption that no two analyses of this particular Specsavers advertisement would be the same – now that's creativity!

Tina Dixon teaches Media Studies, an Examiner for AQA and co-author of various Media Studies textbooks.