SEPTEMBER 2011: **THE PRODUCTION ISSUE**

Media Magazine

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Production and ...
Freaks and geeks
Your own production work
Practice, planning, professionalism
Movie budgets and money shots
Producing the Royal Wedding
The role of the producer
Production courses

MM

English & Media Centre

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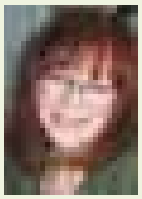

Welcome to ***MediaMag*** 37 – and welcome to the start of a new term, new course, and (we hope) lots of new readers.

This issue of ***MediaMag*** is all about **Production**, in all its many and varied forms, from the **back-stories of classic production set-piece scenes** in ***Saving Private Ryan*** and ***Bonnie and Clyde*** to the logistics of producing a global spectacle such as the Royal Wedding. Roy Stafford explores movie budgets at both ends of the spectrum to find out where all the money goes, while Emma Louise Howard considers innovative strategies for making the most of zero finance. We look at the **production history** of ***Freaks***, one of the most controversial cult movies of all time, and consider how arguably subversive productions such as ***Family Guy*** manage to keep their edge inside the Murdoch empire.

Most importantly, we have a series of pieces designed to support **your own production coursework** – after all, it's worth 50% of your A Level, and requires rather more than a 'point and shoot' approach, as Rob McInnes points out. Steph Hendry provides a route through the AQA MEST2 spec, and Pete Fraser reminds you of some of the key criteria for success in any form of production work across all specs; while our resident cartoonist Goom shows you exactly how *not* to make a film for your coursework.

And for those of you currently confronting UCAS, and puzzling over the bewildering range of **film and media production degree courses**, we bring you personal accounts from three former A Level students and ***MediaMag*** readers who have just completed their first year in three of the most prestigious media departments in the country: Leeds, Lincoln and Bournemouth. Thanks to Alex, Tim and Tara for their insights.

Linked with the theme of this issue, we're launching our new ***MediaMag* Production Competition**, to tie in with our 10th anniversary and a special launch of your work next spring. Please visit the back page for details – a great opportunity to beef up your showreel, share your brilliant work online and prizes.

Finally, the production theme is at the heart of our forthcoming **student conference in London on 4th November**, with a morning of inspiring presentations, an afternoon of fantastic practitioners discussing examples of their work, and opportunities to talk to Skillset, examiners, and university departments. Make sure you've visited **http://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/mmagconference/** for further details.

Meanwhile, have a good term – and start producing!

Remember, *MediaMag* now has its own Facebook page at **http://www.Facebook.com/mediamag.emc**

This magazine is not to be photocopied. Why not subscribe to our web package which includes a downloadable and printable PDF of the current issue or encourage your students to take out their own £10 subscription?

New to MediaMag Online in September

New MediaMagClips from Sonia Livingstone, Professor of Media at LSE
Details of the ***MediaMag* Student Conference**
Entry forms for the **Production Competition**
Web supplement featuring articles on films about the Iraq War, Dogme 95, and much more

And a reminder of our next issues

December 2011: **Politics and Power**
February 2012: **Participation**
April 2012: **Play**
For further details of deadlines and topics, contact jenny@englishandmedia.co.uk

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Front Page News

Are we sexing up the sexualisation of children?

The past few years have seen an influx of reports looking into potential areas of 'harm' for children and teens, and outlining solutions to help protect them. The commercial 'sexualisation' of children has emerged as a major concern, with research in America and the UK attracting the attention of parents, politicians and the media nationwide, most recently in the ***Bailey Review*** in June 2011 (http://www.education.gov.uk/b0074315/bailey-review). But is all this attention justified? Can we rely on the information we are receiving? In her evaluation of the *Bailey Review*, **Dr Petra Boynton** expresses her concern about the validity of such reports, suggesting that we may have lost sight of the bigger picture where child welfare is concerned.

Boynton's first criticism of The Bailey Review is that its conclusions are based on limited or cherry-picked data with no differentiation made between academic research and PR campaigns. She argues that, while primarily concerning young people, most reports have made little attempt at actually including them. Alarmingly, up until now, realities such as these have been largely overlooked. **Professor David Buckingham**, whose 2009 research on childhood and commercialisation was quoted in the *Bailey Review*, interviewed children and teenagers rather than only parents' groups such as the Mothers' Union and Mumsnet, and concluded: 'Children are not, in any sense, simply the dupes of marketers.'

Some practitioners have commented that the *Bailey Review* gives an over-simplistic and moralistic account of the issues. Critics have argued that the preoccupation with 'sexualisation' favours white middle-class parents whose children are not generally facing hardship, and who arguably tend to engage in debates in ways that judge or look down on other people and their children.

This line of criticism has been condemned by many as downplaying the potential dangers of sexualisation and thus acting against the interest of young people. Boynton, and Buckingham, would respond that, in fact, questioning the integrity of these reports is imperative to young people's welfare in that it prompts us to refocus, if and where necessary, on the key issues confronting them today. The extensive **2010 Review by Scottish Parliament** on the commercial availability of sexualised products directed at children reintroduces the very real concerns surrounding financial instability, housing shortage, safety in the community and education for young people today.

Perhaps we should ask why, if the commercial sexualisation of children is such a serious issue, these numerous reports have not led to any real change. It is uncomfortable to think that however well-meaning programmes like ***Stop Pimping our Kids*** might be, the high profile of child sexualisation equates to higher viewing figures and increased profits. As a society it's essential we're properly informed and that we keep our eyes open to the bigger picture. Could it be that the reviews, as well as media attention, have inadvertently 'sexed up' the idea of sexualisation in children?

See www.drpetra.co.uk and http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/jun/06/sexualisation-bailey-review-children

Only 5% of ads feature ethnic minorities

A recent report has revealed that only 5% of the 35,000 TV ads screened in the UK last year featured actors from black, Asian or any other minority groups. Saad Saraf, Chair of the ethnic diversity group at the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) commented that these figures highlighted a drastic under-representation of the diverse ethnic makeup of the UK population, which comprises around 13% ethnic minorities. He observed that 'people react better to advertising when they see themselves reflected in it' and advised advertisers to take a closer look at who their customers were, and to ensure that figures were more representative over the coming years.

The report by Clearcast, which vets all commercials before they are broadcast, based its data on information supplied by ad agencies when submitting commercials for clearance. Actors from ethnic minorities appeared most frequently in ads for property, household equipment, online retail, entertainment and pharmaceuticals; none appeared in ads featuring gardening products or household appliances. The data relates to advertising that appeared on UK mainstream TV channels; Clearcast does not generally clear ads for niche broadcasters which might cater for ethnic minority audiences.

The report showed that Government campaigns 'index strongly' for ethnic minority actors, although mainly in 'walk on' rather than lead roles. Only 1,130 ads used actors from ethnic minority backgrounds in the main role, such as the Premier Inn commercials featuring comedian Lenny Henry.

The report's findings reflect issues highlighted by the IPA in the creative industries responsible for making ads. The 2010 annual census of the UK advertising industry found that of the 18,635 people employed in the sector in 2010, 9 out of 10 staff were from a white background. And believe it or not, this was a marked improvement on 2009 when just 8.9% of staff were from ethnic minorities.

Social networking for the older generation

The last decade has witnessed the rise of **Mumsnet**, the online forum set up to give a voice to parents who felt marginalised or misrepresented in the media. With figures suggesting that 1/5 of Britons today can expect to live to see 100 it was only a matter of time before similar attempts were made to increase the online presence of the older generation, giving them the opportunity to express their views and concerns with the world. Stand aside – as of May this year, **Gransnet has landed**.

Older people have expressed a feeling that they exist in a kind of 'identity void'. In a world obsessed with physical perfection, it is a common complaint that older women feel overlooked and ignored, while both sexes face the prospect of feeling displaced after retirement. A similar displacement is evident in advertising; **the over 60s are very narrowly represented** and the stereotypical beach-loving silver-haired couple who reflected the traditional idea of the 'golden years' in past decades hardly seems appropriate for the twenty-first century. Given that **by 2030 over-65s will account for a quarter of the consumer market in Britain**, this all seems rather miscalculated.

The aim for Gransnet, as with Mumsnet, is to enable its users to access advice, information and support from their peers. As part of the process, the creators of Gransnet hope to show that its users are as diverse as any other group, dispelling the notion that older people are merely a 'homogenous horde'. This was proven to an extent when on the first day on Gransnet people posted on a vast range of topics including their daughters-in-law, political militancy, growing basil outside in England, swearing and grandparents' rights.

Ageist assumptions suggest that older generations can't or won't learn to use technology, and many people question whether enough grandparents are online to warrant a social networking forum all of their own. Of course the digital exclusion of some older people is a serious issue; but it is also true that those **over-65s who are online spend an average of 42 hours a month** on the internet – more than any other group. And the over-50s are the fastest growing group in terms of internet usage. The creators of Gransnet believe that this is reason enough for optimism.

LinkedIn prepares for US flotation

LinkedIn, the social networking site for professionals, has decided to float its assets on the New York Stock Exchange later this year, becoming the first major network in the West to go public. The site, which has over 100 million users, and made a $15.4m profit on revenues of $243m in 2010, is expected to raise around $146m with its keenly awaited flotation.

The business orientation of LinkedIn's members, and their relative influence and power, is said to make them more valuable to advertisers. As a result the 7.8 million shares offered by the company are set to range from a fairly high $32-$35. Reid Hoffman, the co-founder and chairman of LinkedIn, along with the company's other private shareholders Bain Capital, Goldman Sachs and McGraw-Hill will sell 3 million shares in the public offering with LinkedIn contributing the remaining 4.8 million.

LinkedIn is one of a clutch of highly lucrative internet sites including Skype, Groupon and Zynga expected to return huge profits through flotation over the next year.

Front Page News researched, written and designed by Lizzie Wilkinson, publishing intern at the English and Media Centre.

Film releases

The days are getting shorter, the weather is getting colder – cinema, anyone? Here are some of the releases – and remakes – you can look forward to.

September

2nd: *We Need To Talk About Kevin* Starring Tilda Swinton, John C. Reilly and Ezra Miller, this adaptation of Lionel Shriver's acclaimed novel focuses on the mother of a teenage boy who goes on a high-school killing spree. Directed and written by UK indie director **Lynne Ramsay**.

9th: *Jane Eyre* A new take on Brontë's classic with screenplay by Moira Buffini (Tamara Drewe) and a cast led by Mia Wasikowska and Jamie Bell.

16th: *Tinker, Tailor Soldier Spy* Tomas Alfredson (*Let the Right One In*) directs Gary Oldman, Tom Hardy, Colin Firth and Benedict Cumberbatch in an adaptation of **John Le Carré's** acclaimed 1974 novel. George Smiley (Oldman), a cold war veteran, is forced out of semi-retirement to uncover a Soviet agent within MI6.

October

14th: *The Thing* Prequel to director **John Carpenter's 1982 SF horror classic**. At a research site in Antarctica, the discovery of an alien craft leads to confrontation, paranoia and extreme suspense. Produced by Marc Abraham and Eric Newman (*Dawn of the Dead*).

Footloose Remake of the **1984 dance classic** – expect the same spirit with a little extra southern grit and new foot-tapping tunes. Starring Andie MacDowell and Dennis Quaid.

The Three Musketeers Starring Matthew Macfadyen, Orlando Bloom and Milla Jovovitch. The legendary musketeers must unite and defeat a beautiful double agent from plunging Europe into war. Directed by **Paul W.S. Anderson** (*Resident Evil: Afterlife*).

21st: *LOL* A coming-of-age story in which Lola (Miley Cyrus) and her friends tackle a world connected by Facebook, YouTube and iTunes navigating the pressures of high school romance and friendship while dodging their sometimes overbearing and baffled parents.

28th: *The Adventures of Tintin – The secret of the Unicorn* Long-anticipated screen adaptation of the well-loved comic series. Tintin and friends discover directions to a sunken ship and go off on a treasure hunt. Directed by **Steven Spielberg**, starring Jamie Bell, Andy Serkis and Daniel Craig.

Straw Dogs: In this remake of controversial **70s classic Peckinpah shocker**, L.A. screenwriter relocates with wife to her deep South hometown. There, while tensions build between them, a brewing conflict with locals becomes a threat to them both.

December

16th: *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* Holmes and Watson join forces to outwit and bring down their fiercest adversary, Professor Moriarty. Directed by **Guy Ritchie**, starring Jude, Robert Downey Jr. and Rachel McAdams.

The Ps in Production:

Product and Productivity

Pain
Praise
Punishment
Play
Payment
Product
Parody and Pastiche
Postmodern
Plagiarism
Point/Pointless
Pritt Stick
Plasticine
Photoshop
Pleasure
Promethean
Pound shop

Doing media production is never as straightforward as it might seem. **Rob McInnes** identifies some of the P-words which will help you put your own production in perspective.

Pain

Should learning be painful? The eternal question – well, one of them perhaps. Production work is certainly full of painful lessons; whole days of work lost because someone wiped a tape by mistake, or the momentary agony that occurs when you absentmindedly hit no instead of yes when the little box prompts you to save your work. One of life's toughest lessons is that **you need to make mistakes in order to learn**. Although they can be frustrating, annoying and sometimes downright depressing, making mistakes can encourage us to solve problems in new ways and to think creatively. Sometimes the solutions are better than you could possibly have imagined, particularly when you're forced to think outside the box or move away from your comfort zone (enough with the business-speak clichés). But (and it's a significant but if you tend to give up easily) if you can survive the pain of somebody criticising the work that you thought was fantastic or of being awarded an **E** grade for something you thought was an **A**, then you might be on a road to a positive learning experience.

Praise

We all like a bit of this – and it can be painful when others get it and you don't. But when the praise doesn't come pouring over you like warm custard when you exhibit a piece of work, you need to ask yourself tough questions. How much effort did you actually put into it? If you spent hours and hours and hours fiddling with your track in Garageband, had you checked the assessment criteria to make sure all that work would actually pay off? Were you so carried away with the act of creation that you never stepped back to look at it objectively? The fact is that **audience feedback** is a crucial part of the process of making media; and that praise is great – but constructive, honest feedback can be a lot more valuable. Seek that out (as well as the praise, obviously!).

Punishment

Punishment for teachers is having to find nice things to say about lazily produced, shoddy, derivative work that demonstrates no discernible sense of personal engagement, intellectual curiosity or emotional honesty. There are lots of other ways that students can punish their teachers but you'll have to follow my Twitteryfacewebbooklog to learn those.

Play

One of the keys to successful media production is to learn how to **'free' your mind from preconceived ideas** and, importantly, how to avoid seeing production tasks as drudgery. In English, the word 'play' has many different meanings, ranging from those things Shakespeare wrote to all the stuff you do in the park as a toddler. Understanding **play as a creative process** that provides an element of fun and at its best inspires great art is important. The concept is strongly linked to **enjoyment** – both for yourself and others. So it can be a tool you use in the act of creativity. Learn how to harness play constructively and the whole process of production can become a lot more fun.

Payment

The mainstream media in general consist of commercial organisations which produce products to fit regular patterns of broadcast, release and circulation. Being **commercial** essentially means they are **businesses that employ people to produce what they sell**. All those actors, directors, designers, musicians, animators (et al) will be paid (in varying degrees) for their work. As a student learning how to do some of those jobs, you won't be paid – at least, not unless you're a particularly canny student who's managed to blag your way into a paid gig! However, most media production assessment now requires you to show awareness and understanding of what is sometimes called **professional practice'** This basically refers to **the ways that professional media producers work** and it acknowledges the **constraints** that they are under. Many of those constraints are likely to apply to you in any case – such as working to deadlines; accounting for what your specific role has been; responding to feedback and so on. Professional practice in real-world media production usually results in achieving an acceptable compromise between speed of working and technical excellence. It's not easy. And if you're working at A Level and above, it's unlikely to be easy for you. That's why, down the line, if you're any good, you could end up being paid for making media. Why not? Lots of people do.

Product

For commercial media, the **'product'** (whether it's a music promo, magazine, television drama etc.) is **an artefact that can be sold for profit**. But a media product isn't like a can of beans – always identical, always safe and tasty to consume. It might be edgy, exciting, elevating. It might outrage or upset some of its audience. It will be subject to criticism and debate. It may follow the 'conventions' of similar products, while trying to reach out and do something daring or original. So not entirely like a can of beans, then.

Parody and Pastiche

These terms overlap a little, but can be very useful to anyone learning about how a particular media form or genre functions. The great parodies, such as the movie ***Airplane*** (1980), can often cruelly expose the conventions of the source material. ***Airplane*** does this brilliantly, offering us ludicrously overblown passenger stereotypes, melodramatic situations and lines such as 'we have to find someone who not only can fly this plane but who didn't have fish for dinner', which when delivered deadpan become extremely funny. The aforementioned 'fish for dinner' line, together with some of the characters and much of the plot of ***Airplane*** were lifted wholesale from the 1957 film ***Zero Hour***. You might even say, they were **plagiarised** (see below), except that ***Airplane's*** producers had purchased the rights to ***Zero Hour*** outright.

Generally speaking the difference between parody and pastiche is that **a parody's intention is humorous, whereas a pastiche imitates (usually with some affection and precision) the qualities of an original work**. Either way they can be valuable strategies to adopt in production work, as they require **knowledge and understanding of how the original text functions**.

Postmodern

Postmodernism frequently includes elements of pastiche and parody. Postmodern products tend to assume of their audiences **a high degree of knowledge of other texts**. Watch the music video of Lady Gaga's **Telephone**, itself a sequel to an earlier song, and try counting the references to **Blaxploitation and Tarantino films** amongst other things. Postmodern texts with their rather distancing ideological strategies sometimes resemble **bricolage** – the piecing together of art like a patchwork quilt of cultural references.

Plagiarism

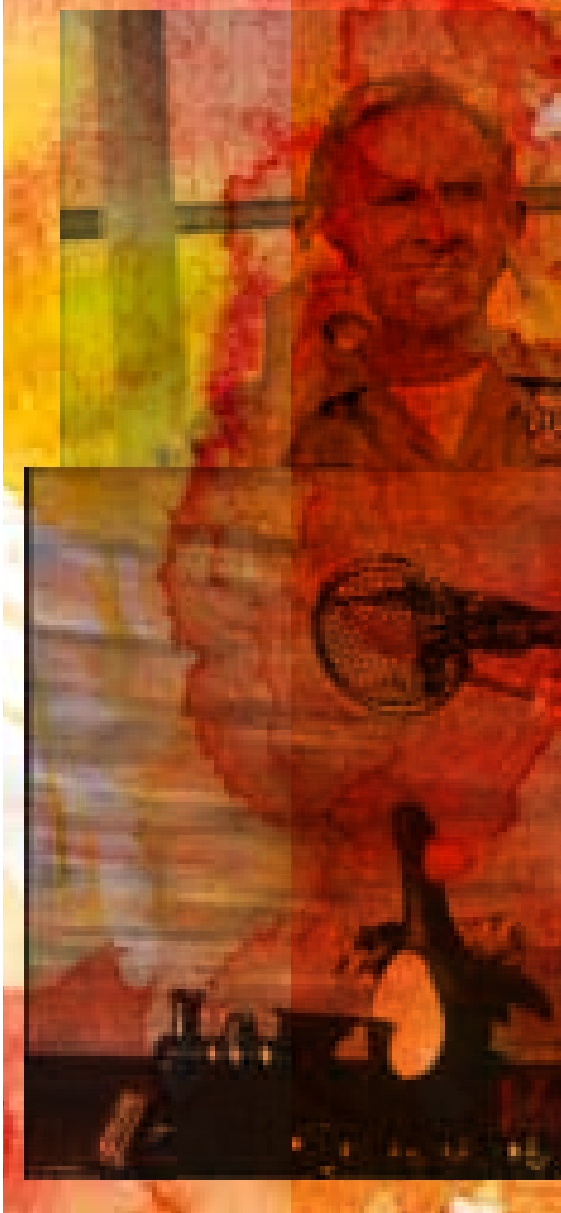
If you're making **mash-ups in the postmodern style** it's sometimes difficult to determine where creative homage ends and plagiarism begins, so if you're being assessed, this will be a debate you probably need to engage in. To make it easier on the assessors, there are usually some rules regarding what is acceptable practice and what isn't. One rule of thumb (apart from the court cases!) is that **if it's in the mainstream media then it isn't going to be plagiarised** (because people lose their jobs over nicking stuff). Of course that doesn't stop it from being derivative. Another rule of thumb is, if you are able to make your own image, noise or utterance, as opposed to copying and pasting someone else's, you'll be fine. And anyway all the great artists steal stuff.

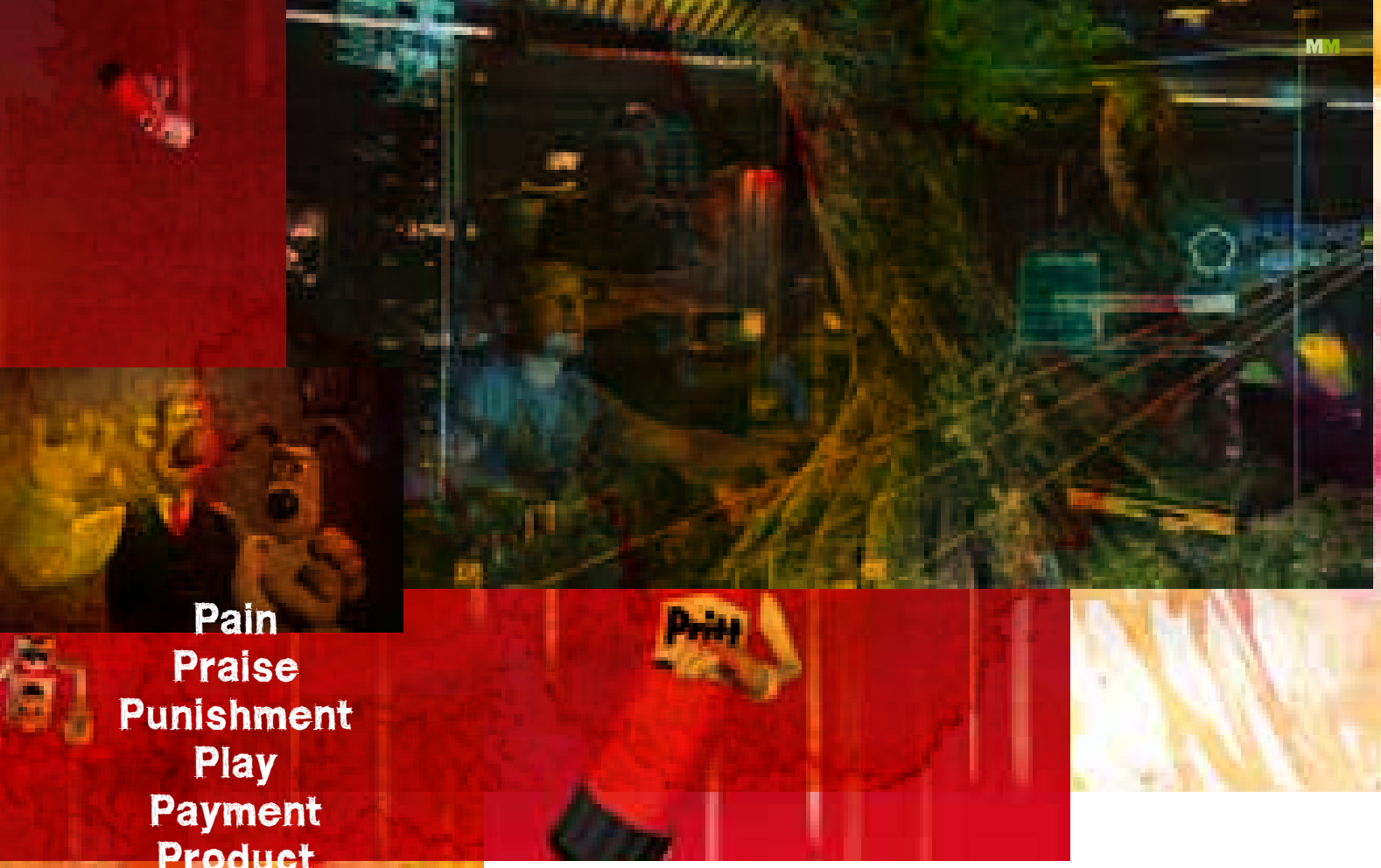
Point/Pointless

Chances are if you think a production task is pointless, then you won't learn much from it. Sometimes seeing the 'point' of a text is everything – the meaning, the reason it exists, whether it entertains or raises issues you think are important. If it's pointless to you, don't expect many marks when it comes to assessment.

Pritt Stick

For me, the Pritt Stick represents some interesting truths about production work. It's a very utilitarian product with one principal purpose – to stick bits of paper and card to other bits of paper and card. It's not much good at sticking anything else and it dries out immediately if you leave the cap off. But it's harmless and tremendously useful for what nowadays is called **low-tech** production work. There are people around who can remember (vaguely) what a pain it was to use glue before the invention of the Pritt Stick (but obviously I'm not one of them). Although a **brand name** – it was first marketed by German company, Henkel in 1971 – the Pritt Stick has become a **generic name**, like Hoover. In the days before 'desk-top publishing' was invented, the idea of a **paste-up** (of the various components of a magazine, newspaper page or other print product) would have been impossible without the magic qualities of a glue stick. Comic pages often looked like a messy jumble of stuck-on speech balloons, tippexed-out lettering and overlaid captions





before they became photographic plates ready for printing. DTP in large part did away with this but despite this the Pritt Stick remains a staple (sorry) of media work at the messy stage.

Plasticine

Unlike the Pritt Stick, Plasticine is a product not of the last century, but the one before that. To artists it offers a simple and elegant way to make and understand movies – on a fraction of the budget you would need for live-action. **Nick Park at Aardman Productions** has used it for years and his Wallace and Gromit characters are literally made of it.

Using plasticine to make small and short animated films can be delightful. They'll be 'yours' in every important respect – especially if you design and mould your own characters. The down side is it takes an age to do animation – but it's great as a discipline in learning about what's important in a story, simply because if you want to create a movement or gesture you'll have to co-ordinate it across every single frame.

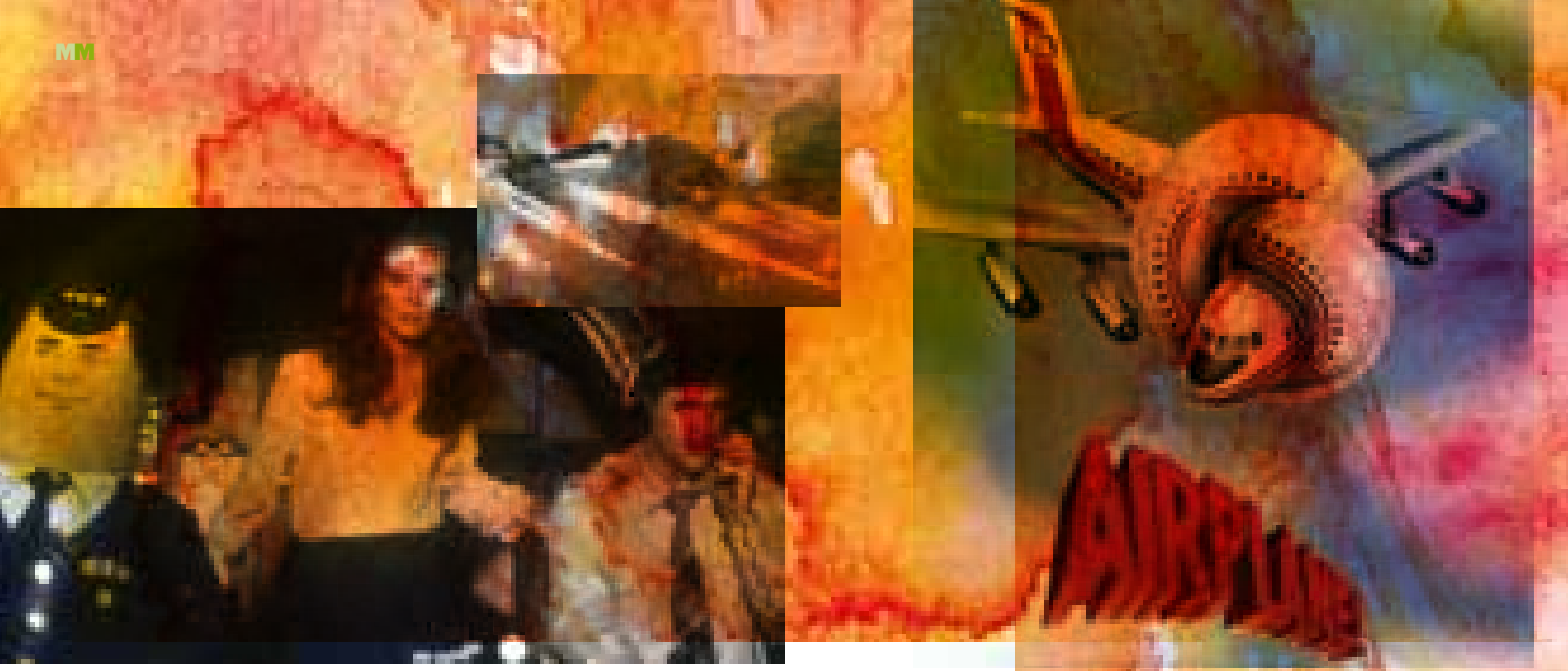
Plasticine was invented by a teacher, and can be seen as symbolic of the relationship of **education, art and play**. It's a simple substance but one which can be put to complex uses, and is capable of expressing profound emotion when combined with the technologies of animation film and the artistry of great animators. Plasticine characters are (probably) cheaper than actors, but it can take just as long to make them smile.

Photoshop

Adobe's powerhouse software application has revolutionised so many aspects of media production that it's now difficult for many people to imagine what life must have been like before it. Now 21 years young, Photoshop has taken the manipulation of imagery far beyond the darkroom techniques that inspired its creation. And yet, ultimately, it's just like any other technological tool of media producers – used with care, thought and understanding it can help make wonderful things. Used clumsily, it'll put a kitten's head on David Cameron. Like Hoover before it, the product was so ubiquitous it became a verb (see below!).

Pleasure

Watch **Nick Park** being interviewed about his career and his creation of the plasticine worlds of ***Wallace and Gromit***. See the sheer pleasure in his face. And then consider the effect of those films on their audiences. There's a love and affection both for the characters and for the enormous attention to detail that helps make the films so amusing… and so uniquely British. The **pleasure** your work offers an audience is important. In the media industries it is **quantifiable** in many ways; **iTunes downloads, box office receipts, circulation figures** etc. – all these provide a measurement of a product's success, as do critical responses. You show some work in a classroom or to some friends to gauge their reaction. If your work is dull or dreary, it should alert you to a number of issues. Did you enjoy making it? Did you think about how it might provoke an emotional response? Did you consider the ways in which it might be understood on an intellectual level – the meaning of its narrative and the representations you've constructed? If you did those things and it doesn't work, then perhaps it is structurally flawed and in need



of some changes. If you *didn't* enjoy making it ask yourself why not. Chances are you will have inadvertently communicated that to your audience.

Rob McInness is Head of Media at Forest Hill School, London, and the author of *Action Adventure Films*, and *Teen Movies*, both published by Auteur.

Promethean

One of the many companies that have innovated their way into classrooms with **information technology**, Promethean is one of the leading manufacturers of **interactive whiteboards**. These white rectangles have not only revolutionised education but they symbolise **the convergence of digital technologies** that has been changing the way we make and consume media. Videos, photos, text, sounds etc. are now endlessly interchangeable. We can look at and interact with anything we want from anywhere in the world on a large screen in a classroom (assuming you can get round the filtering software of course). Whether you've posted a video on Vimeo, photoshopped a photograph in Photoshop or written some words in Word, they're likely to be seen on a whiteboard.

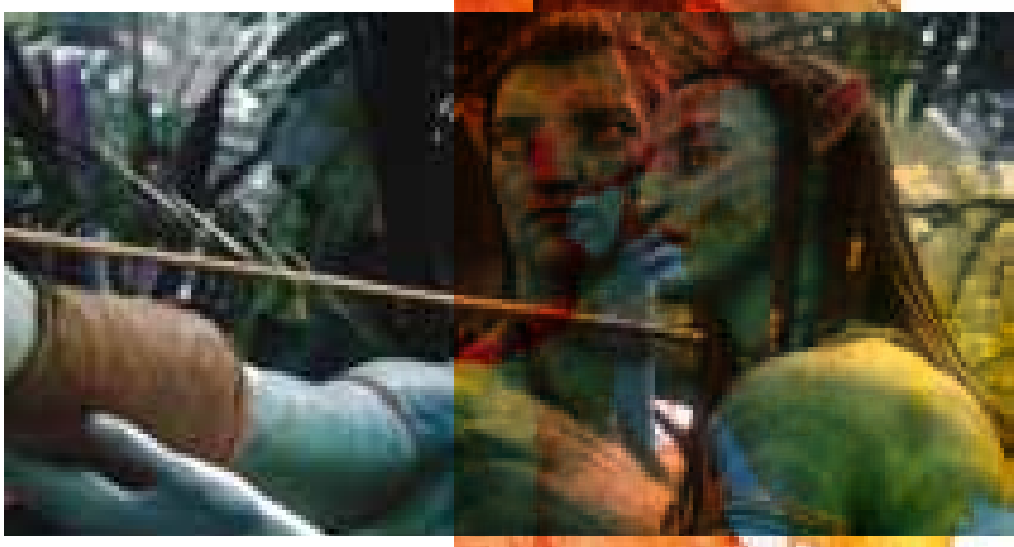
Pound shop

BIG media productions cost BIG money. ***Avatar*** cost well over $200 million – a lot of visits to the pound shop. You don't have that kind of money, so consider **the pound-shop aesthetic**. Work out how to do things inexpensively and try to tap into a bit of creativity to create interesting stuff. Watch the films and videos of **Michel Gondry, or Robert Rodriguez's ten-minute film schools** to help learn the value of economy married to imagination.

Promise

Media texts frequently get let out in the world accompanied by a promise. **Genre**, for instance, promises a certain kind of pleasure. So if you're making, say, a trailer for a horror film, you probably need to think about putting something scary in it. If you're making a romance, contrive a situation that's going to pull at your audience's heartstrings.

And if you're making a comedy, put in a joke!



IN DEFENCE OF MEDIA

or how to stop worrying and learn to love being a geek

What does your production coursework mean to you? An irritating chore? A hurdle to get through to pass your A Level? A hobby, an ambition, a passion? A way of life? Media teacher **Nick Potamitis** reflects on his own experiences as a producer, and calls upon Media students everywhere to embrace their inner geek.

I am a geek. I always have been. According to the physicist **Professor Brian Cox**, being a geek is **'being able to be serially obsessed with things'**. As far back as I can remember, I've always been a serial obsessive. First it was comics and computer games. Then it was ***Warhammer*** and the wrestling. Then I discovered cinema and ***Moviedrome*** and late-night seasons of Alfred Hitchcock and Jackie Chan movies on Channel Four. Thanks to **Capital Gold** and ***HipHopConnection***, I became obsessed with **Dion & the Belmonts** and **The Beach Boys** and then later **De La Soul** and **GangStarr**. I spent my university grant in second-hand record shops hunting out not just every album by

each member of **The Wu-Tang Clan**, but the DVD re-issues of every Hong Kong kung-fu flick sampled in each of their albums as well.

Creative Geekery

Being a geek is a creative act. It's not just about collecting things and facts, although that is a lot of what it's about. Like many of my friends, I didn't just *collect* comics, although I did collect all kinds of comics: superhero comics; war comics; cowboy comics; American comics; British comics; Japanese comics; comics about giant robots destroying cities and in later years, underground comics about giant robots with existential angst. But as well as collecting comics I've always **created my own comics**. When I was 12 I created a self-drawn mini-series based on a thinly disguised ***Judge Dredd*** rip-off, making copies of each issue by hand and stapling them together to pass around to friends. When I got older I made my own photocopied zines which I used to pass around the same friends and eventually I got a couple of my comic-strips into a small-press magazine. It's not quite the same as being snapped up by ***Marvel*** or ***Fantagraphics***, but it felt pretty cool at the time.

DIY Westerns

In the same way my film-geekery has always extended to making movies as well as obsessively watching them. Or, at least, attempting to make them. While still at school, a group of friends and I got together to create our own Sergio Leone-inspired Western filmed in North London. Imagine something like ***A Fistful of Dollars*** meets ***Son of Rambow***. Between us we had a fairly sizeable camcorder; some stetsons and replica six-shooters we managed to borrow from a local Wild West re-enactment society; a video-mixer I'd bought on sale in Dixons and the *BFI Encyclopedia of the Western* which I'd been given for Christmas the year before. I wrote the script on my Amiga home-computer, made copies of it on a dot-matrix printer and we held auditions, read-throughs and rehearsals at each other's houses. I am pretty sure we filmed (out-of-sequence) the climactic shoot-out in a friend's back-garden, but apart from that, I have no memory of ever

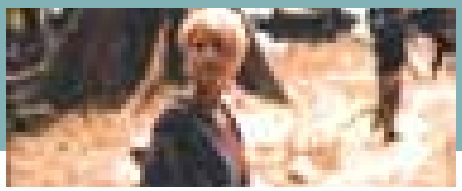
finishing any of the rest of the film, let alone producing a watchable final cut of our suburban-spaghetti western.

This unfinished attempt at channelling the spirit of Ennio Morricone in Enfield was not my first or last attempt at amateur film-making. Before it I'd made *Adam & Joe*-style stop-motion animations using ***Star Wars*** figures in miniature home-made costumes I used to hand-sew myself. A few years later while avoiding writing-up my PhD thesis, some friends and I made a mockumentary about a useless street magician that went by the working title of *Magic Boots*. Now that did get finished. Sort of. We held auditions above a pub in East London with proper, wannabe-actors and filmed it on location in Wood Green with a mini-DV camera I'd got cheap from a friend whose dad worked for JVC. I finished a rough-cut, this time edited on my brother's PC but, just like the Western before it, I couldn't tell you where the tapes of *Magic Boots* are now.

As well as trying our hand at film-making, my brother and I built a light-box to draw cell-animations and we taught ourselves how to create digital art on hooky software we downloaded on a dial-up modem. Ten years before ***Red Dead Redemption*** we had a go at creating **an online Wild-West first-person-shooter** which got as far as creating some Mexican bandit skins and a couple of badly-rendered attempts at a repeating lever-action rifle. (It should come as no surprise that I am a multi-platform Western geek!)

Networks and Communities

Being a 'serial obsessive' does not simply mean that I've started many more creative projects than I've ever finished, although that is, sadly, true. What it really means is that since the 1980s I have been **an active participant in any number of different fan communities**. Some are face-to-face networks of friends and fellow afficionados, others are 'imagined communities' enabled through subscribing to and imaginatively 'buying into' particular magazines or web forums, all the while creating and sharing my own re-mixes and mash-ups of my favourite media texts: from making my own ***Star Wars*** board game to play with friends after school, to recording and passing round my own mix-tapes with other hip-hop fans at university. As **Henry Jenkins** argues, **'participatory fan cultures'** have been around long before the web, but the advent of the internet has just served to expand them and extend the opportunities they have to exchange knowledge, skills and ideas across limitless

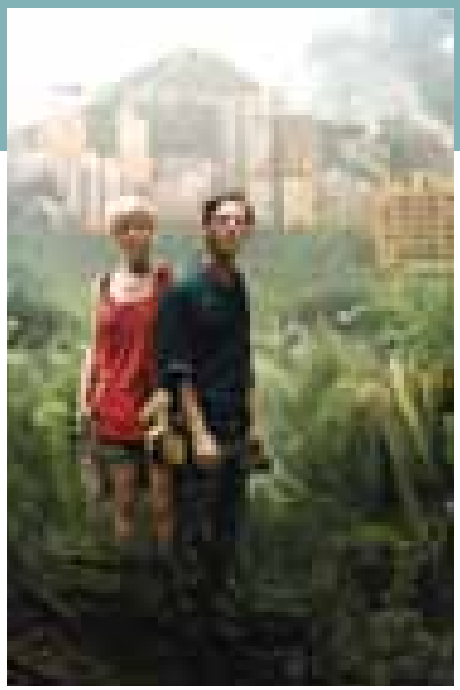


geographical boundaries. I was certainly part of **affinity groups** growing up, but the members all tended to live within a short bus ride from my house. To be honest, there weren't that many other ***Burning Spear*** fans in my school; but now thanks to Twitter, I can start up a *#roots&culture* conversation with potentially anyone who's logged in; and anyone who wants to hunt down those Wu-Tang references can now find online discographies complete with filmic cross-references and links to downloadable videos. On the internet, someone else has always got there first.

The ability of you young people to connect to, and communicate with, others who share your interests and obsessions is beyond anything I knew as a teenager – and I am still less than twenty years older than you. However, the **'everyday creativity'** that you engage in is no different from the stuff I was doing at the same age. What has changed is the opportunities you have today **to find a 'real' audience to watch, listen to, and read the stuff you are creating everyday**. We made *Magic Boots* in 2001, before **YouTube**, before **Facebook** and before 'google' was a verb. We used sites like **AltaVista** and **Lycos** to research production techniques, downloading plans and tutorials for how to build our own steadicam rig. But there was no way at the time we could have uploaded our footage and built an online audience. And if there was, we didn't know about it. Yet I now teach students who have been made **YouTube** affiliates and are earning cash money every time their videos are watched by kids in Kettering and California. I've never checked, but ten years after we had the idea, I like to imagine that **YouTube** is probably full of lo-fi comedies about crap conjurers, and one or two of them might even have fairly impressive viewing figures.

Using Real Technologies

More and more young people can, and do, make their own stuff now, and distribute that stuff online. Not only that, but more and more people have access to exactly the same means of production that were once the preserve of media institutions and the creative industries. Let me give just one example. When I did my Media Studies A Level you could have been



asked to create a double-page spread from a local newspaper. This might involve writing a fictional news-story and mocking-up a page layout. Or it might involve going out and doing local reportage and photo-journalism and producing your simulated newspaper on desk-top-publishing software.

Nowadays, a typical A Level print media production brief might ask you to create a double-page spread from an imaginary music magazine. You will normally begin by researching the generic conventions of music magazines; carry out research on your target audience; create page mock-ups experimenting with typography and layout; as well as numerous other stages of production from lighting a photo-shoot to subbing your copy for typos. While the process may well *simulate* all the elements required in real-world publishing, what you will ultimately have produced – however technically polished or conventionally appropriate – is certainly *not* a 'real' music magazine, although the best work may well *look* like an extract from a 'real' magazine. And yet, the web is full of start-ups and services like **NewspaperClub** and **Blurb** which allow you to produce your very own magazines, newspapers and books printed on real paper and ink at reasonable and accessible rates. Why waste time making a copy of an imaginary newspaper, when you can write, print and then sell the real thing on your own Facebook page or Paypal store?

Real Product for Real Audiences

Media 2.0 with its attendant digital technologies and social media platforms is enabling students like yourselves to become **real producers of real products that you can now share online with real audiences**. You can make your own web comics, music videos, short films, computer games, iPhone Apps, T-shirts, zines . . . the list is limitless. The internet has enabled anyone to become, if not an expert in any subject, then a self-motivated **autodidact** at least, digging down through the Wikipedia articles, blog posts, message boards and YouTube videos to find out about, and be a part of, whatever niche interest floats their individual boat. In many ways, I now see my job as a Media teacher as being much more about facilitating and guiding my students through this maze of ideas, information and new ways of belonging than about warning them of the dangers of News Corp or Syco.

In fact, **digital creativity has important implications** for every aspect of Media Studies. It's no longer possible to explore abstract theories or even textual analysis without paying attention to digital production, consumption and culture. The simple reason for this is that there *is* no longer any textual meaning, culture or activity unaffected by the interventions of digital worlds. When I did my A levels, it seemed feasible – even desirable by some – to make distinctions between 'practical work' and 'theory', between classroom teacher and computer technician, between critical evaluation and creative expression; those days are no longer tenable in an age of user-generated content, visual methods and cultural convergence.

In other words, Media students need to get their geek on. I agree with the actor Simon Pegg, who argues that geek has been 'reclaimed' in recent years. It used to be an insult, now

> **it just means you're into your stuff. That you're proud of what you love, and you're happy to know a lot about it . . . it's about being enthusiastic. It's a liberation.**

We need to do the same for Media Studies. As **David Gauntlett, Professor of Media at the University of Westminster,** and the author of ***Making is Connecting***, continues to argue, we need to liberate ourselves and our students from outmoded models of communication that refuse to acknowledge the connective power of everyday creativity and its transformative potential. It's about developing creative skills, experiences and knowledge through play, through practice, and through taking a punt on an idea even if it doesn't work out the way you thought it might. A bit like ***Magic Boots***.

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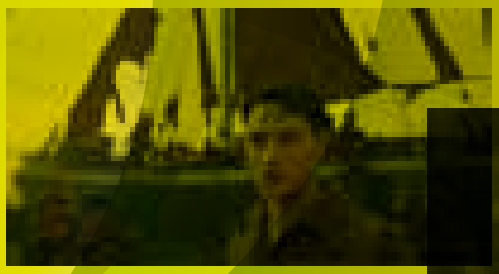
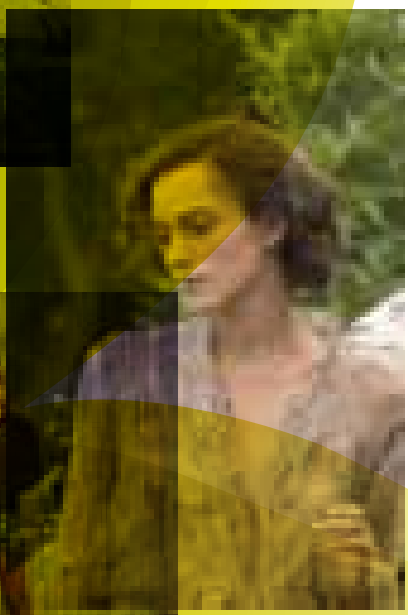
Movie Budgets: Where Does All the Money Go?





Film production has always been a costly business, and the size of a movie's budget is a continuing source of fascination (and in some cases horror). But what exactly does it get spent on, how does it relate to the production process, and how does it impact on the viewing experience of its audience? **Roy Stafford** explores the mystery of where the money goes, considers the model of *Monsters*, and suggests that in the future, biggest may not necessarily mean best.

If you want to buy a car, a TV monitor or a new outfit, you can walk into a showroom and choose one knowing that the price tags represent clearly understood criteria. The least expensive models will have fewer features, less high quality materials and will have received less special attention in terms of design and manufacture. But the most expensive models are unlikely to be more than ten times the price of the least expensive. There may be some questions about taste and fashion, but you can be reasonably confident about what you are buying, and that the price you pay bears a real relationship to the production cost of the item.

Go to the multiplex, however, and you could choose between a film that cost $500,000 to produce and one that cost $100 million. You pay more or less the same ticket price for both (with perhaps a slight premium for 3D) but there is no

guarantee that you will enjoy the expensive film more. What we as cinema goers value in films is almost unquantifiable – and since we all value different things it may be impossible to put a 'reasonable price' on what we are prepared to pay.

In this article I want to focus on what the difference in film budgets actually means in terms of what we see (and hear) on screen. One of the striking features of contemporary cinema is that **budgets generally are getting both bigger and smaller at the same time**. The **major studios** are driving budgets ***up*** in the hope of utilising new technologies to create a greater spectacle to induce audiences into 3D and IMAX screenings. But **independent producers are driving them *down*** (also using new technologies) in order to stay in business and to change film-making practices. The irony is that the budget range that everyone says is being 'squeezed out' is the **'medium budget film' at around $10-30 million**. And what is the most successful film worldwide as I write? ***The King's Speech*** **had a production budget of $15 million and a worldwide gross of $400 million plus**.

My title is partly a dig at those overblown studio budgets, but partly also a genuine attempt to explore the different budget categories in film production. Where does the money go? How can you drive the budget down and still make a film to attract audiences?

Above and below

Film budgets are usually expressed in terms of two sets of costs: **above the line (ATL) and below the line (BTL)**.

- **Above the line costs** are 'direct' and largely fixed – in other words they must be paid irrespective of what happens during the production. They refer to the fees for all the principal creators of the film and the cost of acquiring the original intellectual property (e.g. a successful novel, play etc.). Studio pictures are often expensive because of the fees paid to stars (actors, directors and writers).
- **Below the line costs** are indirect and refer to the goods and services purchased/hired as required for production activities – the 'running costs' of the production. The efficiency of the producer, director and crew during shooting and post-production can increase or reduce these costs.

The property

Successful novels (or non-fiction books like biographies) can cost **over $1 million** to acquire. A top scriptwriter may charge another $1 million or more to adapt the work for the screen. Ideally, a low budget picture will have a script developed from an original idea or a 'found' story like a simple news report or perhaps personal knowledge or experience. **The more that roles can be combined, the less expensive the production**. Writer-directors are common in so-called specialised cinema and sometimes in the mainstream as well. **Alejandro Amenábar**, the Spanish-Chilean director of ***The Others*** **(Spain/US 2001),** not only wrote the script and directed the film but also wrote the music as well.

Stories that have already been successfully exploited as novels or plays obviously have an advantage in that they have **name/title recognition** and have proved their worth in the marketplace. This is why film producers are prepared to buy the rights. However, the temptation to remain 'faithful' to the original novel can create major financial problems for the producer. It costs a novelist nothing extra (except research time) to write a story set in different time periods and in widely separated locations. **Ian McEwan's novel *Atonement*** is set in a grand English country house in the 1930s, on the beach at Dunkirk, in the London blitz of 1940 and finally in London in 1999. Most British films adapted from well-known 'literary' novels fall into the 'medium budget' range and cost around **$10 million** but ***Atonement*** cost three times as much to adapt. Why?

Dressing the past

Costumes and locations create major costs. Let's take costumes first. The audience for a film like ***Atonement*** (UK/US 2007) expects **authenticity** in costumes, and the novel suggests two distinct periods that require research and re-creation. A well-off family in a 1930s country house wore various different types of costumes, 'dressing' for dinner, for sports, for dances etc. The scenes in France require military uniforms of various different types.

What goes for costumes also applies to motor vehicles (cars, buses) and trains, planes etc. CGI can create some of the necessary images of aircraft, dogfights etc. This too will have budget repercussions (some possibly beneficial – see below) but sometimes a production wants to gamble on the use of 'real' locations and props that provide the kind of visceral experience CGI still can't quite recreate. For ***Atonement*****, director Joe Wright** recreated the Dunkirk beaches (from which Allied troops were evacuated in 1940) on the sands of Redcar in North East England. He also gambled on an extremely complex camera shot lasting several minutes that moved through the entire set. This was one of the highlights of the film and at least he could argue that you could see the money on the screen. [The same might be said of the opening of ***Saving Private Ryan*** – see page 22.]

> **... a lot of the budget went on that, but it was only one day we had to shoot it, and that's in a way why I did that tracking shot, because I had one day to film that whole scene and thought that maybe the best way to do that was to concentrate on the rehearsals all day and then use the last 3 hours of the day to shoot. It was partly financial constraints that led to us shooting it in that way.**
> **. . . the art department had been there for six weeks beforehand, so they'd been getting it all set for six weeks and it was a fairly big job.'**
>
> Joe Wright discussing the beach scene in Atonement on www.comingsoon.net/news/movienews.php?id=39526

A rather different case study of the ramifications of the 'property' is ***This Is England*** (UK 2006). **Shane Meadows'** film is based on events he himself experienced in the early 1980s as a young teenager in Uttoxeter, so the property cost nothing except Meadows' own time (but the production did hire a co-writer). The production budget was as low as possible, but the film still faced costs associated with its 1980s setting. **House interiors** for the period had to be researched and recreated (partly from second-hand shops). Cast members had to get **haircuts and appropriate costumes** – and negotiations were necessary to acquire **the rights for music** (mostly reggae and ska) that

fitted the time period. The 'right' music has often been a problem for low budget films. When older independent films are being considered for DVD release it sometimes becomes problematic because the cost of renewing music rights is prohibitive.

Location or studio – or bedroom?

Producers are the unsung heroes of film productions. All too often the praise for a successful film is heaped on the director alone or on the production crew. The 'creatives' know what will work best but they rely on the producer to do the sums. The initial decisions about how to shoot the script involve many separate considerations.

Up until the 1960s big studio pictures were usually made on **studio sound stages**. This was partly because the studios owned their own facilities and they had already created **'standing sets'** such as a Victorian house, a Western street, a Roman temple etc. which could be used again and again with slightly different 'set dressing'. But primarily **the studio setting offered more artistic control and greater shooting efficiency**. Studio sets were built purely for shooting films – rooms didn't have ceilings, a whole wall might be missing, sometimes a building was just a 'flat' front with nothing behind. All that mattered was **how a scene looked on film** – and that required freedom for lighting and moving large and heavy cameras around the set. Directors who required precise camera movements and symbolic use of mise-en-scène (e.g. Alfred Hitchcock) preferred to work in studios where they were guaranteed to get what they wanted.

Even today when **location shooting** is the norm, some scenes may be shot on studio sets (especially blockbuster films, many of which use UK studios). There are other cost considerations too. In the old studio system, several films were being made at the same time on the studio lot. This meant everyone could eat in the studio canteen rather than hiring expensive catering on location. The studio had its own orchestra for musical arrangements and all the post-production facilities were nearby. The cast and the crew lived within a few miles of the studio. Today many Hollywood films are made in Toronto or Vancouver, in London or Berlin and in many other locations all over the world. Actors and department heads have to be put up in expensive hotels (even if the rest of the crew lives locally). Post-production can take place anywhere in the world and the orchestra might be recording music thousands of miles away. Indeed, the Bratislava Symphony Orchestra in Slovakia is one of the most popular film orchestras today, used by Hollywood studios and videogame companies (http://www.bso.sk).

Locations pose many problems. A genuine nineteenth century building may look great in a long shot, but you can't just knock walls down to fit in cameras and lights to shoot interiors. For ***Atonement***, the production team found Stokesay Court in Shropshire as a 'perfect' fit for the main location in the novel. But as production designer Sarah Greenwood recalls: '... it took seven weeks of preparation to ready Stokesay for five weeks of filming'. The US distributor **Focus Features** offers a fantastic resource for researching this production (**http://www.filminfocus.com/film/Atonement/articles**).

A production may also need to close a street, stage a demonstration, explode vehicles etc. Again some of this may be covered by CGI but there are always cost issues – all these demands may require **permissions** from several interested parties (not least police, fire services etc.). Some locations are more friendly towards film productions than others. Productions often move to locations that provide support and incentives, including potential investment in order to boost the film industry locally. **Film London** has an interesting feature on its website with case studies of scenes from film and television productions and how specific locations in London have been used ('Location of the Month': **http://filmlondon.org.uk**). ***This Is England*** was shot mainly on locations several miles apart in order to tap into funding from two (now defunct) English Regional Screen Agencies, **EM (East Midlands) Media and Screen Yorkshire**. Hollywood productions use Canadian locations because of the 'soft money' considerations – **the tax concessions and grants available from public funding** from Telefilm Canada and regional agencies (see http://www.telefilm.gc.ca/en/partnering-with-canada).

But what if you could make a film **using your own equipment and post-produce it in your bedroom**? Inexpensive digital technologies helped to transform the **popular music industry** during the 1990s – could the same thing happen to cinema? In one sense it already has. You've probably made your own video productions and possibly posted them on YouTube. Several 'no budget' productions costing only a few thousand pounds have been quite successful on DVD. **Jonathan Caouette** made a splash at Cannes in 2004 with ***Tarnation***, a film based on his unusual family history (and he returned to Cannes in 2011 with the follow-up ***Walk Away Renée***). Caouette's debut utilised home video, answering machine messages and photos and was reportedly **made for $300 and edited on his iMac**. But though this kind of production is feasible, it still tends to end up looking 'different' on screen with a lower resolution image and a reduced colour range. Film students still want to learn how to use **35mm** film technology as well as the new generation of digital film cameras such as the RED range (see **http://www.red.com**). They want to match the quality of the mainstream film image – and that carries a slightly bigger price tag.

Monsters (UK 2010)

Gareth Edwards' film *Monsters* has come to be seen as something of a **'game changer'** in low budget production. The film was made for around **$500,000** and yet it was presented in **CinemaScope** on multiplex screens across the UK and featured some beautiful CGI work. More importantly perhaps was the **'hidden' CGI** that enabled writer-director Edwards to make his film with so little money. During the promotion of the film in North America and in the UK, Edwards spoke at length about how the film project was conceived and how the production worked.

Edwards' career has been mostly in television, working on 'factual programmes'. A trained film-maker, he has also become adept at using computer software and creating inexpensive effects that have boosted the production values of his television work. In one of many YouTube clips discussing his work, Edwards demonstrates how he created an army of warriors on screen using just eight actors to illustrate a BBC Factual programme about Attila the Hun (http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=fBeHljB6uFU).

In the production notes for ***Monsters*** and various interviews, he describes how he was on holiday in the Maldives and watching fishermen hauling in their nets when he had an idea. What if, in their nets, the men discovered an alien creature? If he had been carrying a digital video camera, Edwards could have shot the scene and inserted an alien creature digitally into the sequence. This was the idea he transformed into ***Monsters***.

The basic premise of the film is that alien 'spores' have been brought back to Earth by a space probe which crashes into the forests of Central America. Eventually these spores develop into fully grown alien creatures which then begin to reproduce. The US and Mexican military end up attempting to keep the aliens behind walls and wire fences in an 'infected zone' across Central America. All this has happened before the film narrative begins, and which concerns itself with a journey made by two young Americans across the infected zone. Although there are a couple of 'encounters' with the aliens, the film is basically a **romance and a 'road movie'** which

also involves a satire on American attitudes towards the illegal migrant workers from Central America who attempt to cross the US/Mexican border.

Monsters makes for an interesting case study in genre film-making but my interest here is in how precisely Edwards approached the production. He had the backing of **Vertigo Films**, an independent British company that both produces a limited number of low budget films each year and also acquires other independent titles for distribution. Vertigo found the whole budget for the film and pointed Edwards towards the lead actor. Other than that he seems to have made many of the production decisions himself, following several of the 'lessons' we set out above. First he decided to **double up as cinematographer as well as writer-director**. He also recognised that when the shoot was completed he would have **to create all the digital effects himself.**

The lead actor, **Scoot McNairy,** was known to Vertigo as they had organised a very successful UK release of ***In Search of a Midnight Kiss***, a US microbudget romcom, in 2008. Edwards and McNairy hit it off immediately and McNairy's real-life partner **Whitney Able** then joined to take the second role. This was all the casting Edwards needed so when the shoot began the three of them were joined by a tiny crew (basically the sound crew). They drove across Central America and stayed in motels. Edwards had a script outline but the dialogue and incidental action were both created when they found a suitable location and inveigled the locals into taking part in the film. **No sets were constructed and no extra props were required.** When the script required that the couple would come across a sign warning about the 'Infected Zone' or a damaged tank or aircraft lying by the roadside, Edwards simply filmed the location in such a way that he knew he could insert a CGI image later. After a few days shooting, the group were joined by a **mobile editing team** who used a motel room to begin constructing a rough cut.

Edwards used the **cheapest professional quality digital cameras** he could find. He attached an adapter to a Sony EX3 camera to **alter the depth of field and to make the image more 'filmic'** and he used a selection of lenses designed for SLR cameras. He demonstrates this technique in a video interview on http://vimeo.com/groups/8548/videos/16896471 (This video also indicates how he must have had some kind of **product placement with Canon**.) It's always difficult to find out exactly how film productions spend their money, but it looks as though **the equipment cost was as low as $15,000**. The bulk of the budget must have been in the standard fees for cast and crew and the **below the line cost** of transporting and housing the crew 'on the road' through hundreds of miles of varied terrain in Central America. Edwards then presumably charged the production a standard rate for his digital effects creation and also commissioned a music score (from young British composer Jon Hopkins: http://moviemikes.com/2010/10/interview-with-jon-hopkins/).

The reception of the film has been interesting. It has been highly praised by critics, industry professionals and key members of the SF/horror fan community. Mainstream audiences and the wider fan community have been divided in their responses. That title is a problem because it creates expectations that the film doesn't fulfil. Action fans aren't expecting a restrained romance. The film's use of metaphor to critique American policies on immigration has also caused some controversy/contempt. But what is clear is that **audiences don't see the film as 'cheap'.** Those digital effects work very well. In another YouTube clip, Edwards demonstrates how he created a downed US military aircraft which eerily rises from the bottom of a lake by simply **adapting an 'off the peg' 3D outline** (http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=m7SQDuDnAMM&NR=1&feature=fvwp). The film ends with a sequence featuring the aliens that is beautiful to behold with the excellent musical score. The alien images are quite different from those of more traditional 'creature features' (Edwards describes them as more 'organic') but they demonstrate what can be achieved with imagination and the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding of computer software.

Budgets and business models

Pirates of the Caribbean 4 broke records around the world when it opened on **over 15,000 screens in May 2011**. Big budget films can produce big box office returns – but not necessarily big profits. The first few months of 2011 saw very disappointing results for Hollywood. Its business model is broken, with DVD revenues declining rapidly, and there is as yet little confidence that online revenues will deliver a similar income stream.

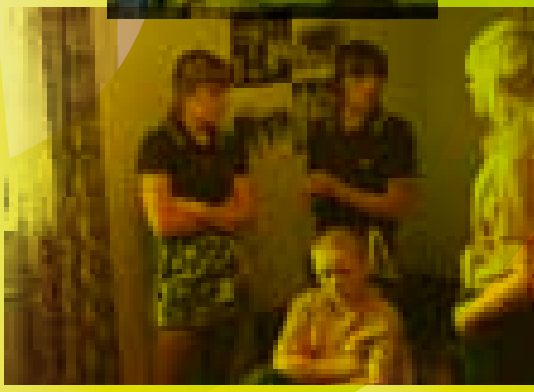
Productions like ***Atonement*** will be more difficult to finance in whatever the future production environment turns out to be. But **imaginative films that look good on $1 million or less** look more and more inviting. Yet Gareth Edwards appears to have signed on to make Godzilla for Hollywood. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose!*

Roy Stafford is the co-author of *The Media Student's Book* (5th Edition) with Gill Branston. The book's website at http://www.mediastudentsbook.com/ carries a section on media production and a detailed case study of a film school production project.

Further reading

www.mediastudentsbook.com/sites/default/files/documents/Chapter%2011%20%28358-382%29.pdf

Also recommended as an overview to complement this article, Mark Kermode interviews Gareth Edwards (an excellent discussion but contains serious spoilers): www.YouTube.com/watch?v=z52OHXfLbSU&feature=related



Cash-Strapped Creatives

The movie industry is one of the most lucrative but also one of the most expensive businesses in the world, so when film-makers don't have the budget to back up their work, they turn to more creative methods of production… **Emma-Louise Howard** investigates.

In an age when polished Hollywood blockbusters such as **James Cameron's *Avatar*** cost a total of $246 million to make (incorporating the expense of its re-release), an underground revolution is taking place. Gutsy new film-makers have been throwing dreams of big bucks out the window and scraping together their savings for a new breed of movie. What these films may lack in cash, they make up for in creativity.

But when did **low-budget production** really begin to take off on a noteworthy scale? Perhaps we can cite the rise of the **found footage genre** in creating a trend that continues to grow to this day. Often adopting a **mockumentary**-style format (which makes for an unsettling mixture of **realism and sensationalism**) these films are frequently made on a shoestring budget. Back in 1980, the notorious and controversial ***Cannibal Holocaust*** was considered to be something of a pioneer in this genre. However, 12 years ago, a little film about three students who got lost in the woods took the mainstream film world by storm. While ***Cannibal Holocaust*** was graphic and visually explicit, ***The Blair Witch Project*** opted to unnerve its audience by relying on the assumption that what happens off-screen in film is far worse than anything we can possibly see. The premise was simple. First, its creators **Eduardo Sanchez and Dan Myrick** created the **mythology** surrounding the film; the story, the website and surrounding literature, and marketed it as the **found footage** of a trio of film-makers who set out to produce a documentary about the fabled witch, thus blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality. Exactly what happens to Josh, Mike and Heather is left open to the audience's interpretation, but we are encouraged to conclude that they meet something of an abrupt end after what appears to be days of isolation and psychological torture.

The rumour mill continues to buzz about ***The Blair Witch Project's*** actual budget. **Some insist it was made for just $20,000, others cite figures up to $750,000.** Either way, it's still a great deal less than the millions spent on big studio productions, even ten years ago. Predictably its success sparked a spate of low-budget mockumentary-style films which prided themselves on their inexpensive production values such as ***The Collingswood Story*** (2002), ***The Last Horror Movie*** (2003) and the Columbine-inspired ***Zero Day*** (2003). Perhaps most noteworthy is the ***Paranormal Activity*** franchise which began in 2007 with its **$15,000 debut**, while its 2010 sequel was made for a moderate $3 million. Higher, yet still relatively modest budgets followed suit – in 2008, disaster film ***Cloverfield*** was released alongside large-scale media tie-ins for $25 million, and aptly enough the same year a shot-for-shot US remake of the 2007 Spanish horror ***REC*** appeared in the form of ***Quarantine*** for approximately half that price. Even 2009's ***District 9***, which mixed mockumentary footage with in-depth character study and graphic horror, was produced for only $30 million.

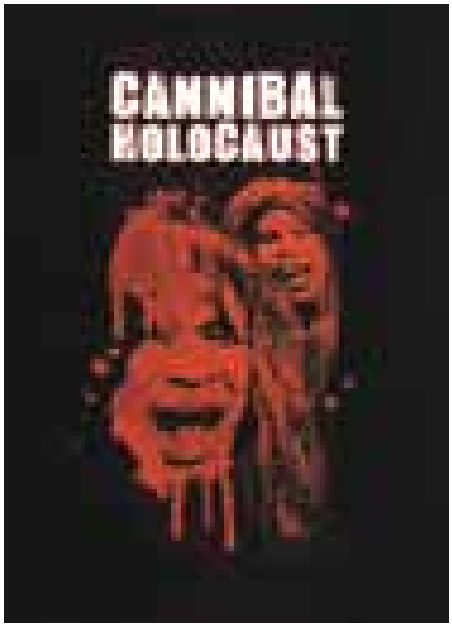
Why did this genre become such a success, to the extent that even film-makers with relatively large budgets started jumping on the found footage bandwagon? Perhaps it has something to do with the fact that these less expensive films not only captured the public imagination but also the public's hard-earned cash! Less cynically though, their enthusiasm also could have stemmed from a genuine appreciation of the focus placed upon **human emotion and reaction** in these films and the **pared-down filming techniques** such as the claustrophobic close-ups and documentary style approach. Additionally, lower budgets often come with

fewer studio constraints, such as pressure for films to conform to a certain status quo or limiting deadlines, allowing for more creativity on the part of the film-makers. But if the found footage genre becomes over-saturated (as some may argue it already has), what do the low budget indie film-makers do next?

They make a movie like ***Monsters***. It would appear that the connection between low-budget production and high creativity value is a tangible one, and director **Gareth Edwards** set out to make a movie that differed from the average 'giant alien disaster' film. On its release in 2010, **Chris Madden**, co-creator of movie review site **Casta La Vista**, was fortunate enough to interview Edwards and pick his brains about the production of ***Monsters***. Edwards was reluctant to confine the film within a specific genre and said of his creation:

> **It's kind of a mix of different films. If I say it's a horror movie, I'm misrepresenting it. If I say it's a monster movie, I'm misrepresenting it. If I say it's a road movie, it's kind of misrepresenting it. If I say it's a love story… For me the premise [was to] make a monster movie that begins where all the other ones normally end…**

Edwards also addressed the fact that most invasion-based disaster films portray characters reacting with shock, surprise and extreme behaviour to the events that are unfolding around them. He, however, wanted to



... make a monster movie where it's normal, and people aren't reacting to it. The same way that say people in Afghanistan behave around tanks, and around American soldiers, I actually want people in the background, on the streets, to go about their daily lives as if nothing's going on, and that's what you get for free when you turn up with a camera. We just incorporated real people, and anyone that spoke or was visible in the film, we got a release form for them, but essentially apart from the two main actors everyone else is just people we met on the way.

This aspect of ***Monsters*** can be directly compared to ***District 9***, where the invasion, although documented, has already taken place; the film itself revolves around the aftermath, the politics and logistics of the situation. The action does not take centre stage (which could be due to budget constraints). Instead that position is occupied by predominantly character-driven drama.

When asked if budgeting or filming schedule led to any creative constraints, Edwards stated:

I couldn't have just one camera, I had to have two… I wanted to spend the least money possible, and I wanted to spend the amount of money that I could afford to pay back if it was a film that no one liked. I kind of felt guilty about spending everyone else's money.

Edwards goes on to describe how his crew (that for the majority of the film consisted of just four people) travelled around Central America in the back of a van shooting the film. Investors keen to secure a return on their investment helped by providing items needed for the trip. However, while investors worried about things like a camera breaking, Edwards had different concerns:

The second camera became the iconic image to me of one step too far in this guerrilla approach we were taking.

Ironically, he actually felt that **less equipment would have afforded him greater creative freedom**, citing that the 'iconic' second camera became something of a burden. For Edwards the organic element of production was something that he felt was crucial to the project. It would seem that for Edwards the old maxim of **'less is more'** is not just a trite phrase.

Just days before the US release of ***Monsters***, ***Colin*** a British zombie horror that limited its budget even further, was screened at Cannes in October 2009.

It was reportedly **made for a mere £45**, with its director **Marc Price** drafting in actors via posts on social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook, and utilising simple household items for visual effect. This hand-held shaky-cam-led apocalyptic tale (filmed on a 10-year-old standard definition Panasonic mini-dv camcorder) is gritty, visceral and claustrophobic, and while its exceptionally low-budget production values are clear for all to see, its creative plot manages to maintain the viewer's interest. Why? Because ***Colin*** is the first ever zombie film to tell the **entire story from a zombie's perspective**. Edited using Adobe Premiere software, ***Colin's*** violence and scenes of mass destruction are mainly inconsequential. Emotional scenes such as the one in which his sister attempts to get him to remember her, or Colin's confusion at his inability to use a door handle, or his stalking of a woman who reminds him of his girlfriend are what really stand out. It offers a great deal more 'heart' and emotional depth than the archetypal zombie gore-fest, and by turning the classic survivalist/antagonist dichotomy on its head it **subverts audience expectations**, putting paid to any focus on how 'cheap' it looks.

Cheap shorts

Another way in which low-budget films creep into the public consciousness is via the use of **shorts**. These are films that convey a story not only cheaply but within a tiny space of time, for

example ten minutes. When we consider that the average Hollywood blockbuster can extend to two and a half hours or more, the limitations for shorts seem all the more inhibiting.

Conversely though, short films can be astoundingly creative and experimental, as highlighted by the work of film-maker **Ruairi Robinson**. In an online interview, he explained he got funding for his short film ***Blinky*** (available to watch on the website Vimeo) from the Irish Film Board, who also supported his earlier shorts such as ***Silent City*** starring **Cillian Murphy**. Even Robinson's use of a video-sharing website to distribute his film is reflective of a very contemporary phenomenon, taking the success of **online viral campaigns and using them to reach a wider audience**.

Set sometime in the future, ***Blinky*** depicts a household robot purchased and employed to attend to domestic chores as well as befriend a couple's son, played by Max Records. Robinson confirms his robot is:

> **...entirely CGI ... I designed and modelled him in 3D myself. I provided the voice, did all the animation finessing, lighting, materials, rendering and compositing ... The budget for the visual effects was zero ... [We weren't] rolling in money while making this. It's been rough.**

However, supporting the point that constraints can lead to more creativity, Robinson says of short films:

> **I like them. You can play with ideas in a very pure way, unencumbered by the weight of four-quadrant marketing needs and politics.**

Understandably, when budgets are low, there are fewer people directly involved in the creation of a film. This gives the directors of less expensive films more **creative ownership** of their projects, arguably resulting in a connection more akin to the bond we would typically associate with the 'traditional' artist and their work. Edwards asserts:

> **I'd happily make a film and completely fail – as long as it was a film I was proud of that I wanted to watch, I'd be okay with that. . . . If filmmaking is like being a doctor or a surgeon, then making a movie is like doing surgery on people, but when it's a movie you really care about it's like doing surgery on your own child. It was a constant battle to make sure it didn't go too much off course… It was very stressful.**

This comparison of work to one's own child is once again a creative stereotype, but when these cash-strapped creators make up for lack of budget with intense creative input, long hours and meaningful character-driven drama instead of impressive effects to the point of hyperbole, it's easy to see why such a link is made. Big movie studios may have their high-budget big-grossing franchises, but the budget-savvy can afford to be experimental in creating texts that reflect a great deal of integrity and pride.

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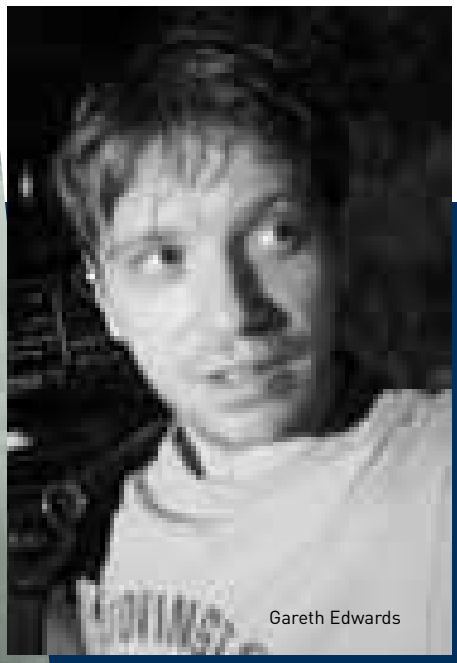
Chris Madden co-runs Casta La Vista.co.uk with Chris Wakeman – a film review website with audio podcasts, interviews with directors and actors and press coverage of large film festivals.



Gareth Edwards

Cash-Strapped

producing private ryan

the story of an epic opening sequence

The opening sequence of Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* must rank as one of the most complex, gruelling and costly sequences ever made. **James Rose** takes a closer look at the logistics of the shoot and analyses the ways it constructs meaning and audience response.

On 6th June, 1944, approximately **2,500 American soldiers lost their lives** when the Allied Forces began Operation Overlord by invading Normandy at Omaha Beach.

In his account of the production of ***Saving Private Ryan*** (1998), **Christopher Probst** states that during the pre-production process, **director Steven Spielberg and his Director of Cinematography Janusz Kaminski** decided that the film's opening sequence – the disastrous storming of Omaha Beach – would be one that would be filmed as realistically as possible. Spielberg's desire for a strong sense of realism was an effort to **re-sensitise the audience** not only to screen violence but also to the harrowing realities of war. It was his intention that not only should the audience be witness to the horror of this historic event but also that they should, in some way, ***experience*** it. To achieve this desired effect, Spielberg and Kaminski engaged in a series of pre-production discussions, meetings, and tests, with the aim of deploying film technology, technique and language to create one of the most dramatic and realistic depictions of combat committed to film.

Concept

The combat scenes are like news footage ...
Steven Spielberg

Spielberg and Kaminski realised that the audience had to be positioned, as close as film would allow, within the actual action. As part of their research, the pair began to look at a range of visual reference material, including **Robert Capa's war photography** (Capa attended and documented the real Normandy beach landing) and actual **newsreel and documentary footage** shot by both news networks and military cameramen. Having examined this footage it was decided that the opening sequence should appear, as Kaminski indicates, as if

several combat cameramen [were] landing with the troops at Normandy.

To achieve this quality, a number of technical strategies and filming techniques were deployed:

- In order to amplify the verisimilitude of the beach-landing mise-en-scène, **hand-held cameras** were used for the majority of the filming. This meant that the cameraperson could actually be part of the action (and film actors and conditions) as if they were experiencing a real war situation.
- As the cameras were both hand-held and moving through the action as it happened, Spielberg wanted the camera to physically feel the impact of nearby explosions. To achieve this, Kaminski attached the **Clairmont Camera's Image Shaker** device to some of the cameras. This device enabled Kaminski and his crew to control not only *when* the camera would vibrate but also *by how much*, thus giving them great control over the final effect – minimal shake for far-off explosions, considerable shake for those explosions that occurred nearby.
- **Panavision** removed the protective coating from some of Kaminski's lenses, to replicate the quality of the film lenses used in the 1940s. Although this did not directly affect the quality of focus or image sharpness, it did **change the contrast and colour quality** of the image, all of which resulted in a diffused and hazy image.
- Some of the camera shutters were set to either **45 or 90 degrees**. This meant that when certain actions were recorded – an explosion or bullet-hit for example – the exact detail of the moment would be revealed in clear and graphic detail: particles of sand would be seen to be thrown into the air; speckles of blood would be seen to splatter across skin or uniforms.
- To enhance the **historic** quality of the footage, Kaminski **manipulated** the film stock by **desaturating** the colours via **Technicolor's ENR** process: by altering the chemicals used in the film's processing, Kaminski could control the final outcome – in this case dropping down the overall brightness of the colours and creating an overall slightly bluish tint.

Pre-production and mise-en-scène

I tried to be as brutally honest as I could…
Steven Spielberg

Due to filming restrictions, Spielberg and his production crew were unable to use Omaha Beach itself. Instead, **Ballinesker Beach in Wexford, Ireland,** was used. It was chosen primarily because of its close similarity to Omaha but, in addition, the cliff-line was an uninterrupted expanse, which meant that a greater range of long shots could be filmed without having to digitally remove contemporary structures or objects. With the beach chosen and permissions to film secured, Ballinesker effectively became a massive set, and one that needed to be dressed with accurate and realistic period props.

In terms of **mise-en-scène**, the Omaha Beach sequence initially appears to be devoid of props and structures; after all, it is simply a beach. But, as the opening shots indicate, to make manifest the reality of war, all that appears on-screen had to be historically accurate. The sequence begins with **a canted angle medium close-up of a Czech Hedgehog**, the waves gently lapping against this metal structure. These large crosses of iron were the beach's initial defences, placed closely together on the shoreline, with their weight, shape and proximity to each other preventing either tanks or amphibious craft from landing on the beach itself. By preventing such amphibious craft from landing, the attacking force would have to wade through the sea and the strong waves, and thus slow down long enough for other defences to come into action.

At Omaha these defences included the

digging of multiple trenches along the beach, the laying of barbed wire fences, sandbag gun encampments as well as the construction of heavily fortified concrete gun turrets. Obviously, none of these existed on Ballinesker Beach and so each had to be hand-built by the production crew at the actual location.

With the beach now looking like Omaha, circa 1940, the costume designers and prop managers had to gather and/or make the hundreds of costumes and props this sequence would require. The costumes had to be both historically accurate *and* battle-worn; the US soldiers' helmets needed to be battered and their painted emblems peeling; similarly the lifejackets worn by some also had to be 'distressed' to appear as if they had been used many times before. Each soldier also carried a rifle inside a plastic bag as per the real event (to prevent seawater entering into the gun barrel or loading mechanisms). While making and distressing these costumes for the 1,500-strong cast who would appear in the sequence was a mammoth task in historical accuracy, it was even more difficult to obtain the correct landing craft. To sustain the illusion of historic reality Spielberg desired, the production designers needed to have the same amphibious craft as those used in the actual Normandy landing. These were eventually sourced from around the world: two were brought from Burtonport, Donegal to Ballinesker Beach while another two were shipped from Southampton, England. A further eight were shipped from Palm Springs, California. All of these vehicles were fully functioning landing-craft; two of the twelve were used during actual World War 2 campaigns.

Production: Captain John Miller, Omaha Beach

Omaha Beach was a slaughter...

Steven Spielberg

After a brief sequence in which an elderly war veteran visits the many graves at Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial at Colleville-sur-mer, Normandy, the film proper begins on the morning of June 6th, 1944. Allied Troops in amphibious landing craft head towards Omaha Beach to begin their invasion of Nazi-occupied Europe; and so begin the massive military operations that made up D-Day.

Shot in **tight and intimate close-ups**, the start of the sequence juxtaposes the detail of mise-en-scène with the terror of the soldiers. While their costumes and props (military uniforms, metal helmets, stitched insignias, dog tags and rifles) all signify power and authority, their actions undermine this; some tremble in fear, others vomit, one repeatedly prays, while another kisses his crucifix. The film's protagonist, **Captain John Miller (Tom Hanks)**, stands amongst his men, his hands uncontrollably shaking. He suddenly barks out orders as the craft approaches the beach and then, in a terrifyingly quick and brutal real-time sequence, his many men are almost instantly killed as the craft's landing bay door drops and the German defences open fire. In this **quick succession of medium and close-up shots** the audience is witness to the intense horror of war – men are either shot before leaving the amphibious craft, or drown in the

waves due to the weight of their equipment. Others are maimed or killed by mortar fire, many scream out unintelligible words as they huddle against the hedgehogs. In amongst this horror, they repeatedly see fleeting glimpses of Miller attempting to reach the shore.

As Miller drags himself through the waves towards one of the many hedgehogs that defend the beach, the film is steadily **overcranked**. Overcranking is a technique whereby **the unexposed film stock is moved past the open shutter at a speed much faster than normal**. When played back at the standard speed (twenty-four frames per second), the action it has recorded appears to move in slow motion. The effect of this technique is, quite literally, **to slow the recorded movement down** in order to allow the audience to see virtually every single detail of the unfolding action.

By deploying this effect so early on within the Omaha Beach Landing sequence, Spielberg and Kaminski generate a number of **emotional effects**. For Miller, the slow motion functions as a representation of how *he* is witnessing the events, for it visualises the horror of *his* experience – he is surrounded by a chaos of noise and movement, seeing not only death but the dreadful massacre of his men, all of which is too much for him to either comprehend or bear witness to. The effect of the slow motion amplifies the horror by fragmenting its depiction into briefly frozen and jerking movements; but it also implies that Miller himself is trying to edit out the intensity of the violence by 'missing out' certain frames of the action. By slowing the footage down, Spielberg and Kaminski imply that Miller himself is trying to edit out the horror of what he is seeing.

The power of slow motion

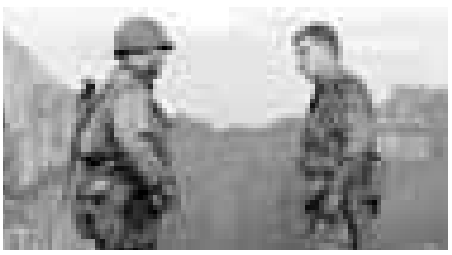
As well as amplifying the horror, **the shift from real time to slow time** also creates a sustained break within the chaotic flow of the sequence's action so far. This is compounded by Miller's own actions as he crawls through the waves to the iron cross and clings to it to gain some form of cover from the immense fire being laid down by the German infantry. Just as Miller hides behind the hedgehog and catches his breath, the slow motion effect also allows the audience a brief respite from the graphic violence and emotional onslaught that the sequence has so far delivered.

The shift from real time to slow time is paralleled by a similar shift in the quality of the **diegetic sound**. As Miller makes it to the hedgehog and the camera physically moves toward him into a close-up shot, the diegetic sound of gunfire and mortar explosions becomes muffled beneath a hollow drone. This sound has no visible on-screen source, but its juxtaposition with the close-up of Miller's blank expression suggests that it is what Miller himself can hear in *his* head; and so **this dull drone functions as an internal diegetic sound**. The matching of this sound with that image compounds Miller's shell-shocked state.

Editing

The sequence continues to unfold in slow motion and is constructed around a pattern of **cutaways** from Miller's blank expression to the violent events that unfold around him: a young soldier clinging to a hedgehog, desperately trying to avoid the gunfire; Miller witnessing a soldier carrying a flame-thrower explode; a soldier turning to reveal a bloody stump where his right arm should be. He stumbles amongst the bodies looking for his arm and, when he eventually finds it, picks it up and then walks towards a medic. Each of these events is a small story encapsulated within the wider horrors of the beach landing. Given the **editing pattern** the sequence follows, it is obvious that the cutaways are filmed as **subjective point of view shots** – the audience both witnesses the horror that surrounds Miller, and, through this choice of shot and editing, is 'forced' to see what he sees. We are no longer passive observers of this sequence but **participants within it**, crouching as low as does Miller, watching helplessly as others die all around him. As a consequence of this, **the viewing relationship between the audience and the film changes**: instead of objectively and passively watching the film, the cutaways force the audience to see as subjectively as Miller.

The emotional impact of this part of the sequence is exaggerated by the intensity of the close-up of Miller's increasingly blank expression: this is emphasised not only by **positioning his face within the centre of the frame** but also within a very **shallow focal plane** – his wet and matted hair, the streaks of water, the splatters of blood, and the glassy blue of Hank's eyes are all drawn into **sharp focus** to epitomise his character's horrific experience. Additionally, each close-up of Miller moves up and down, implying that the camera is floating on the waves that surround him. This subtle and rhythmic shift



works to exaggerate the disquieting nature of the sequence, adding further unease to the already emotionally-charged moment.

The editing pattern of this shell-shocked sequence shifts slightly in the cut from the armless soldier back to Miller – instead of cutting back to the intense close-up, a profile shot is inserted: his head and shoulders fill the left-hand side of the foreground (again in an intense shallow focus, emphasising the wet and bloody details of the mise-en-scène) while in the background (and out of focus) one of the many landing craft has beached itself. As Miller turns to look at that craft, **a focus pull** shifts the audience's attention to those soldiers exiting the craft. To our horror, these men are all on fire, spilling out onto the beach either to be shot or to roll in the bloody waves trying to extinguish the flames that engulf them. While this moment is depicted in a continuous long-shot, it could be argued that the earlier editing pattern cutting from Miller's face to his point of view is actually maintained (or at least implied) rather than disrupted, for the focus-pull literally homes in on what Miller is seeing and thus, to all intents and purposes, the image of the burning soldiers 'becomes' a point of view shot.

The sequence ends with a close-up of a soldier looking directly into the camera and mouthing the words 'What now sir?' as the sharp whistle of a falling mortar is heard in the background. This whistling acts as a **sound bridge** over the cut back to the close-up of Miller. He stares blankly into the camera as the whistling gets louder until the mortar lands, the sound of its explosion 'knocking' Miller back into the violent reality of his situation.

Prior to this sequence, the soundtrack had comprised solely **diegetic sounds**, all coming from a range of **unseen sources** – constant gunfire, the sharp 'whizz' of the tracer bullets, the 'crack' of bullets ricocheting off the Hedgehogs, soldiers shouting orders or screaming for their mothers, the dull 'thud' of explosions and the equally constant sound of waves crashing upon the shore. All these sound effects are layered together to create **a soundscape of violent and relentless combat**, their cacophony amplifying the intensity, chaos and claustrophobia of this deathly situation. As Miller slips into his shell-shocked state, these sounds are literally drowned out by the **internal diegetic sound** – the dull, hollowing ringing in his ears. With all (external) diegetic sound removed, Spielberg and Kaminski place even greater emphasis on the image, compounding the horror of what Miller and the audience are witnessing.

It is perhaps unsurprising, given not only the emotional impact of the Omaha Beach landing sequence but the immense attention to period detail that was invested into its production, that ***Saving Private Ryan*** has become one of the most celebrated war films in cinematic history. The efforts of Spielberg and Kaminski were rewarded in the 1999 Academy Awards, respectively winning the **Oscars for Best Direction and Best Cinematography**. While these accolades indicate the quality of filmic skill they also intimate a quality of verisimilitude and of the deployment of technical skill which not only positioned the audience within the cinematic frame but also made them ***recognise* the content of that frame**: the brutal sacrifice of the lives of these 'real' men; it forced them to **'experience'** war and, in the end, to realise that war is indeed hell.

James Rose is a freelance writer who specialises in horror and science fiction film and television. His work can be read at http://jamesrose-writer.blogspot.com/

In the library and on the internet

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The production of mise-en-scène

To emphasise the extent of Spielberg's desire for complete realism within the Omaha Beach Landing sequence, here is a set of facts and figures that illustrate the depth and attention to detail the production crew went to:

• **400 professional film technicians** made up the production crew for the beach landing sequence which involved an acting cast of 1,500 people. 1,000 of these were recruited from the Irish Army Reserve and battle re-enactment groups.

• Real amputees and paraplegics were recruited from all over Ireland to play the parts of the dismembered soldiers.

• An estimated **$12 million of the film's total $65 million budget** was spent on the Omaha beach landing sequence. Lasting only 23 minutes of the film's total running time, this ratio of expenditure means that **nearly 20% of the film's production budget was spent on less than 14% of the film**.

• It took the production crew **11 weeks** to prepare Ballinesker Beach and then a further **15 days** to film the entire sequence.

• It is estimated that the sequence injected **€6 million** into the Wexford economy, with a range of the production services (catering, accommodation, scene work etc.) being provided from local sources.

• **2,000 weapons** were used in the Omaha Beach sequence – 500 were modified to enable them to shoot blanks while the remaining 1,500 were made of rubber.

• The Prosthetics Department of the production crew made over **1,000 dummies** to place on the beach. Again, in a desire to achieve the intensity of realism, these dummies were incredibly life-like – each was anatomically correct in terms of appearance and condition of injury, even the hairs were individually hand punched into each dummy's scalp, chest, arms and legs.

• The **11 weeks of pre-production** included the construction of service roads to enable the crew access to the beach and for the transportation of equipment as well as the building of the battlements, bunkers and areas of landscaping. At the end of filming, the beach had to be returned to its original state.

FAMILY GUY™

an institutional case study

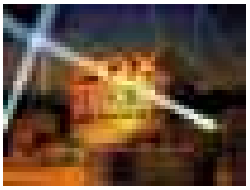
It's subversive, lewd, crude and extremely rude – and it's owned by Rupert Murdoch's Fox Broadcasting. So how does *Family Guy* get away with it? AQA examiner **Tina Dixon** explores the appeal of Peter, Lois, Stewie et al – not to mention talking dog Brian.

Family Guy, as you will almost certainly know, is an animated comedy series shown in the UK on BBC3, which has been around since 1998. Personally, I have always enjoyed it since my children were quoting lines from it back in the early 2000s. I think it takes a little while to get into, as is the case with any comedy, as you have to understand the characters; but when you do, pretty much everything that comes out of their animated mouths is funny. That said, what has always interested me from a Media Studies perspective is that it is produced by **Fox Broadcasting**, a company owned by **Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation**, and, given its production company and owner, something has always niggled at me and my enjoyment of it.

I want, therefore, to explore ***Family Guy***, and its production from an institutional and ideological perspective, and to decide whether how it is produced should affect our enjoyment of it.

Family Guy: the history

A quick look at Wikipedia (**http://en.wikipedia.org.wiki/Family_Guy**) to find out a few facts tells us that it is an animated television series created by **Seth MacFarlane** for **Fox Broadcasting Company**. It centres around the Griffin family: dad Peter, mum Lois, children Meg and Chris, baby Stewie and talking dog Brian. They live in Quahog, surrounded by odd-ball friends, Quagmire, Joe and Cleveland, to name a few. For the most part it parodies **US popular culture** – this is a point worth mentioning, as in the UK we don't always share the same popular culture, and there is occasionally a culture gap between what makes US audiences laugh and our British sense of humour.



MacFarlane pitched a fifteen minute pilot to Fox which aired on 20th December 1998. He was then given the go-ahead to write further episodes. In 2001, just after the third season, Fox cancelled the show. However, good DVD sales and high ratings for re-runs convinced Fox to renew in 2004.

Seth MacFarlane is the Executive Producer and Creative Consultant. There are several other executive producers, including **Alex Borstein**, the voice of Lois, who has also been a supervising producer. There are a number of writers on the show, and according to MacFarlane. It takes **ten months to produce a single episode**. This is an amazingly long time for what is roughly twenty minutes of air time. How and why does it take so long?

According to Sean Russell on a website about 'how stuff works' (http://electronics.howstuffworks.com/tv-animation1.htm), producing an animated TV programme is a laborious process, involving a good number of people working a good number of hours. Every single frame must be **drawn by hand**, and twenty minutes of footage contains **approximately 30,000 separate frames**. This can take on average nine months, and will involve eight steps:

- Writing the script
- The table read
- Recording voices and editing soundtrack
- Creating the storyboard
- Creating the animatic
- Creating the colour
- Editing the colour
- Adding sound effects and music

So, it is probably fair to say that this is an expensive process – and the money has to come from somewhere.

A brief history of Fox Broadcasting – and why it matters

- Fox Broadcasting is an American TV network owned by **Fox Entertainment Group**, which is part of **News Corporation**. It was launched on 9th September 1986.
- The network is **named after its sister company 20th Century Fox**. The beginning of a new Fox Network was initiated by News Corporation in March 1985 with the $250 million purchase of 50% of TFC holdings, the parent company of 20th Century Fox film studio.
- In May 1985 **News Corporation paid $1.55 billion** to acquire individual TV stations in six major US cities from Metromedia.
- In October 1985 20th Century Fox decided to form **an independent TV system**, a fourth network which would compete with the three major TV networks: ABC, CBS, NBC.
- In December 1985 Murdoch agreed to pay **£325 million** to acquire the rest of the studio from his original partner Martin Davis. The purchase of the Metromedia stations was approved by the Federal Communications Commission in March 1986.
- From 2004-2009 Fox was **the highest rated network in the 18-49 demographic**.
- In 2007-08 Fox became the **most popular network in the US** in terms of household ratings, replacing CBS for the first time in history.

A trip to the **News Corporation website (http://www.newscorps.com)**, an extremely efficient and professional source of data, tells us that:

> **News Corporation's Board of Directors and management are committed to strong corporate governance and sound business practices.**

All very official and professional – until you click on the Fox section (http://www.fox.com) and in extremely bright colours encounter a list of shows which include: ***American Dad***, ***American Idol***, ***The Cleveland Show***, ***Family Guy***, ***Glee***, ***Hell's Kitchen***, ***House***, ***Raising Hope*** and ***The Simpsons***.

This immediately sets up a strange juxtaposition, in terms of contrast between the very serious dark blue of the News Corporation website and the bright, cartoon-like colours of the Fox page. This is even more marked when you click on ***Family Guy***, and discover you can shop for: iPhone Apps, ***Family Guy*** for mobile, ***Family Guy*** on iTunes, and merchandise including DVDs, CDs, books, T-shirts and clothing. This page also summarises what ***Family Guy*** is about:

> **The comedy follows the adventures of lovable oaf Peter Griffin and his hilariously odd family of middle-class New Englanders.**

and gives details of awards ***Family Guy*** has won.

There seems absolutely no doubt that Fox is only involved with ***Family Guy*** because the organisation can make money from it. News Corporation did not become the multibillion dollar international conglomerate it is by making mistakes where money is concerned. The US domestic market is so huge, with the population of the US at 07/05/2011 currently at 311,302,000, according to Wikipedia. Once a TV series such as ***Family Guy*** has been shown at home to such a massive audience, a production company such as Fox can then afford to sell it relatively cheaply to other countries, such as the UK. This would explain how BBC3 can afford it.

Viewing figures on BARB (http://www.BARB.co.uk) show that in the UK BBC1 and ITV1 attract the largest audiences. For example, week commencing 17/04/2011 BBC1's ***EastEnders*** (Fri) attracted 11.07 million viewers and ***Waking the Dead*** attracted 7.24 million. The biggest audience for a BBC2 programme that same week was 2.17 million for ***The Secrets of Scott's Hut***. In the same week ITV1 's ***Coronation Street*** (Mon) attracted

9.95 million, with Channel 4 attracting 2.26 million for ***The Hotel*** and C5 2.6 million for ***CSI***. Although I was unable to find specific audience figures for ***Family Guy*** I did find figures for the weekly average viewing per person (hours and minutes) for all channels. To compare:

	Jan 11	Feb 11	Mar 11
BBC1	6.18	6.10	5.54
BBC3	0.28	0.24	0.24

And for the week commencing 17/04/2011, the average weekly viewing figures per person in hours and minutes was: **BBC1 5.27, BBC3 0.27**.

It is clear therefore that BBC3 audiences are relatively small compared to BBC1, and the demographic is different too. BBC1 has a wider demographic, whereas **BBC3** targets the **16 to 34 age group**. And this is where ***Family Guy*** finds itself in the UK, and it is probably more suited to BBC3 with its younger demographic and therefore less likely to offend.

Insulting the world

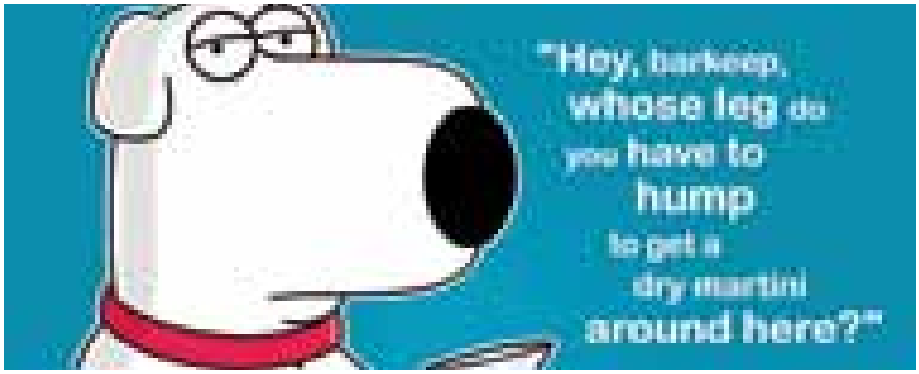
For me, it is the all encompassing nature of ***Family Guy's*** offensiveness that I find interesting. Most TV shows that are a little offensive tend to target a particular group, but ***Family Guy*** tends to insult everyone, with little discrimination as to who gets it. Certainly in the episodes I have seen the series has denigrated women, feminists, people who have had a stroke, homosexuals, models, people who are Irish, black, disabled, Jewish, Mexicans, people dying of AIDS – and they were just the groups I could name off the top of my head. **The character of Brian,** a talking dog, who has relationships with women, including sexual ones, is quite often seen drunk, but at the same time is probably the most rational and normal character in the show. The character of **baby Stewie** talks, and is possibly the most intelligent member of the family, though he regularly practices matricide. **Meg, the daughter** is treated with utter disdain, and is regularly humiliated and beaten; she is also reminded on a regular basis that she is not as attractive as her mother. **Chris, the older son**, is overweight and simple-minded. **Lois, the wife and mother** of the family, is most often kind and caring, but is apt to treat Meg as a figure of fun, and is prone to some strange sexual practices. And finally, **Peter, the head of the household**, is without doubt a complete buffoon, who is less intelligent than either his baby or dog!!

How do they get away with it?

Having seen Seth MacFarlane interviewed on a few occasions, there is no doubt that he is a highly intelligent and creative individual, who is well aware of exactly what he is doing on ***Family Guy***. He completely understands the nature of the jokes on the programme, and, I would argue, is careful to insult just about everyone, so as to not single out any particular group. However, there have been times when I have wondered how in heaven's name he gets away with it – and he must too.

For example ...

We have come to expect that small production companies are often able to push the boundaries a little further than mainstream productions, since their reputation is more likely to be based on aesthetic, edgy and/or shocking content than on money or mainstream appeal. So, for example, **Bwark** the production company behind ***The Inbetweeners*** was able to really push the boundaries of taste because there were no big money men behind them telling them what they could and couldn't do; and, in part, this was responsible for its success. The film industry is also full of scenarios in which the big companies such as **Warner Brothers** have had veto over scripts and endings. In fact, **20th Century Fox** meddled constantly in the making of ***Alien 3*** directed by David Fincher, and even re-worked the film upon completion.



So, back to ***Family Guy***, which is not produced by a small company, but a huge multinational conglomerate – the same conglomerate that meddled constantly with the production of ***Alien 3***. This is the part that has always puzzled me. Why is Fox not meddling with it? How is MacFarlane able to pretty much do as he pleases? Of course, I do not know the answer to this, and can only really speculate, but my speculation is two-fold.

Firstly, I would argue that there is very much **a zeitgeist approach** to ***Family Guy*** at Fox, in that as a company it is good for them to have their finger on the pulse of something that is clearly tapping into the spirit of the time. It is fun, trendy, and a bit naughty (in a Roald Dahl ***Matilda*** kind of way!).

And secondly, it makes them lots and lots of money – not just from the broadcast sales, but all of the merchandise too (even my own daughter used to have a talking Stewie). The DVD sales create a huge amount of wealth – don't forget that in 2004 the show was resurrected three years after cancellation because of its high DVD sales. The first volume, combining Series 1 and 2 sold a total of 1.67 million units in 2003, topping TV DVD sales in that year. The second volume sold another million units. And moving forward to volume 7 which was the **highest-selling TV DVD** shifting 171,000 units by June 2009.

On the same basis, it seems likely that the only reason ***Alien 3*** was meddled with was to make it more commercially viable, and that the creative input of David Fincher played a very weak second fiddle to the financial motivation behind the film.

The case-study example of ***Family Guy*** is a brilliant reminder that media production is a business, **an enormous, all-pervasive business**, run, in large part by very few multinational conglomerates. And you do not need a degree in economics to work out that as long as ***Family Guy*** is bringing home the bacon financially, Fox will probably keep their meddling hands off it – but the day it starts to lose money it may be axed, and there is every chance that the reason cited will be that it became **too offensive for its audience**! It will also be interesting to see how this series will survive the fallout from the crisis at News Corp this summer. But from a purely escapist and enjoyment perspective, long may it continue!

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Getting into trouble with Bonnie and Clyde

Glamorous outlaws, beautiful stars, sex and violence in Depression-era America, filtered through 60s liberal values – what could possibly go wrong in the making of *Bonnie and Clyde*? **Jonathan Nunns** explores the troubled production history of a film masterpiece which launched American New Wave cinema, won 10 Oscar nominations and is now hailed as a 20th-century classic.

Many films get labelled as 'troubled' during production. That can mean several things: people falling out, the studio pulling the financial plug, or a locked-in release date, meaning the film is contractually required to meet a fixed release days before it's actually ready. There have been famous disasters. ***Heavens Gate*** (Cimino 1980) sank a studio, so did ***Cleopatra*** (Mankiewicz 1963). Sometimes though, greatness escapes from the wreckage. ***Gladiator*** (Scott 2000) escaped the death of actor Oliver Reed mid-shoot, going on to win Oscars; and ***Apocalypse Now*** survived both the lead actor's heart attack on location, and a genuine and bloody civil war, to become an iconic anti-war film. This article will look at the notoriously troubled production history of ***Bonnie and Clyde***.

So who were they?

Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow were real-life lovers and outlaws during the Great Depression of the 1930s who became **folk heroes** and **proto-celebrities** by raiding and robbing the American banks at a time when they were hated by ordinary people (banks unpopular? Who'd have thought it!) for repossessing homes, farms and businesses and destroying the lives of millions. The real Bonnie and Clyde have probably been lost in the mythology which has surrounded them since their romanticised 'Romeo and Juliet'-style death in a hail of police bullets. To a large extent this myth-making has been fuelled by the celebrated 1967 film of their story.

In the early 1960s, two budding screenwriters, **Robert Newman and David Benton** were enjoying watching movies but having less success making one of their own. Inspired by **French New Wave classics such as *Breathless*** (Godard 1960) and ***The Four Hundred Blows*** (Truffaut 1959), they recognised that the **iconoclastic** approach of the French could be applied to the then stuffy and stale US cinema. This was an era before home video; if you didn't see a film in a cinema, you didn't see it at all. French films were finally becoming available on American screens due to the slow-motion car-crash that was the decline and fall of the **Hollywood studios** after the **Paramount Decrees** (1948). That court case destroyed their stranglehold over distribution, and for the first time foreign language films made it on to American screens .

Inspired, but not supported by the industry, Newman and Benton hawked their **American New Wave** script around Hollywood to no avail. As studio **mogul** Jack Warner commented 'who wants to see a film about the rise and fall of a couple of rats?' **The Hollywood Production Code** had imposed draconian censorship on U.S. films since the Thirties (see page 35), but by the 1960s, social change had rendered it thoroughly out of date. This was, after all, the era of the Rolling Stones, free love, the Pill and the Vietnam War. Despite that, Americans were allowed no sex and very little violence in their films and audiences chafed at such patronising treatment.

Desperate, Newman and Benton got their script to their hero, **Francois Truffaut**, asking him to direct. He was already committed to another

project, but gifted them an iconic **montage sequence** for the script, in which Bonnie narrates a poem, linking her and Clyde with the lawman who eventually slays them. She is reading to Clyde as she writes, their pursuer reading from the newspaper they sent it to. **Godard's** interest was shorter and typically tempestuous, but the intervention of the French director delivered more than just some **script-doctoring**. Truffaut mentioned the project over a Paris lunch to a rising American star, **Warren Beatty**.

The Beatty effect

Beatty was known for pretty-boy roles, in films such as ***Splendour in the Grass*** (Kazan 1961). He was already successful, but did not want to be **typecast**. He saw the opportunity not only to star in the film but to produce. During this period of change, as studio power waned, stars were starting to take control of their own careers and act as their own **producers**, developing **star vehicles** they themselves would appear in. Beatty saw such an opportunity with ***Bonnie and Clyde***. He contacted the writers with the words **'I'm on page 27. I want to do it'.** He also gave the writers advice over their disappointment with Godard and Truffaut.

You have written a French New Wave film. What you need is a good American director'

Arthur Penn, who had worked with Beatty on ***Mickey One*** (Penn 1965), was attracted by some aspects of the script but unsettled by others, amongst which was a three-way sexual relationship between Bonnie, Clyde and a male gang member, C.W. Moss. Beatty wanted to extend his range but not ostracise his audience, and in those homophobic times, Beatty might well have feared the public response. However, Penn had different reasons. He viewed the **ménage a trois** as too sophisticated for such down-home yokel characters. However, in order to keep a sexual edge in the movie, Clyde was given a sexual dysfunction, impotence, instead.

'You've got to let me make this picture'

(Warren Beatty)

Despite agreement on these aspects, the film could not simply purr into production; there was no money. **Star-power** became important here. Beatty had access to one of the last great Hollywood moguls, **Jack Warner**. Accounts differ and Beatty denies it, but Hollywood lore has it that Beatty, on his knees, begged Warner's executive Benny Kalmenson for the money to make his movie. 'Get off the floor you crazy bastard' came the reply.

Convinced that the picture would fail, but willing to indulge their star, Warner offered Beatty **40% of the gross**, thinking that this percentage would cost them less than his normal fee. Money in hand, the film went into production in the South Texas locations frequented by the real Bonnie and Clyde thirty or so years before.

Location filming was a typical **New Wave** signature; the majority of Hollywood studio films were shot on the **back lot**. Even ***Casablanca*** (Curtiz 1942) with its exotic Moroccan setting, never made it off the Warner's lot in Burbank, L.A.

Conflicts and controversies

Problems continued for this early example of American **independent** film. Penn was employed as director by Beatty, his star, who was also his producer. The two did not get on creatively and rows ensued daily. The **director of photography, Burnett Guffey,** was old-school Hollywood and used to taking all morning to light his sets, as Penn himself said 'to make the old actresses look good'. Penn and Beatty wanted a more realist, less stylised and more **Verite** approach to the film. The rows culminated with Burnett's collapse on set with a stomach ulcer. Despite this, Burnett still went on to win an **Oscar** for the beautiful cinematography on the film.

The Production Code was officially repealed in 1966, finally allowing a little realism into American films. Newman and Benton's script took full advantage of the more liberal atmosphere, focusing on the **Freudian** sexual undercurrents mentioned earlier, and making Bonnie and Clyde, two apparent **anti-heroes**, highly likable and charismatic characters despite being outlaws and killers. Previously, **The Production Code** had forbidden any glamorisation of crime.

Also controversial was the then-unprecedented treatment of **violence** in the film. **The Code** had

limited the scope of movie shoot-outs by ruling that bullets could not be fired and seen to impact on victims in the same frame. Sergio Leone's **Spaghetti Westerns** had broken this rule in 1964, but this was because, as an Italian, Leone was not familiar with the Code. However, in the case of Beatty and Penn, the provocation was deliberate. Previous movie gun battles had allowed no realistic representation of bullet strikes. **Squibs**, the explosive theatrical blood packs that create the effect of blood spray from gunshot victims, were used here for the first time. In one scene Bonnie Parker is shot and wounded by a cop, the bullet is fired and impacts in the same frame and the squib shows the effect of the bullet strike.

Further controversy came from the **negative portrayal of the police** in the film. Bonnie and Clyde's main pursuer is characterised as an **antagonist**, with them as **protagonists**, totally at odds with the standard, heroic portrayal of the police. Texas Ranger Frank Hamer, humiliated early in the film by the duo, appears vengeful and unprincipled, eventually gunning the pair down in cold blood without the traditional police warning. So controversial was this representation that the Hamer family sued the film-makers after the film's release.

The final scene was highly controversial and one of the most difficult to shoot. Bonnie and Clyde, driving on a lonely country road are flagged down by another character (a Proppian false hero). The police are hidden with machine guns. The ambush sees the pair and their car riddled with bullets in one of cinema's iconic death scenes. The nervous stars were smothered in squibs for the scene, Beatty triggering the onslaught as he steps from the car squeezing, of all things, the pear he was eating as the signal for all hell to break loose. The squirt of juice from the fruit was the cue for the technical crew to set off the squibs as the police fire a barrage of blanks. The scene was the film-makers' attempt to reflect the shocking reality of gun deaths and to reflect the real carnage raging in the Vietnam War and seen nightly on America's news.

Well, that's the longest fucking two hours and fifteen minutes I've ever spent

Jack Warner

With **principal photography** over and with the film in **post-production**, a rough assembly-edit was shown to studio boss Jack Warner. His response was scathing. As Beatty tried to explain that the film was a **homage** to the Warner Bros gangster films of **Cagney** and **Bogart** he responded with the classic line, 'What's a fucking homage?'

The film was duly released by a studio that had no faith in it. It was dumped into drive-in theatres in the summer of 1967; unsupported, it failed to attract audiences on initial release. Furthermore many critics hated it. *The New York Times* reviewer Bosley Crowther called it 'a cheap piece of bald faced slapstick'. Another attack was launched by the religious lobby group, the Legion of Decency. This was for a scene where Bonnie, running downstairs, appeared to be naked beneath her dress. Beatty commented:

It was Father Sullivan. He kept running the film back and forth, saying: 'Oh no, that's her breast!' and we'd say 'No Father, it's just her dress, it's silk' and he'd say 'No, no, I see her breast! Wait, I think I see a nipple!'

A film reborn!

We have seen that production can be infamously difficult and this was certainly the case with ***Bonnie and Clyde***. Newman, Benton, Penn and Beatty and the rest, had the last laugh though. After its failure in America, the film was an immediate hit in Europe, where audiences were already familiar with the **New Wave** style. By December 1967 it was on the cover of *Time Magazine* and had become a sensation, spawning a fashion trend for the retro costumes and a hit single for UK artist Georgie Fame.

Warners had a rapid rethink, re-releasing the film to acclaim and ten **Oscar** nominations in early 1968. The film cemented Beatty as a top player in Hollywood, made Penn a hot director and launched the careers of all involved, including Faye Dunaway, Gene Hackman and Gene Wilder, who all became major stars. The location filming, choppy editing, slow motion violence, Freudian themes and controversial subject matter kick-started the **American New Wave**, opening the way for films like ***Easy Rider*** (Hopper 1969) and for the arrival of the **Movie Brats**, including Steven Spielberg, Francis Coppola, George Lucas and Martin Scorsese, the directors whose work in the 1970s would irreversibly change the face of cinema. Sometimes it seems a difficult production can be no bad thing!

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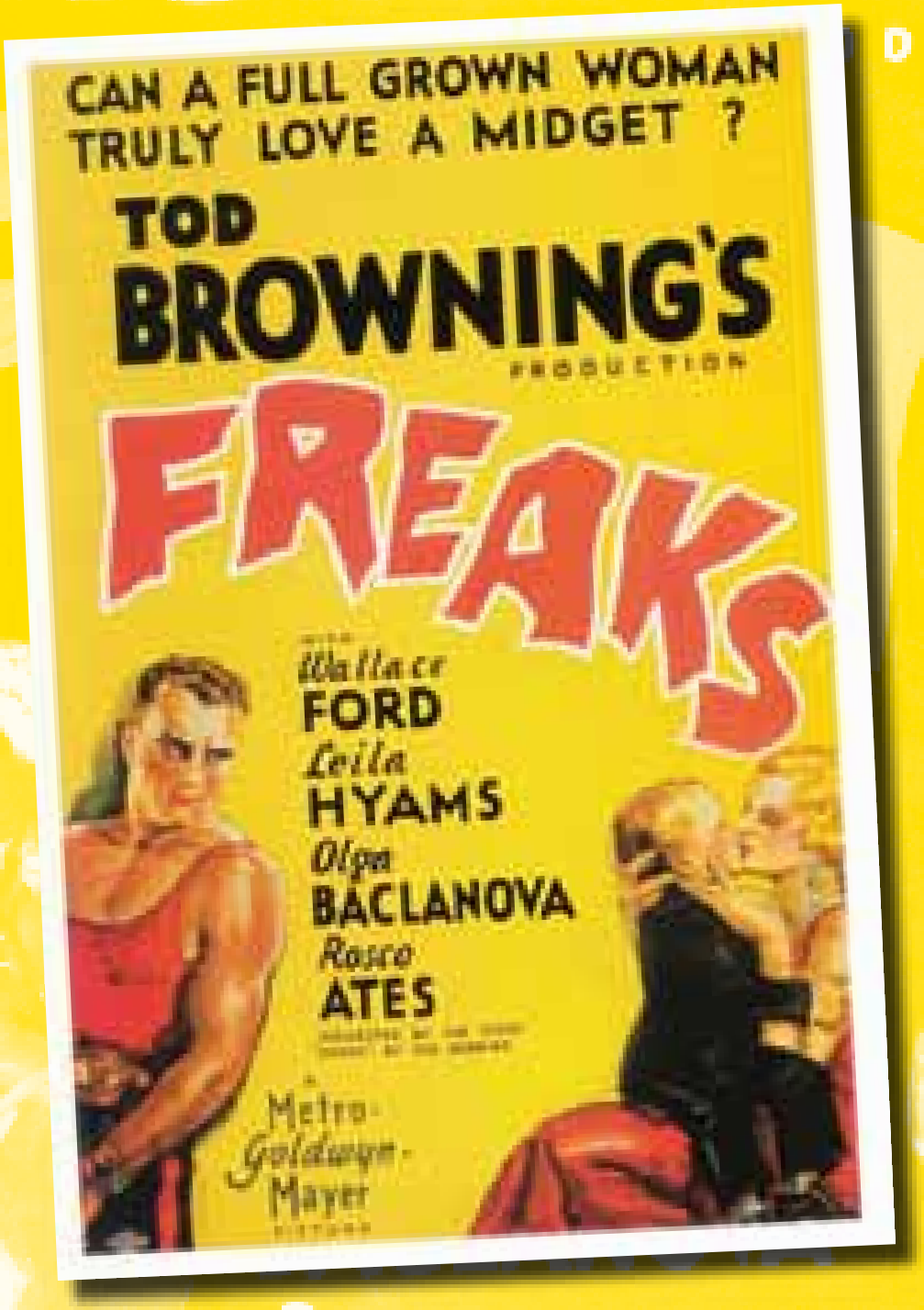
FREAKS


CAN A FULL GROWN WOMAN
TRULY LOVE A MIDGET ?
TOD
BROWNING'S
PRODUCTION
FREAKS
Wallace
FORD
Leila
HYAMS
Olga
BACLANOVA
Rosco
ATES
Metro-
Goldwyn-
Mayer

Freaks: the history of cinema's greatest sideshow

Michael Ewins reports on the history of the production and reception of one of the greatest cult horror movies of all time.

There is perhaps no greater production story to be told in the history of motion pictures than that of ***Freaks* (Tod Browning, 1932)**, MGM's infamous horror classic, released to disgusted uproar in a time of creative uncertainty, when America was facing real-life horror in the form of The Great Depression, and unemployment was at 23.6%.

In the Golden Age of Hollywood studios practiced a production-line system in which movies could be produced fast, distributed wide and make a quick return. 'Ship 'em out and pack 'em' in was the basic idea, and it proved particularly successful with **genre films**. In 1931 **Universal Pictures started up a production line of horror**, starting with ***Frankenstein*** (James Whale) and ***Dracula*** (Browning), both inflected with the aesthetic of German Expressionism, a popular movement in the 1920s which gave us films such as ***Metropolis*** (Fritz Lang, 1927). However, largely due to a financial dip between 1936 and 1939, the line quickly ran out of steam, and by 1943 the creative well had run completely dry, producing cash-grabbing fantasies such as ***Frankenstein Meets The Wolfman*** (Roy William Neill). But Browning had broken the mould right on the cusp of its arrival, when the world simply wasn't ready for him...

Hidden Hollywood

Many people think of 1930s cinema as being quite prudish and timid; it produced a large number of **gangster pictures**, including the original ***Scarface* (Howard Hawks, 1932)**, but none depicted graphic violence or blood, and there was no sex or swearing. But there is, in fact, **a hidden Hollywood**, which prefigures the exploitation movement of the 1970s which dominated Manhattan's 42nd Street. Unbeknownst to many, between the late 1920s and early 1930s Hollywood was actually ripe with cinematic debauchery, with films like ***Night Nurse* (William A. Wellman, 1931)**, about nymphomania and child murder, pushing the boundaries of good taste.

As proven in the recent documentary ***American Grindhouse* (Elijah Drenner, 2010)**, these films have been around since Edison invented the Kinetoscope, and existed right up until the brink of change, when **Dwain Esper's *Maniac*** (1934) – an intense horror movie which contained nudity and graphic violence – was released. It was in this year, and as a result of moral panics around the representations and values of such films, that **the Hays Code** came into official effect.

Tod Browning was prolific, like many directors at the time, and his pictures were largely oriented around crime or horror. His most famous pre-*Dracula* work was ***The Unholy Three*** (1925), a crime movie about side-show performers starring midget actor Harry Earles, who brought to Browning a short story titled **'Spurs'**, by Tod Robbins.

The story, set in a travelling circus, centred on the exploitation of a midget performer by a beautiful 'normal' bareback rider, who marries him for his money, expecting him to die, leave her his money and release her into the arms of her lover. At their wedding, surrounded by the side-show performers – the giraffe boy, the wolf-woman, the giant and the snake-charmer 'freaks' – she publicly humiliates him, and a year later he exacts terrible revenge.. You can read the original story at http://www.olgabaclanova.com/spurs.htm.

Browning had run away from home to join the circus aged 16, and many reports confirm him as a contortionist and the star of a burial act called 'The Living Corpse'. 'Spurs' soon became his dream project. It was retitled ***Freaks***, and the film went into pre-production. The intention was to reunite the successful partnership of **The Unholy Three**: Browning, Earles and Lon Chaney, Sr. Unfortunately Chaney passed away in 1930, and Browning left MGM to direct ***Dracula*** and two further pictures for Universal.

But he was still eager to shoot Robbins' story of carnivalesque horror, and so returned to MGM where he was promised – and turned

The Hays Code, named after Will H. Hays, Hollywood's chief censor at the time, was the infamous Motion Picture Production Code, which set up industry censorship guidelines and required that all films be approved by the PCA (Production Code Administration), a precursor to the MPAA (Motion Picture Association of America). This meant that all films slated for general release must be submitted to and approved by a committee, essentially limiting the freedoms of film-makers who until now had been allowed to show whatever they wanted. The Code lasted until 1968, when it was replaced by the subsequent film rating system.

down – complete creative control over a big budget picture. Instead Browning was granted permission to pursue the ***Freaks*** project and immediately sent out calls for circus performers, casting the larger roles to Olga Baclanova, Leila Hyams, Wallace Ford, Henry Victor and Roscoe Ates. **His most controversial decision was to cast people with genuine deformities and disabilities, rather than relying on costumes and make-up. According to Wikipedia:**

> **Among the characters featured as 'freaks' were Peter Robinson ('the human skeleton'); Olga Roderick ('the bearded lady'); Frances O'Connor and Martha Morris ('armless wonders'); and the conjoined twins Daisy and Violet Hilton. Among the microcephalics who appear in the film (and are referred to as 'pinheads') were Zip and Pip (Elvira and Jenny Lee Snow) and Schlitzie, a male named Simon Metz who wore a dress mainly due to incontinence, a disputed claim. Also featured were the intersexual Josephine Joseph, with her left/right divided gender; Johnny Eck, the legless man; the completely limbless Prince Randian (also known as The Human Torso, and mis-credited as 'Rardion'); Elizabeth Green the Stork Woman; and Koo-Koo the Bird Girl, who suffered from Virchow-Seckel syndrome or bird-headed dwarfism, and is most remembered for the scene wherein she dances on the table.**

Shock horror!

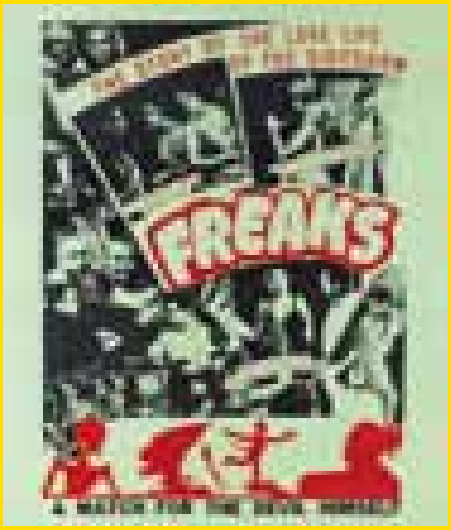
What comes next is perhaps the most shocking chapter of the ***Freaks*** legacy – its first public screening, in San Diego, 1932. Most reports were likely hyperbolic headliners, deliberately exaggerated to attract attention, but the rumour mill still produced some real outraged gems. We know for a fact that the film was met by public fury, but one story finds a pregnant woman suffering a miscarriage from the horror, and in another **F. Scott Fitzgerald**, author of ***The Great Gatsby*****,** was reported to have thrown up after witnessing a scene involving Siamese twins. Reviews ranged from negative to scathing; and despite the media frenzy the film failed to generate any Box Office.

In the 1930s, if a film flopped its director would struggle to find work again; the studio production-line system demanded not only a high output rate, but high income too, and thus good Box Office profit was vital. After the critical slaughtering and financial failure of ***Freaks***, Browning struggled to find any work in the following years, and didn't make the transition into Talkies easily. He retired in 1942, dying from throat cancer on 6th October 1962. He may not have been appreciated as such then, but the world lost **an icon of horror** that day, and one of the most important and consistently interesting directors of the Golden Age.

Freaks was, inevitably, withdrawn from cinemas, and banned in the UK for 30 years. What is interesting is the audience which revived it.

The (re)birth of a cult movie classic

Freaks re-surfaced in the early 1960s, and was re-born as a cult movie by essentially the same 60s hippies currently going mad for The Beatles. In 1963, the British Board of Film Classification finally awarded it an X certificate – for adults only – to a generally positive critical response:



The point constantly being made, one way and another, is that the real monsters of this world are not physical but mental; that the strong and the beautiful may well be much more horrifying than the maimed and deformed. In this sense it is less a horror than an anti-horror film; starting with our most primitive feelings of fear and revulsion at

the abnormal and the 'unnatural', it works us round little by little to comprehension and acceptance and drains our horror away.

The Times, 13.06.1963

This was the time of so-called Swinging London, and as strip clubs began popping up next to chip shops, film-makers started catering to the sleazier side of society, with condescending documentaries such as ***London in the Raw*** (Norman Cohen, Arnold L. Miller, 1965), which now act as curious time-capsules, and records of our baffling repression. (***MediaMag*** editor Jenny remembers being completely blown away by ***Freaks*** in a purple haze at the Warwick University Film Society in the 1970s, chosen for screening by Steve Jenkins, now BBC Head of Film acquisitions.)

This liberated counterculture crowd, who were experimenting with pot and promiscuity, viewed the film for the extraordinary morality tale it really was, but its fate in the US was decidedly different. Here we meet back up with ***Maniac*** **director Dwain Esper**, who picked the film up, retitled it ***Nature's Mistakes*** and sold it to grindhouse audiences as **a full-on exploitation flick**, in the hope of making a quick buck. But anyone who has seen ***Freaks*** will know that it's actually a very thoughtful picture, humanising and empathising with the deformed 'freaks', who have a sense of honour and community, and casting the circus owners as a group of greedy, dishonest monsters. They, ironically, are the real ***Freaks***.

The film is discussed as a case study on the student site of the BBFC website.

Looking back one can now imagine Browning's film sitting side-by-side with the **experimental and avant-garde cinema which exploded in the 60s/70s**, including ***Herostratus*** (Don Levy, 1967), ***The Devils*** (Ken Russell, 1971) and ***The Holy Mountain*** (Alejandro Jodorowsky, 1973). This is a historically and culturally significant time for cinema, so it's incredible to consider how much ***Freaks*** feels a part of that whole. The ban was subsequently lifted everywhere, and the film even entered the United States National Film Treasury in 1994, a fact which would have made Browning very proud indeed. It's now available on DVD in high street stores the world over, which perhaps is the perfect note on which to round off this tale. Because it goes to show both how far we've come, and that the boundary-pushing work of **Tod Browning** paid off. Without him cinema would be very different, and certainly nowhere near as interesting...

http://www.sbbfc.co.uk/CaseStudies/Freaks

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freaks#Reception

http://www.olgabaclanova.com/Freaks_re-evaluation.htm

Michael Ewins is a freelance writer who reviews movies for a number of websites and blogs.

Crime doesn't pay

Take two films from different eras but with similar genres and themes, and compare and contrast ... If you're an AS Film student, the US Comparative Study is one of the tricky areas you'll need to prepare for next summer. Here, **Will Rimmer** suggests two heist movie films made 45 years apart – Kubrick's *The Killing* and Soderbergh's *Ocean's Eleven* – which throw up some fascinating comparative issues.

If you're studying Film Studies at AS Level, Section C of your exam paper requires you to tackle the **'U.S. comparative study'** question. This relatively new paper has been up and running for over three years now, so both teachers and students have, to a large degree, been able to get to grips with the demands of the question. Yet there are still a multitude of potential angles to take, which can both help and hinder in equal measure.

The focus is to **compare and contrast**, finding a range of **similarities and differences** between two films which are from the **same genre and/or theme**. Another key element to consider is that both films have to have been **released at least a generation apart**. Yet how do we define a generation – 10 years? 20 years? 40 years?

With our students, we've aimed to deal with texts from as large a temporal gap as possible, to further explore similarities and differences not just in terms of genre, narrative, representation, themes and messages and values, but also **how production contexts affect the institutional, economic, and socio-political factors that shape both films**.

This article deals with two **heist** films (a sub-division of the crime genre) which, released decades apart, have enough parallels to merit close textual analysis: ***The Killing*** (Kubrick 1955) and ***Ocean's Eleven*** (Soderbergh 2001).

Time of production

When these films were released, both directors were at different stages of their working lives. **Stanley Kubrick**, aged just 28, and at an embryonic stage of his career,wasn't yet the all-powerful auteur film-maker he would later become. For ***Ocean's Eleven***, however, **Soderbergh**, still basking in the Oscar success of his two previous films ***Traffic*** (2000), and the Julia Roberts star-vehicle ***Erin Brokovich*** (2001), could call on star names and a hefty budget to ensure a green light.

It is interesting to note that ***The Killing*** was the first film for the newly formed production company **Harris-Kubrick productions**, just as ***Ocean's Eleven*** was the first out of the starting blocks for **Section Eight,** created jointly by Soderbergh and his star George Clooney. However, these companies had rather different starting points: while Kubrick had a limited budget of around **$320,000**, Soderbergh, backed by the studio might of Warner Bros, had access to a production budget of **$110m** (plus tens of millions more for marketing purposes). Similarly, ***The Killing*** was released playing second feature to the film ***Bandido***, while ***Ocean's Eleven*** went out on over 3000 screens for its North American release. And though ***The Killing*** received favourable reviews, thanks in no small part to its time-shifting non-linear narrative structure, it made little impression at the box office, whereas ***Ocean's Eleven*** benefited from a Christmas release in North America (December 7th) which could capture the widest possible audience.

The Killing was made in the mid-1950s, and so was part of the original **'studio system'** era of film-making, which saw the studios maintain all the power over both directors and stars. Studio heads such as **Louis B. Mayer**, **David O. Selznick** and **Jack Warner** were arguably as famous, if not more so, than the movie matinee idols they helped to create. 45 years later, it could be argued that the balance of power had shifted to a certain degree; **director Soderbergh and star Clooney** both exercised a high degree of control over the look and feel of the film, but also took a share of the profits on top of the usual salary. **Profit participation** is now industry standard, with **the star and/or director used as a selling tool** to ensure box office success.

Though Kubrick certainly controlled ***The Killing*** as a film, it was never a money spinner for him personally. The film industry was entrenched in a rigid system of **vertical integration**, which ensured that major studios controlled all aspects of production, distribution and exhibition. At this point **United Artists**, the studio behind ***The Killing***, was regarded as a minor studio, and so lacked the power that majors like Warner Bros, 20th Century Fox, and Paramount wielded.

Star system and genre conventions

The Killing was based on a pulp novel, ***Clean Break***, stumbled across by James Harris when browsing through a book store, looking for a good source on which to base the company's first film. Kubrick used the novel to craft a heist film which not only followed the typical codes and conventions of the heist film, but also subverted them to challenge audience expectations. **The non-linear approach to storytelling** ensures the spectator is kept on their toes; we see certain scenes repeated, each time from a different perspective, and Kubrick employs a neutral,

almost 'voice of god'-style narrator to relay the precise minute-by-minute timings that the main protagonist, Johnny Clay must work to if his plan to steal $2m from a Los Angeles racetrack is to succeed. To play the central character of Clay, Kubrick picked **Sterling Hayden**, star of ***The Asphalt Jungle***. Though Hayden was a genuine star at that time, he was not 'A-list' in the mode of a Cary Grant, James Stewart or Marilyn Monroe. However, by the time he made ***Ocean's Eleven***, George Clooney embodied all the matinee idol good looks and charisma to confirm him as a classic film star at the top of his game. Despite the all-star ensemble cast, it is Clooney who carries the film on his shoulders.

Both films fit neatly into the **heist genre**, and many film-makers of note have been lured into this most seductive of genres. Indeed, **Quentin Tarantino** highlighted the influence of ***The Killing*** on his first film, ***Reservoir Dogs* (1991)**, whose non-linear narrative structure and pessimistic finale are to a large degree taken from Kubrick's film. In contrast, wisely, Soderbergh and **screenwriter Ted Griffin** deliberately avoided any references to the original 'rat pack' ***Ocean's Eleven*** (1960) which starred **Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Junior et al** in a poor crime caper story which is best forgotten. Re-imagining an average film, rather a classic, is something other directors may well take note of.

Shared heist genre codes and conventions that occur in both ***The Killing*** and ***Ocean's Eleven*** are:

- **A charismatic leader** of the crew who is a career criminal in and out of prison.
- Male behaviour which reinforces **masculinity** in a patriarchal society.
- The importance of **teamwork** (and the consequences if it fails).
- Planning v random chance.
- **Non-linear** storytelling devices.
- **Flashbacks and repeated scenes** for the benefit of the audience (e.g. the horse race in ***The Killing***, and the vault robbery and planting of a mobile phone in Tess Ocean's pocket).
- **Character role playing** e.g. Danny Ocean's right-hand man Rusty Ryan pretends to be a detective, a doctor and S.W.A.T. team leader. He is the ultimate 'convincer.'
- The effects of **female betrayal** (Sherry Peatty) or loyalty (Tess Ocean).
- **Precise timing** to pull off the con.
- **Violence**
- **Gangster moral codes** – honour amongst thieves?
- **An inside man** (e.g. George Peatty/Frank Catton).
- Recruitment and heist planning scenes.
- Characters who cannot be trusted (e.g. George Peatty's wife Sherry in ***The Killing***).

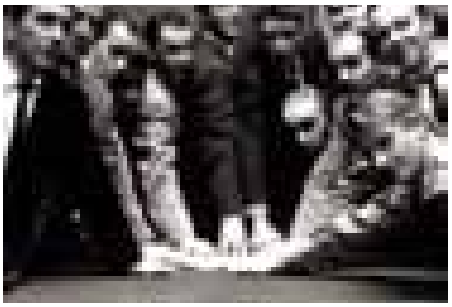
These conventions show clear similarities; there are, however, many differences between both films. For example:

- Danny Ocean relies on the use of technology to help him infiltrate the Casinos, and thus steal $150m; Johnny Clay back in the mid 1950s didn't have this at his disposal. Ocean doesn't need to resort to intimidating violence and murder to pull off his heist, something which has shocking consequences for Johnny Clay's crew.
- Unlike George Peatty, the inside man at the racetrack who lets slip to his cheating wife Sherry that he is involved in a heist, Ocean's team all stay silent, adhering to the cinematic criminal code – that is, say nothing, see nothing, hear nothing!
- The most important difference of all, surely, must be that while Johnny Clay agonisingly loses all the $2m at the airport, as a result of quickly purchasing a cheap suitcase and the intervention of a dog, Ocean and his team expertly make off with a **perfect heist** which runs like clockwork. As an added bonus Ocean even wins back his estranged wife Tess from his nemesis Terry Benedict.
- ***The Killing*** ends with a dramatic open-ended scene of Johnny Clay surrounded by cops outside L.A. airport. Kubrick eschews an explanation which rounds off the film neatly, and the audience are left with an enigma – what will happen to Johnny?

Conversely, Danny Ocean starts the film fresh out of prison, but because he has broken his parole terms, despite the successful heist he must go back to prison for, (in his own words) 'about

three to six months.' Yet despite this unfortunate setback, ***Ocean's Eleven*** appears to suggest a clear narrative resolution. A title caption reads 'about three to six months later', and we see Rusty Ryan picking up Danny from prison, with Tess waiting in the car. The hero has won the girl, the stolen money is secure, and a happy-ever-after future seems certain. Or is it? Danny, Tess and Rusty drive off, but following closely behind are two of Terry Benedict's henchmen, intent on getting back the money for their ruthless boss. The chase is on…

There are many other similarities and differences which can be found in the films, and certainly our students when studying these texts have figured out a range, covering **narrative, genre and areas of representation**, which are too detailed to cover here in this article. This is something you, in collaboration with your teacher and fellow students, can do in class.



Comparing themes

The most prescient theme of both films is the obsessive **greed for money**. The difference between Johnny Clay and Danny Ocean however, is that while Clay wants to steal the $2m loot purely for the sake of having such a large sum of money, Danny uses the Casino robberies as a way of getting back his wife, by showing her that all Benedict cares about is money and the power that comes with that. Danny's share of the robbery is a fortunate by-product that comes with winning back the love of his life.

Other themes to be interpreted are the binary oppositions of **meticulous preparation v random chance**. It is the luck element, alongside the brilliant planning, which ensures Ocean's gang succeed (Benedict and his team of henchmen somehow don't spot the fake vault doesn't have the word 'Bellagio' written on the floor); while Johnny Clay watches the money – *his* money – swirl around helplessly on the airport tarmac.

The theme of **surveillance** can also be observed as a constant motif in both films. Soderbergh shows us characters secretly observing the actions of others throughout, and no scene exemplifies this better, or with greater irony, than when Tess Ocean watches Benedict fall into the trap set by Danny to choose between the stolen cash, or Tess herself. Told by techno-geek Livingston to 'turn to channel 88' in her hotel suite, Tess beats Terry at his own game of people-watching. As she succinctly reminds him in the following scene:

You of all people should always know Terry, in your hotel, someone is always watching.

Tess's transference from Benedict to Danny is now complete.

Messages and values

The overall message to emerge in ***The Killing*** is clear: **crime doesn't pay**. Yet in ***Ocean's Eleven*** crime does indeed pay – to the tune of $150m. Teamwork, trust, unity and luck function in perfect harmony, in a way Johnny Clay strives for, but never achieves. Within the 'crime doesn't pay' ideology, which is central to our understanding of the heist genre, comes the message that **money is the root of all evils**. The obsession with gaining quick and 'easy' money in ***The Killing*** breeds **greed, jealousy and disloyalty** from all quarters. This happens in virtually all heist films. The outcome can only end in one way: failure. Yet did anybody tell Danny Ocean this?

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The Killing DVD

PRODUCTION TIPS 2.0

Practice, planning and professionalism

Whatever your task, and whichever specification you're studying, when it comes to video production work, there are a few golden rules which never fail. **Pete Fraser**, chief examiner, guru and author of *Pete's Media Blog*, talks you through some warm-up exercises, frequently-made mistakes, and how to be organised.

In September 2002, I wrote a piece for the first ever issue of ***MediaMagazine***, called 'Production Work tips: 50 ways to improve your practical work'. (***MediaMagazine*** 1, Sept 2002 – search in the online archive). Looking back on it nine years on, there's a lot that I still stand by 100%; but having seen literally thousands of pieces of student work since then, there's a bit more that I'd add…

I'm going to suggest some activities which have been tried and tested and work well! The idea is that if you do these, your work will be better and you'll get more out of it. I'll **concentrate on video, but the same principles apply to other types of production work too**. In the first part, I'll talk about some **practice activities** which should develop your skills and help you to look at things more closely. After that, I'll summarise some of the **key points** about getting a coursework project as good as possible.

Getting started

There are many ways to start – research, planning, learning techniques…but you know what the best one is? Just have a go! Get out there and do something.

Now that's easier said than done, and the first time you shoot stuff for Media Studies, I can pretty much guarantee it'll be rubbish; but that doesn't matter – just as long as it's better next time. So what could you do for starters?

1. Sweding

Think of a film and try to tell the story on video in **less than 60 seconds**. It's called **sweding** and appeared in the film by Michel Gondry ***Be Kind Rewind*** where his central characters, who work in a video shop, have to do quick cheap re-makes of the films which had accidentally been wiped from tapes. The term and the activity have caught on, with a whole load of examples on YouTube. My favourite is the one for ***Die Hard*** (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pT6XYtlIGj0).

All you need to do is agree on a film, brainstorm the most memorable bits from it that you could string together to tell the story, grab whatever props and costumes you can find– and then get out and film it. If you do it in order, that'll be quickest, so you don't have to edit much. Then stick it on YouTube and see if you can get 150,000 hits!

2. Music video karaoke

If thinking of making a music video, try a 'karaoke' version of about a minute of a track as a warm-up activity to get used to the needs of a performance and multi-angle set-up. Take a verse and chorus, and film your performers running through it several times from different angles. Then, line up the 'takes' to the music in the edit program, and cut back and forth between them getting the best versions of each part. This will show you what you need to concentrate on when filming your assessed work – it may be that shots are too static, that certain angles don't really work, that performers need more encouragement, or that there just needs to be more variety. This one is a good illustration:

http://www.youTube.com/watch?v=qbgb1MK3qu0

3. Interviews

If you are going to make a documentary which involves interviewing people, try recording some really simple interviews in a range of different ways to see what the effect is. For example, just get two people to talk about what they had for breakfast and how they got to college, but film it in different ways – over the shoulder shot/reverse shot style, from the floor looking up at their chins, from a distance so they are both in shot, with the camera constantly moving around them. Again, cut it together to see what it looks like. This may give you some ideas about what (and what *not*) to do in the real thing.

4. Shooting script

Take an existing film script and shoot the scene. If you do this for a film you haven't seen, but for which the script is easily available, you can again learn a lot about how scenes work. For example, if you visit IMSDb (www.imsdb.com), you can find hundreds of scripts from 'classic' films. ***Citizen Kane*** is there, which lots of people have heard about as one of the greatest movies ever made, but have never seen; I remember years ago giving students a scene to film before watching the original. It got them thinking about how to film a conversation and where to put the camera; and then when they saw the scene in the film itself, they had a much greater understanding of how the camerawork, editing and mise-en-scène worked. But you could pick a scene at random from any film – just make sure you can get hold of the film afterwards to compare.

5. Re-makes

Re-make a film sequence, a music video or a TV titles sequence frame by frame. You could do it with your mates, or even with Barbies, soft toys, or Lego.

For a Lego version of TV's ***Life on Mars*** see here: http://www.youTube.com/watch?v=IybHfbQWrJo

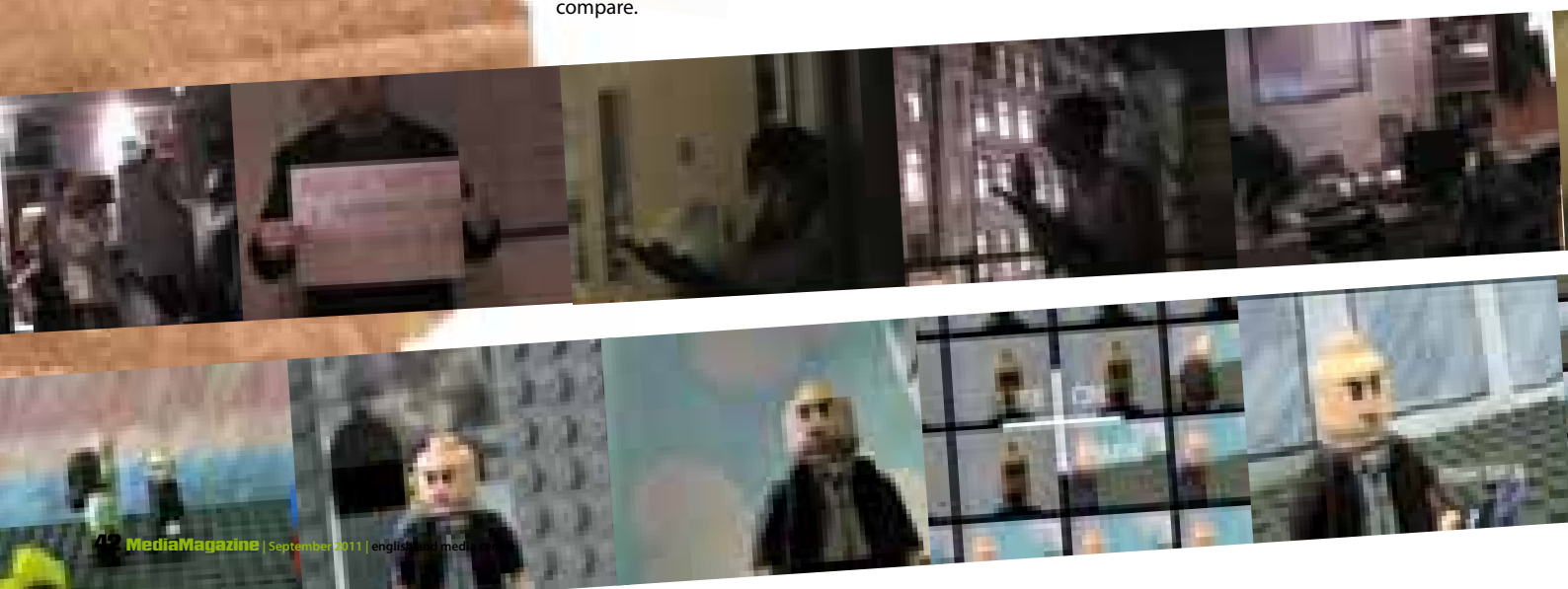
For the first minute of Britney Spears 'Hit Me Baby One More Time' see here http://www.youTube.com/watch?v=jxahdCeCCkc

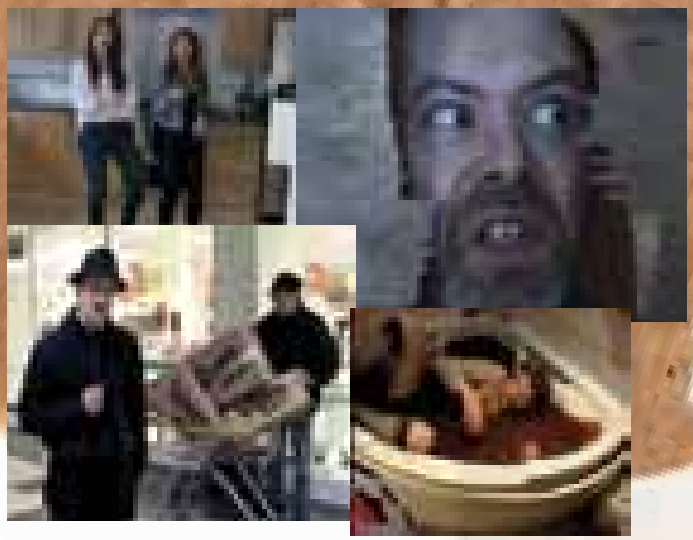
And for ***The Godfather*** a scene with the original alongside to compare:

http://www.youTube.com/watch?v=BRjw_FTkl6U

This takes a bit more planning than the other activities, as you need to choose a specific sequence and then storyboard it frame by frame to try to get it as accurate as possible. You then need to gather your props and costumes and select a location, getting the cameraperson to follow that storyboard as closely as possible to match up the shots. If you use the original soundtrack, you can edit a version with the split-screen to compare the original with your version too. What I think students learn from this sort of activity is better analytical skills, because you really have to take note of how it works in order to try to do the same yourself.

So, having had a go at some warm-up exercises, where the stakes are low (no marks involved!), what are the main things to bear in mind for your real, assessed project?





Laying the foundations

Do your research and keep a record of every bit of it! This involves looking at existing examples of whatever kind of text you are making – trailers, film openings, ads, music videos, documentaries, short films – and really noting how they work. What do you need in this kind of text? Break it down and really look at how they operate, what their rules are.

One of the most common problems with student production work is that it often doesn't look like what it is supposed to be. This is what I call the Ronseal Effect: your production should do exactly what it says on the tin!

- **Film openings** are there to start the film off, not tell the whole story; they include **titles** – which feature certain **institutional details**, such as the **names** of the people doing particular jobs, certain **companies** which have particular roles.
- **Trailers** work to give the audience a sense of the film and to entice us in – not give the whole story away.
- **Music videos** almost always feature lip-synched performance.

Yet very frequently, students' videos end up looking more like something else – film openings resembling trailers, trailers looking like music videos – because the research hasn't been carried through to the final product.

So make sure you really look at the stuff you are researching! And look at previous student work too – you can learn from their strengths as well as their weaknesses!

Planning

Log all your evidence of this, even where you change things from early ideas. Although a practice task doesn't need much planning, an assessed one does! Storyboards, scripts, location recce pictures, costume ideas, props, actors – they all need planning and all need gathering; the project won't happen without them! **Plan for the unexpected on a shoot** – bad weather, not being allowed access to your location, people getting in the way, a cast member not turning up, something going wrong with the equipment ...

Avoid the obvious

I said all this back in 2002, but on the evidence of videos I have seen this year, it needs saying again! **No smoking, drinking, drug taking (even simulated), driving badly, sitting on swings and roundabouts, trying to be funny, pretend guns in public places, chasing through shopping centres, using really famous artists for music videos** (their real image will be in everyone's heads, including yours – impossible to shake off or emulate), and **absolutely no using the zoom on the camera mid-shot, either!**

Group work

Make sure everyone has a go at everything and is properly involved at every stage. Don't hog the project, but on the other hand, don't be a passenger either! Everyone needs to take responsibility for the project and pull their weight; and everyone needs to communicate – so an obvious tip – **have each other's phone numbers**!

Editing

Make sure you have shot more than you need, and then be **ruthless** when it comes to editing. Get rid of stuff that doesn't work, and don't labour your point – **cut and cut again**! Get feedback from others all the way through – do rough cuts and keep copies of them and of the comments you get. Get people to be honest with you and **act on advice**. *They* are not stupid because they don't get the point of your video; *you* need to change things to make it work.

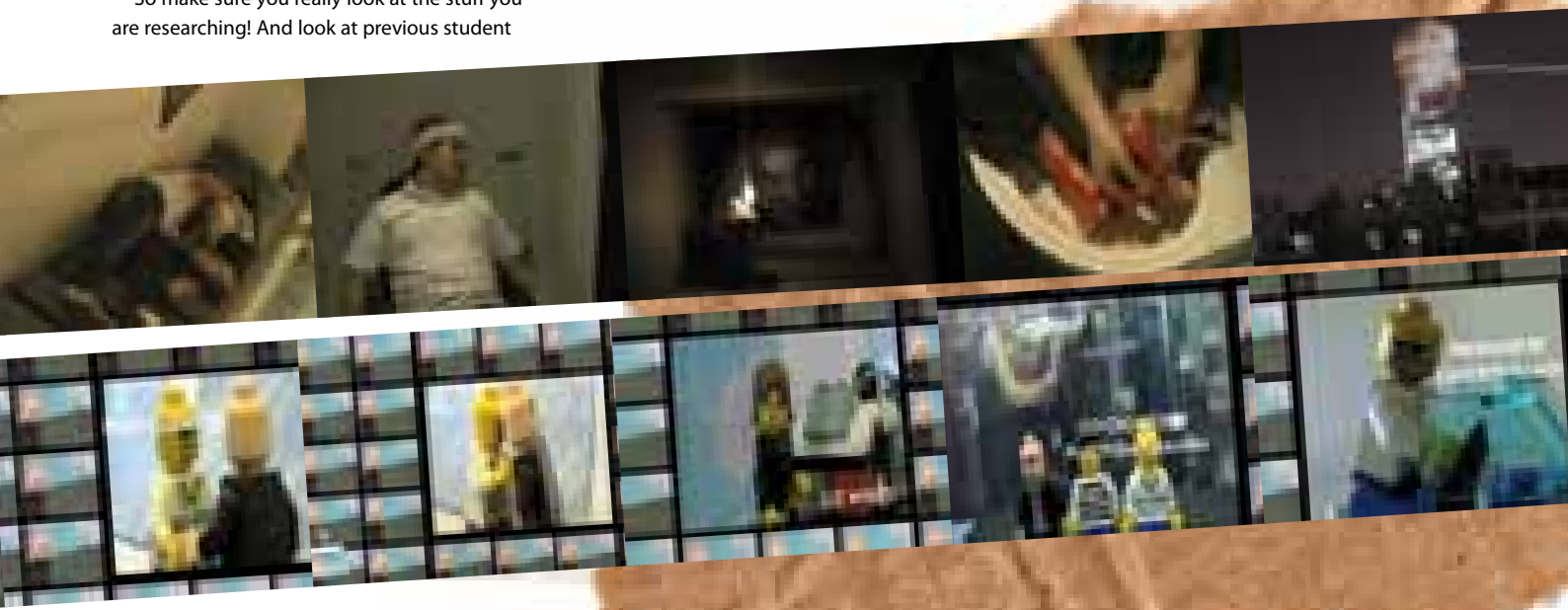
And finally ...

The same point I ended on in 2002. Treat your **project with professionalism and organisation** and you will not go far wrong! Enjoy your work. Being creative is brilliant, but you can't beat being organised.

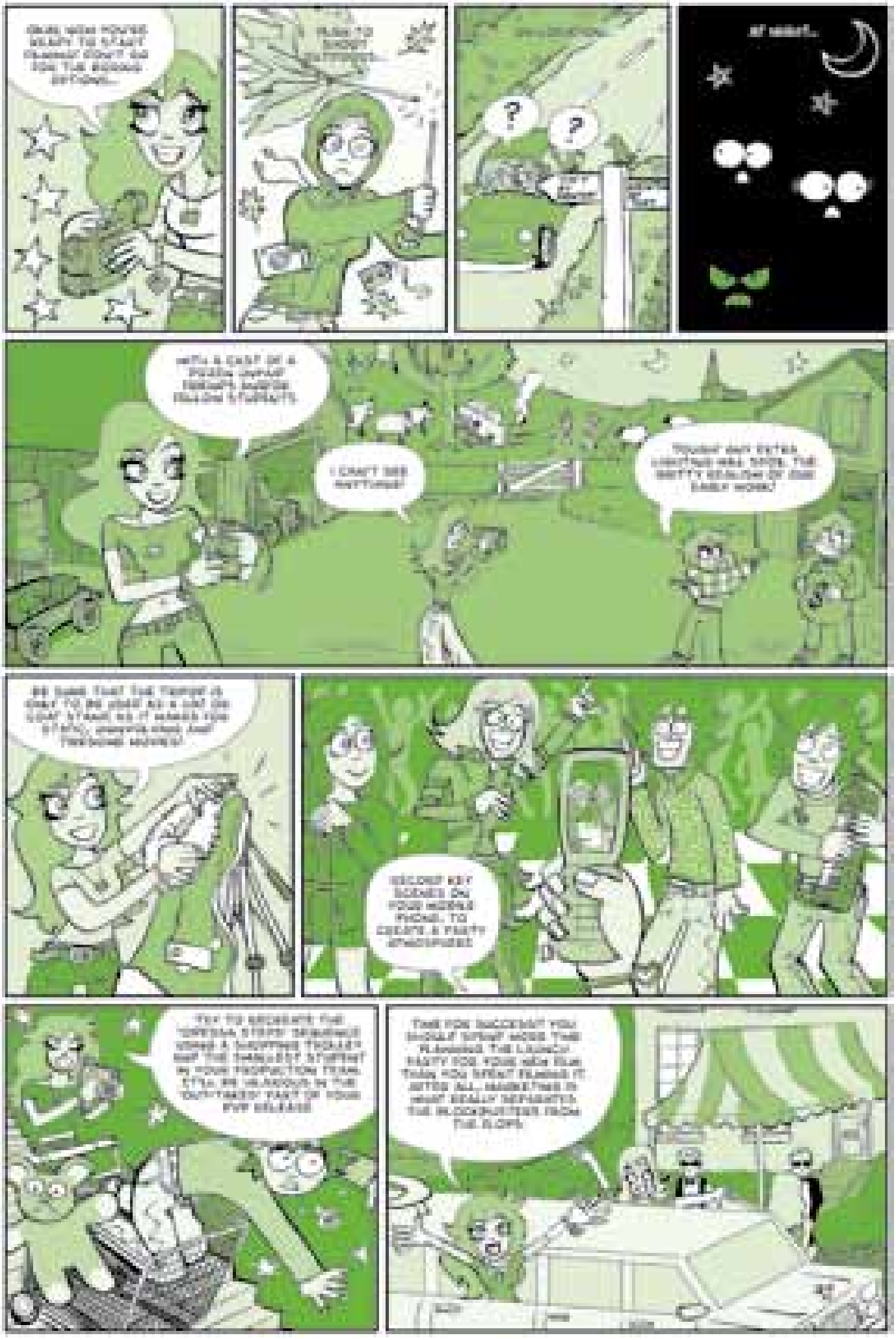
Check out the OCR blog for links to some really good examples of student work, whichever spec you are following: http://ocrmediastudies.weebly.com/index.html

Pete Fraser is Chief Examiner for Media Studies A Level, a freelance consultant, and author of Pete's Media Blog.

Now turn to the inside back cover for details of our new *MediaMagazine* production competition!




HOW NOT TO MAKE A FILM FOR YOUR PRODUCTION COURSEWORK


OKAY, NOW YOU'RE READY TO START FILMING! DON'T GO FOR THE BIGGER BITTORS...
PLAN TO SHOOT
?
?
AT NIGHT...
WITH A CAST OF A DOZEN UNPAID FRIENDS AGAINST MAJOR STUDIOS?
I CAN'T SEE ANYTHING!
THOUGHT ANY EXTRA LIGHTING WAS SUCK THE GRITTY REALISM OF OUR EARLY WORK!
BE SURE THAT THE FILMING IS ONLY TO BE USED AS A CUT ON YOUR STAGE AS IT MAKES FOR STILL UNDERSTANDING AND THRILLING MOVIES!
RECORD KEY SCENES ON YOUR MOBILE PHONE TO CREATE A FILM ATMOSPHERE
TRY TO RECREATE THE "SPECIAL STEPS" SEQUENCE USING A SHOPPING TROLLEY AND THE SMALLEST STUDENT IN YOUR PRODUCTION TEAM. IT'LL BE HILARIOUS IN THE OUTTAKES PART OF YOUR DVD RELEASE
TAKE YOU SUCCESS! YOU SHOULD SPEND MORE TIME PLANNING THE LAUNCH PARTY FOR YOUR NEW FILM THAN YOU SPENT FILMING IT AFTER ALL, MARKETING IS WHAT REALLY SEPARATES THE BLOCKBUSTERS FROM THE FLOPS

Dealing with MEST2

Half of the marks available for AS Media Studies come from the coursework module so, a carefully constructed and well presented coursework folder can help enormously when it comes to achieving a good final grade. **Steph Hendry**, Principal Moderator for AQA's MEST2, talks you through the best way to boost your grade in successful production work.

AQA Media students need to make choices from three briefs which are provided by the exam board. Each brief contains a scenario and three tasks – you need to choose **two tasks** from **one brief** and complete the tasks as instructed. This means that each coursework folder will consist of:

- **two practical pieces** from the platform options of broadcast media, print and/or emedia
- **5 -6 pages** of pre-production planning and research materials
- **a 1500 word** evaluation of the two productions.

Each part of the folder will be assessed in combination and a mark awarded based on the quality of the whole folder. It is important that each aspect of the production process is dealt with effectively to allow for as high a mark as possible.

There are six distinct stages in the production process:

1 **Reading the briefs/tasks and making an informed selection**
2 **Pre-production research**
3 **Clarifying intentions**
4 **Pre-production planning**
5 **Production**
6 **Evaluation**

1 Reading and selecting the brief/tasks

The Briefs

The three briefs are focused on different aspects of the media – at the moment these areas are: **film and television, lifestyle and music.** It is important that you have some interest in the area that you choose to work in as you will need to spend quite a bit of time researching the area – always far easier if you are genuinely interested.

The Tasks

You should also consider carefully which two of the three practical platforms you want to create and your choice may be limited by technological considerations. Whichever tasks you choose, you should make sure you will have access to appropriate equipment and software to enable you to complete the tasks effectively. You should also consider your own technological expertise and the support available to you in your school/college when selecting the tasks you will work on.

- **To complete an effective moving image production** you will need access to good quality video cameras and editing software. You should consider how you will deal with sound in your moving image work as some cameras do not record dialogue well and you may want to add music and/or a voiceover in post-production.
- You will also need specialised equipment to record and edit **audio** work to get the best possible quality in your work. Consider where you are going to do your recording and also think about how you will deal with music, sound effects, the construction of jingles etc.
- **For emedia** you will need to use software that allows you to construct web pages. These pages will need to be saved as working web pages before submission and your work should look similar to real web pages. Higher grade work will often include some key features of the platform such as animation, embedded video etc. You should ensure the software you use will allow you to include these kinds of features. Software such as Publisher and Dreamweaver have been successfully used by students in the past. Be cautious if the software you use provides design templates. Relying on them will limit the marks you can achieve.
- **Print work** also needs to be completed in an appropriate software package so you can create columns, captions, boxes, add images etc. There are many desktop publishing packages but Word and Powerpoint are not good choices for print or emedia.
- **Both print and emedia** will need you to create **photographic illustrations**. Again you should use the best quality camera that is available to you to do this. Mobile phone cameras are not a good idea as the quality of picture they produce is usually not very good. You should construct your photographs carefully – considering lighting, composition, mise-en-scène and costume (if appropriate). Don't fall into the trap of using 'snapshots' and do remember that at least 80% of the images you use should be self generated. Don't rely on images you find on the internet too much. Using post production software such as Photoshop will help you make the most of your photographic images and demonstrate your technical abilities to the examiner.

The Scenario/Instructions

Once you've decided on the brief and tasks you want to complete, you should read the scenario and instructions very carefully. The information provided

within the brief will give you lots of clues as to the type of research you should undertake before you begin to complete the practical work. Read through and highlight key words and phrases and consider the following carefully:

- What target audience do you need to aim your products towards?
- What are the main functions of the texts you will produce? What are they trying to achieve?
- What institutional considerations do you need to keep in mind during the planning and production?

2 Pre-production research

You will need to undertake a number of research tasks when starting the production process. The following questions may help.

- **What are the codes and conventions of the form and genre** you will be working in? For emedia and print consider the use of images, text and layout and design. For moving image consider the use of the camera, editing, lighting, sound and mise-en-scène.
- How do media producers currently address the target **audience**?
- How do existing media texts attempt to fulfil their main **functions** (being persuasive, informative, entertaining etc.)?
- What **conventions** are used by the **media institutions** you are trying to emulate?
- What are the characteristics of the **target audience**? What do they expect? How can they best be appealed to?
- What **representations** are commonly used in the types of texts you are creating?
- What **narrative** techniques are used in the existing texts you are researching? (This applies to all three platforms.)
- What **values** and **ideologies** are associated with the texts/forms/genres you are creating?
- What **institutional** issues impact on the way your texts are constructed?

The best way to answer these questions is to look at and analyse a number of existing media texts in the area you will be working in. In addition, you should undertake some institutional research and consider ideas about audience from your studies and text books.

3 Clarifying intentions

Once you have undertaken some research you should use the knowledge you have gained to help you to decide on how to proceed with your

practical work. Many students find it useful to write down their intentions for production (although there is no formal requirement to do so). You should have a clear idea of what you are trying to achieve with your productions from your close reading of the brief and tasks and your research should have given you ideas as to how to go about this. Part of this could be a **consideration of the placements of your work** once finished (where you have a choice) and **how, specifically, you will attempt to appeal to your target audience**. Once you are clear on what you want to do you can move to the next stage...

4 Pre-production planning

All aspects of your production work should be planned in advance. In the media industry an enormous amount of time is spent in the pre-production planning stage and this helps productions stay focussed and is more time-efficient. Lots of students by-pass this stage of the process and rush into production. They then often end up wasting a lot of time and poorly planned productions are often less successful. Each platform needs slightly different planning processes – the following are just some of the things that could be completed before production:

Broadcast

- Script
- Storyboard
- Shot/transition list
- List of props/costumes etc.
- List of sound effects required
- Selection of locations/appropriate mise-en-scène
- Notes regarding post-production requirements
- Job allocations and timeframes (for team work)

Print/emedia

- Detailed flat-plan/mock-ups of pages detailing layout and design elements
- Breakdown of illustration needs

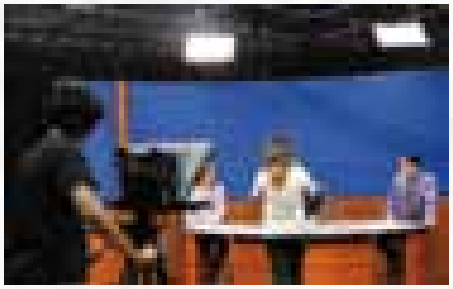
Photography

- Sketches of image content required
- List of props/costumes etc.
- Selection of locations/appropriate mise-en-scène
- Notes regarding lighting requirements and any post-production effects required

When submitting your final folder, you will need to select 5-6 pages of your research and planning materials. Try to ensure this selection shows your best and most detailed work.

5 Production

Detailed planning will allow you to be much more focussed and efficient when it comes to production. In your productions you should attempt to show a good knowledge of the appropriate codes and conventions of the form you are working in but also try to add some creativity and originality. Pay close attention to the existing texts that you have studied and always keep the tasks' instructions in mind. Meeting the needs of your target audience is also crucial so, throughout your production, continue to consider whether your work will appeal to them.



6 Some common production errors to avoid:

Broadcast

- **Trailers that are simply a montage of shots**. Try to consider the way trailers construct a narrative and look carefully at editing speeds and the types of images commonly used within your genre.
- **Radio pieces that are simply bits of 'chat' with a piece of music at the start and the end**. Listen to radio shows and identify how sound effects, idents and jingles are used to add interest – perhaps consider adding an advert or two if your work is intended to be broadcast on commercial radio.

Print

- **Magazines and newspapers that are the wrong size or that use fonts and/or columns inappropriately**. Body text fonts in newspapers and magazines are smaller than a lot of students think. Using large fonts may take up more space but will end up looking very unprofessional. Pay close attention to how the publications you are emulating use images, captions, headlines etc. as reducing the font size does not always mean writing more copy.

Emedia

- **Emedia that is simply information + images/ illustration**. Try to consider audience interaction and include facilities to enable audience activity as well as making your work visually interesting. Also consider how the audience will navigate through your site. Some web sites are submitted that are full of dead-ends or links to other pages that are not easily spotted.

Photography

- **Poor quality photographic illustration.** This is all solved in the planning and largely depends on the time you are prepared to spend on taking your pictures. If you are limited in terms of locations and equipment consider how you can make your pictures more visually interesting by using image manipulation software, and avoid using pictures that have not been taken specifically for your practical projects.
- **Over-reliance on found images**. Occasionally you may find you wish to use images you have found on the internet. Try to avoid this as much as possible. Take your own photographs where possible and if you do use found images, they should make up no more than 20% of the images in your productions.

You will also need to consider the practicality of presenting your finished work. Moving-image work will need to be put onto a DVD (one that can be played on a domestic DVD player), print work should be printed as professionally as possible and emedia work will need to be saved to a USB pen or disc as a functioning website. Alternatively you can upload your moving-image and/or emedia work to the internet and submit it as a URL.

7 The evaluation

The most common mistake made in evaluations is that students see this as an opportunity to discuss the production process. This is *not* required and should be avoided. Because the evaluation comes at the end of the process it is often rushed and this can limit your final grade.

The purpose of the evaluation is for you to discuss how successful your work is in terms of:

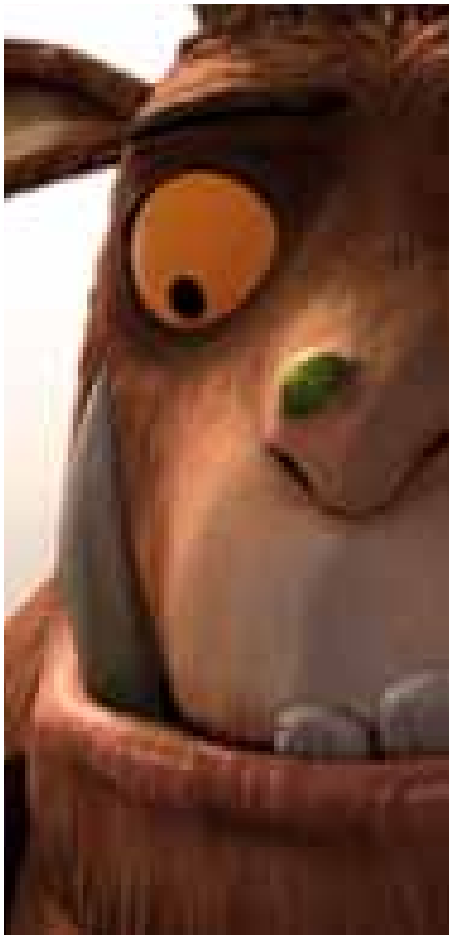
- meeting the brief/task requirements and the productions' functions
- appealing to the target audience(s)
- replicating codes and conventions of the platform, form, representations, genre etc.

Use of media concepts

One of the requirements of the evaluation is to show you have considered how the third platform could have been used in combination with the productions you have completed. You should also pay close attention to your spelling, punctuation and clarity of expression as well as using media terminology as you write. You should analyse both the strengths and weaknesses of your productions in terms of media concepts and show you understand how media texts use **media language, representation and narrative** to construct media texts that follow **genre codes**, appeal to **audiences and how institutional needs are met.**

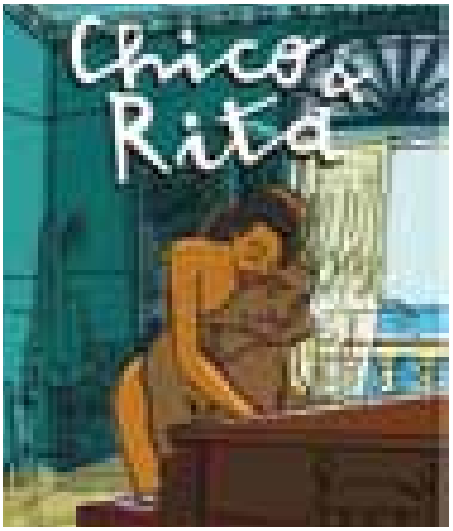
Do remember that the coursework needs to reflect **half a year's worth of work.** If there is a 'trick' to being successful it is in the time you give to the research and planning stages. When involved in production you will need to be developing your own technical skills and working out how to achieve what you want using the production equipment and software. This is not **the time** to be making lots of creative decisions; many students spend enormous amounts of time during production re-evaluating what their finished pieces will be and changing direction – effectively wasting time, making more work for themselves and limiting their technological achievements. You will produce better products, achieve a better mark and have more fun with the productions if you are clear about what you want to achieve before you start. Most media students find the coursework the most enjoyable part of the AS year as it gives you an opportunity to be creative, develop new technical skills and make decisions for yourself. There aren't many other A Levels that can offer all that!

Steph Hendry is a Principal Examiner, freelance writer, and a lecturer at Runshaw College.



Martin Pope: A Producer's Life

Martin Pope has been an independent producer for over 15 years. His most recent films are *Wild Target* and *The Gruffalo* which was nominated for an Oscar at the 2011 Academy Awards. **Mike Hobbs** met him to ask for the lowdown on a producer's life.



MM: What does a producer actually do?

Essentially the producer is the person who makes it happen. He or she initiates the project, organises it, and gets on with the job of connecting people and resources. I think the best definition I heard was from someone on our Producer Placement scheme who said that **a producer is someone who knows what to say, to whom and when.**

One of the most difficult parts is finding funds, but I reckon the most taxing is deciding on which project to go ahead with. This is because you've usually got several ideas that are at different stages of development, but you have to make a firm decision on the front running project that will find an audience. The audience is always crucial.

MM: How does the role differ for films and TV?

The jobs are essentially the same, but the main differences revolve around **size and complexity**. In film, you generally have more people that you have to satisfy – the funding will probably have come from several sources. But if you're working in TV with a traditional broadcaster, then it's likely they've provided most of the budget and therefore the funding gap (i.e. the money you've had to find from elsewhere) is relatively small. As a consequence, your principal aim is to satisfy the broadcaster.

MM: How do you sort out production problems? Have you got any recent instances?

They are so diverse – and it's great that it's such a varied role – that it makes it hard to find a typical example. However, perhaps a short episode from ***Wild Target*** will give a general idea of production management issues. We needed to find a location for **Emily Blunt** to be seen riding a bicycle through London, so I sent the director and the location manager out on a recce around London, telling them to return with suggestions for a few back streets that would present relatively few obstacles. Fat chance.

They came back to me with the vastly overambitious idea of filming her careering down Whitehall and into Trafalgar Square with a stunt involved. Try as I might, I couldn't persuade the director otherwise: he was set on it. And it was a great idea, just complicated. So we knuckled down to it and tried to make it work. And, after a host of negotiations with local authorities, bus companies and the police, we managed it.

The solution was to film at the quietest moments (Sunday morning between 6:15 and 10:30) for a series of 4 minute segments, which was the longest time we were allowed to stop the traffic (and there were a lot of people monitoring us, you can be sure). It was akin to a military operation for those short spells, with police holding back the traffic, so nothing random entered the shot and the stunt cars could roll.

MM: Tell me how you got started in the business.

Well, I'd done lots of theatre at university and I was really keen to get into directing. But it's not easy in the first years after graduating, and as I scraped around on various fringe productions, I became somewhat envious of various friends who were hauling in large salaries. So I was just about to start working in the City, when something came up, and I decided to make one last attempt to get into the industry.

My first job was working at the BBC as a runner on a production of a TV play ***Raspberry Ripple*** that was in part about – amazingly – Faye Dunaway as a matron in the NHS. It was the best introduction I could possibly have had: if you're working as a runner, you have occasional moments to stand around, keep quiet, observe and wonder why things are going right or wrong (and what you would have done differently in the latter case).

After that I worked at the BBC as an **Assistant Director and a Script Editor** (both of which were also invaluable) before I became a Producer there. I stayed until 1995 when I left to set up my own independent production company and began work on the feature film ***Alive and Kicking*** (also known as *Indian Summer*). Coming from the BBC, where you start to take so much help for granted, working on your own was a bit of a shock.

During the next eight years, I produced various other TV dramas, such as ***The Turn of the Screw***, and feature films ***Lawless Heart***, ***The Heart of Me*** and ***Touch of Pink***, until setting up **Magic Light Productions** with **Michael Rose** in 2003.

MM: What made you change your operation?

Well, I'd always wanted to go into partnership with someone – two heads really are better than one, plus it's considerably less stressful – and I'd known Michael since the 1980s.

Since teaming up, we've continued working on various live action productions ***(Sparkle***, ***The Cottage***, ***Glorious 39*** and ***Wild Target)*** but there was always the intention of getting into animation. Michael had worked extensively with **Nick Park** who makes the ***Wallace and Gromit*** movies, so he had plenty of expertise.

Animation productions are not necessarily especially different: you still have to find the right materials to go into the story, pitch the idea correctly to find an audience. However, there are naturally differences of scale, organisation and in the sort of talent you need to hire.

It wasn't long before we decided we wanted to make ***The Gruffalo***. All the signs were good: our children all enjoyed the story, and so did those of just about everyone else we knew. We made some enquiries, and after finally securing the film rights, we set about the very intense business of making sure we didn't disappoint all those who loved the story so much.

The crucial challenge was finding the right animators to do justice to the story. After a lot of research, we chose **Studio Soi** in Germany because we felt they could provide the right approach. We raised the money for making it privately, and then negotiated with various networks (such as the BBC in the UK and ZDF in Germany) to show the film.

Now we're spending quite a bit of our time dealing with all the varied merchandising and licensing aspects, as well as selling the film internationally. We've also produced another animated film – the feature, ***Chico & Rita***, which came out last year.

MM: What were the Oscars like?

Well, we didn't win, but I'd prepared myself for that by saying we didn't really expect to do so. However, it was an incredible experience to be there for the first time. Not for Michael, obviously, because he was attending for the fifth time, and has already won twice with Nick Park. The ceremony itself was pretty slick, and I was impressed with the fact that it was all over in three hours.

A moment I'll always remember is when I was standing at the end of the red carpets (they have two, one for the stars and a reserve one for everyone else) when I turned around and found I was right next to Warren Beatty. He was obviously waiting for his wife Annette Bening, who'd been nominated for Best Actress. Anyway, it was a special thrill for me because he was such a huge star when I was growing up, and given that I'd started as a runner for Faye Dunaway, it rounded off my ***Bonnie and Clyde*** moment (they co-starred in the 1967 runaway gangsters box-office sensation – see page 30).

We were in LA a week before the ceremony having meetings, but after the results are announced, the party is soon over. We flew home the day afterwards.

MM: So what are you working on at the moment?

One of our main projects is the companion project to ***The Gruffalo*** called ***The Gruffalo's Child*** which is currently nearing completion. We've chosen to work with Studio Soi again after their great work first time out, and we're looking forward to showing this film to its audience.

And we're now venturing into the world of documentaries. We're currently in post-production on ***One Life***, which is a theatrical feature film about the connectedness of all life on the planet, in part using footage from the BBC Natural History Unit's ***Life***. I know that in the UK we've been conditioned to watch natural history on TV but in many other countries around the world they prefer to see nature on the big screen, and I must admit I now agree with them. Seeing natural history in cinema is wonderful – it could have been designed to show these incredible scenes.

MM: Can you tell me about your involvement with the Producer Placement scheme?

This has been an excellent scheme which we've worked on with **Skillset** in 2008 and 2010. It was designed to get emerging producers engaging with the business of film production. The participants went on two week placements (on average) to distributors, sales agents, film lawyers, financiers and marketing people. The idea was for the budding producers, often in their mid/late 20s with some experience, to walk in others' shoes, so that they could find out about the **pressures** that caused film executives to take particular decisions. It focused on discovering the **constraints** under which the crucial cogs of the industry work. Sadly, with budget cuts everywhere, I don't think they'll be repeating it.

The programme encouraged people to think about whether their film was going to work **as a business proposition**. Several of those on the scheme have already gone on to make low budget features, and I really do think it was unique business training. There are other programmes for producers (e.g. ***Inside Pictures*** and the **Media Business School**) but none quite the same.

MM: What are your top tips for getting into production?

Make sure it's the job and not the *idea* of the job you want to do. Or at least be certain you understand what you're letting yourself in for.

If you want some pointers as to what we look for, here are some useful do's and don'ts, depending on the level you're trying for.

- Always explore and try to **understand the genres** you're interested in – watch as many films and TV programmes as you can.
- Prepare your **list of top 10 films**, because you will probably get asked for it.
- Study the **end credits** of movies, especially anything that grabs you, so that you can target your approach to any company accordingly.
- When you write, **make it personal**, and send your details to **a specific person at a specific company**.
- **Don't attach Word documents** – if you have to attach something, create a PDF.
- If you can get a job as a runner, take it, because it's a great way to learn about the business.
- But make sure you don't get trapped, and **beware the unpaid internship**!
- Don't go into production management if you don't know how to handle a spreadsheet.
- Remember that the most difficult part of making films is getting people to see them in the right way.

Since I began, some things in the business have changed dramatically – people have to start now on **'no budget' filmmaking**, only possible because of the huge technological changes, and the ability to make and edit films from a PC. Of course, other things don't change, and, beyond independent UK films, the other world of studio film-making remains. When **Rupert Grint** was working with us on ***Wild Target*** for a six-week shoot, he told us he was just off to the ***Harry Potter and The Deathly Hallows*** shoot (admittedly for two films) that would last 64 weeks.

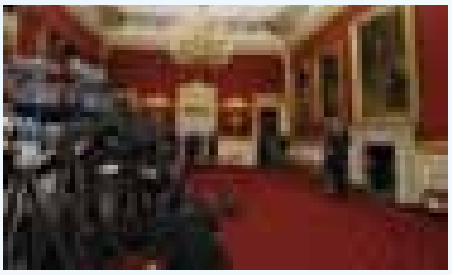
Mike Hobbs is a freelance writer and journalist.

WEDDING-WATCHING

the production of a royal spectacle

It's all over – until it's Harry's turn ... But what did it all mean? Why did it recruit such a massive global audience? And what can Media students learn from the gigantic media production that was the Royal Wedding? **Alex Fraser** investigates.

What has been the most watched broadcast of this century so far? The World Cup Final perhaps? A defining moment in world history such as the horrific live video of the second plane smashing into the World Trade Center on 9/11?



The toppling of a great dictator, with the final moments of his life crudely recorded on a mobile phone?

No, these would be far too sensible a guess. The most watched event of this millennium so far happened on the **29th April 2011.**

The Royal Wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton attracted coverage from all over the world. Many political commentators expressed doubt about the influence that the monarchy has nowadays, both worldwide and in Britain. The unprecedented global interest in the wedding would appear to completely dismiss these doubts.

The media scrum and thousands of tourists flocking to London suggest that **public interest in the lives of the Royal Family is at its highest point since the funeral of Princess Diana** – which ironically was the last broadcast to receive viewing figures that were anywhere close to those of this event, which the BBC estimates to be close to two billion worldwide. (NB this figure is highly disputed and almost impossible to calculate.)

There is also an intricate **back story** which has woven its way through the media coverage of the royals and particularly Princes Harry and William. The media have had a keen interest in the princes since they were born. It has been argued at times that this has been particularly distasteful and **voyeuristic**. Others claim it to be some form of **guilt**, with allegations that the media and paparazzi were responsible for the crash that killed the princes' mother. Whatever the reason, the media have been fascinated by the boys.

As might be expected, the advance coverage in Britain and worldwide was huge. The event itself could be described as the media's 'wet dream'; **the perfect story**. The princes were victims of a troubled childhood, forced by the death of their mother to step into the spotlight and to mature very quickly. There was clear symbolism in the young attractive outsider marrying into the royal family, just like Diana a few decades before her; even Kate Middleton's engagement ring is the one that Charles gave to Diana.

Then to round it all off, **the location** of the wedding: Westminster Abbey. The abbey has hosted numerous other Royal Weddings and was the venue for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, but this alone doesn't fully explain its significance as the location of the wedding. It is particularly symbolic as it brings closure at last for William; having witnessed the funeral of his late mother at the same place only fourteen years before, the story is finally drawn full circle. The moment that William and Kate kissed on the balcony in front of the crowds at Buckingham Palace was the media's happy ending, and perhaps the ending that the public had been longing for. This was demonstrated by the British newspaper coverage on the morning after the wedding, when almost every tabloid and broadsheet (apart from *The Times*) used the picture of the couple's first kiss in front of the crowds at Buckingham Palace as their front page.

The media had their story. But how exactly did they cover it? An interesting case study to look at first is **Channel 4**.

Channel 4 did not broadcast the ceremony live. But this didn't mean that there was any less coverage of the big occasion than the other channels. They decided to go for the comic and satirical angle for their coverage. This included ***My Big Fat Royal Gypsy Wedding***, which was adapted from their series of documentaries investigating the extravagant weddings and lives of the UK travelling community. They also produced a show called ***Royal Wedding Crashers*** which included a variety of different Z-list celebrities who had been tricked into thinking that they had received an invite to the Royal Wedding and must learn royal etiquette such as never turning your back on a royal and learning the code words for a bomb threat at the palace ('apple juice' they were told). Channel 4 chose to present their coverage in this manner because their target audience is young, educated, politically aware, possibly with republican views, and are more likely to enjoy a satirical look at both the monarchy and the culture of celebrities.

Celebrities have been much more associated with the 2011 Royal Wedding than any other before it. A star-studded guest list included Elton John, Guy Ritchie, Rowan Atkinson and even the Beckhams. This was evident in both the BBC and ITV's coverage of the event. A good way to analyse this coverage is to compare the wedding of Diana and Charles in 1981 to that of William and Kate.

Thirty years, two weddings and a load of celebs

The commentary from both the BBC and ITV in 1981 focused mainly on which royals and dignitaries were attending. The 2011 coverage contained a great deal of celebrity-spotting as well as politicians and royals. Sky News even embarrassingly cut away from an interview with Prime Minister David Cameron to shots of Tara Palmer-Tomkinson in the Abbey. Newspaper coverage in the lead-up to the wedding ran stories about who had not been invited. *The Mirror*, for example, produced an article on how Lily Allen was furious not to receive an invite when singer Joss Stone had. What this shows us is that over the last 30 years celebrity culture has become much more valued than it ever was before.

Another comparison between the 1981 Royal Wedding and that of 2011 is the style that the BBC used. In both cases they decided to go with a **main male commentator**; in 1981

this commentary came from Tom Fleming and in 2011 it was led by BBC news reader Huw Edwards. The dynamic set up by the BBC between its presenters is particularly notable; on both occasions they also used a female co-commentator. In 1981 this was newsreader Angela Rippon; during Kate and Will's wedding this role was shared by Sophie Raworth and *Grazia* magazine's Paula Reed. The two seemed to discuss very little apart from fashion, celebrities and Princess Beatrice's bizarre hat, while Edwards was left with all the more serious commentary. This could raise interesting questions about **gender representation in the media**. Do women only know how to talk about fashion? Is Huw Edwards there by merit or just because he is a man?

The BBC also went for an angle often more associated with showbiz reporting from awards ceremonies such as the BAFTAS and the Oscars. This involved a reporter on the ground, covering the gossip from the wedding. This style is familiar from American TV, and much more informal than the BBC has previously employed for a royal occasion. This aspect of their programme was covered by Radio One DJ Fearne Cotton, who was taking vox pops and gossip from members of the public and celebrities in the crowd. This might suggest that the BBC is desperate to modernise their coverage of the royals to make it more appealing to a younger audience. This differs from coverage in the past, which has often been criticised by anti-monarchy groups such as 'Republic' for being high-register and often biased towards the establishment.

Exploiting the occasion

The Royal Wedding also led to an opportunity for a lot of different television channels and media companies to cash in on the occasion with their coverage. One example of this is the film produced by Revolver Entertainment ***William and Kate – the movie***. The film, shot entirely in California and very loosely based on how Kate and William met at St Andrew's University, was shown on Channel Five in the week leading up to the wedding. It stars two lookalikes of the famous couple, and presents a dramatised

version of the couple's relationship. Its critics have accused the film of exaggerating and inventing events surrounding the couple's courtship; it is so obviously inaccurate that it even shows London buses driving on the right side of the road! What it does demonstrate, despite its 'cheesy' portrayal, is just how much of a worldwide phenomena the Royal Wedding is – even the film industry attempted to cover the event.

The rise of online media

One certainty was that this Royal Wedding was the first to provide extensive online coverage. It was a true example of **multimedia convergence**. The wedding itself was **broadcast live on YouTube** as well as the major television channels. YouTube also hosted an interactive greetings book for well wishers to post videos to the newly weds.

The coverage also championed **the use of the smart phone and mobile devices** with internet capabilities. Whilst watching the ceremony I was able instantly to download the wedding music from iTunes. Google maps had a live interactive map of the procession route and for your iPod and iPhone there was an App to explore Westminster Abbey and find out about the venue of the wedding.

Social media was also teeming with news about the Royal Wedding, with the topic trending all across Twitter. The social network had everything from official updates from Clarence House and all the major news associations, including one of my favourite tweets of the day from the Press Association **Kate says 'I do'.** Others were more comic with their tweets: '**Good job Kate's not in France. She'd get arrested wearing that veil!'** This also demonstrates the importance of social networks in breaking news and for generating user interactivity. The networks connected people all over the world whilst watching the spectacle, something that has never been possible for any other Royal Wedding.

Global coverage

The coverage of the Royal Wedding globally is perhaps on a scale that has never been seen before; with TV stations from Al-Jazeera to Fox News all offering coverage of the special occasion. It is estimated that there were over **8,000 media workers** at the occasion, unprecedented for a single day event.

Social networking and new media technology have made the Royal Wedding not only accessible to more people than ever before but also have increased the interest of the occasion by offering a level of interactivity that for previous royal occasions people could only imagine. The wedding of William and Kate has not only become the most viewed television event of all time, but is also perhaps one of the most interesting current case studies of our media's representations and values.

Alex Fraser is studying Broadcast Journalism at Leeds University.

Audience figures

28.4 million UK viewers watched Charles and Diana wed in 1981.

26.2 million unique UK viewers watched Kate and Wills wed live across five host channels (BBC1, ITV1, Sky News, Sky Living, and the BBC News channel) – fewer than for 1981. BUT ... with modern online coverage factored in, BBC statistics suggest that iPlayer and online streaming pushed UK figures past **34 million** – even though BBC streams crashed due to an overload of viewers attempting to access coverage.

22.7 million US viewers watched the event live across 11 US channels.

During the day, there were:
- **74 UK Facebook updates per second** during the wedding
- **268,000 mentions** of the wedding on UK Facebook alone
- **1.3 million viewers** on YouTube's Wedding Channel.

400 million viewers have since watched on YouTube's live stream.

Read more internet TV news, and an alternative view on the impact of the wedding: Royal Wedding Viewcount Fails To Match Hype http://www.worldtvpc.com/blog/royal-viewcount-fails-reach-hype/#ixzz1NTA8JKqg

Horror and Heroics

The cinema of September 11th

On the tenth anniversary of an unforgettable terrorist attack, **Pete Turner** explores cinematic representations of a day which changed the world and questions the motivations of film-makers that tackle 9/11.

On the morning of September 11th 2001, four commercial passenger planes were hijacked and deliberately flown into targets across America by al-Qaeda terrorists. The first two planes hit the towers of the **World Trade Center** in New York. The third hit the Pentagon in Virginia followed by the fourth plane crashing in a field in Pennsylvania (for more on the attacks see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/September_11_attacks).

The media and millions of stunned viewers were instantly obsessed with documenting and witnessing the attacks. Many people in the UK will remember being glued to television screens as the day's events unfolded. Television news programmes remained on throughout the day with most other broadcasts cancelled. The second plane to hit the World Trade Center was transmitted live on air by cameras already rolling to capture the smoke pouring from the first hit tower.

No disaster in history has been as well documented, with a variety of news cameras and amateur camcorders. Literally thousands of hours of footage exists of the events of 9/11'

Dixon, 2004

Despite easy access to real footage of 9/11 made possible by the news media, television documentaries and the internet (just search for 9/11 on YouTube for evidence of the 'thousands of hours of footage'), it was inevitable that cinematic narratives would eventually tackle the horror and heroics of the most spectacular and devastating terrorist attack ever to occur on American soil.

But do audiences really want to see a real-life tragedy, fresh in the memories of so many, exploited by film-makers? And what are the reasons for representing such atrocities?

Hollywood's initial response

Immediately following the attacks, Hollywood took a sensitive step away from disaster spectacle. The original teaser trailer for ***Spiderman*** (2002) had featured the titular hero spinning a web between the two towers of the WTC in order to catch a helicopter full of criminals (see it here: http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=7xNgtWG09TQ) but this trailer (and also a poster featuring the towers reflected in Spidey's eyes) was withdrawn by Sony Pictures out of respect for those affected by the tragedy. Similarly films such as ***Collateral Damage*** and ***Big Trouble*** had their release dates delayed due to nervous studios. Even some films due to be broadcast on television (such as ***Independence Day***) were replaced in the weeks subsequent to the attacks (read more: http://uk.movies.ign.com/articles/305/305861p1.html).

11/09/01 – September 11 (2002)

Then in 2002, eleven film-makers from across the globe each contributed a short film (**11 minutes, 9 seconds and 1 frame**) to form a collective international response to the atrocities. This seems to be the first cinematic response to the tragedy. It is an amazing collection of work with interesting international directors tackling the events in very different ways.

French director **Claude Lelouch's** segment creates a strong emotional impact, coupling the use of news footage shown on a television screen and the experience of a deaf woman in New York. **Ken Loach's** piece has been praised as a very effective history lesson; it puts 9/11 into perspective by reminding viewers of the massacre of 30,000 Chileans, a **massacre that the American government endorsed**, that began with a military coup on September 11 1973. Loach effectively reminds the audience of the suffering of others in the world, and points a finger at American interventions in causing harm. However the events of 9/11 are never seen in this short film. On the other hand **Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu's** segment is at the other extreme. It is nothing but images and sounds from the day. People fall, black screen, people fall. It feels a bit exploitative of the incredible footage but is undeniably extremely saddening and shocking, despite the fact that these clips are readily available on the internet. **Samira Makhmalbaf** (Iran), **Mira Nair** (India) and **Sean Penn** (USA) also impress with their short films. Their respective contributions show the impact of 9/11 on a class of school children in Iran, the search for a lost son, the xenophobia experienced by a Muslim-American family in the aftermath and the impact on one lonely old man in New York.

25th Hour (2002)

The spectre of September 11th looms over **Spike Lee's** film about a drug dealer's last hours as a free man before he goes to prison for seven years.

Whether it be the blue searchlight beams from ground zero or the ode to firefighters in Monty's father's bar, the references are continuously evident.

Tooze, 2003

One scene very deliberately uses Ground Zero as a backdrop as two characters discuss the choices available to their drug-dealing friend Monty:

we simply see the sight and hear Middle Eastern wails of grief in the background, underscoring the devastation of the event on both sides of the 'war on terror' making us see and hear the dual tragedy

Lauren Blumenfeld

On the other hand, it has been argued that Lee **blatantly relies on the power of post-9/11 imagery to underscore the emotions of his melodrama**

http://thedancingimage.blogspot.com/2009/06/waiting-for-25th-hour.html

Both points of view seem fair; Lee is a political film-maker and the film is as much about post-9/11 America as it is about the main character Monty. However the imagery is clearly used to invoke emotions in the audience and give the fictional characters' narratives more potency.

United 93 and World Trade Center (2006)

By 2006, the world seemed ready for a '9/11 movie'; and in fact, not one but two film-makers chose to tackle the drama of September 11 2001. The first to be released was **Paul Greengrass' *United 93***. This real-time thriller focuses on the fourth plane that crashed in a field in Pennsylvania after the passengers fought back against the terrorists on board their plane. This was the first Hollywood film to directly represent the events of 9/11:

> **Greengrass incorporates information about the disaster, including the plane's exact movements in the air, the times and content of phone calls to family members, recordings from inside the cockpit and reaction on the ground from air traffic controllers and the military, as well as details about the passengers' personalities and mannerisms provided by the families**
>
> Timmons, 2006

The use of handheld cameras and relatively unknown actors creates a documentary-style immediacy that makes the film incredibly difficult to watch. Many film critics praised the film as a sensitive, brilliantly-crafted and unbearably tense masterpiece. However the trailer was pulled from some Manhattan cinemas due to the upset it caused.

Later the same year, **Oliver Stone's *World Trade Center*** was released. It stars **Nicholas Cage** and **Michael Pena** as the last two people to be pulled alive from the rubble of the World Trade Center. Despite Stone's reputation for controversial films that are often critical of the USA and their government, this film lacks any political criticisms and instead attempts accurately to reconstruct the **personal stories** of two heroic police officers who survived the towers' destruction. Generally well-reviewed, the film did receive some negative press partly due to the lack of involvement of some victims' families. Author **Shari Graydon** condemned the use of the most dramatic elements of tragedies such as 9/11 as crass. She said:

> **These tend not to increase our understanding or make us better equipped to deal with situations such as these in the future.**

She added that such films only served to increase the

> **'culture of fear' in certain parts of the United States**
>
> Sharp, 2006

Opinions over whether these films were made too soon (or even whether they should have been made at all) are divided, with people having strong arguments on both sides. For example, Stewart (2006) argues:

> **that the only reason the film was made was to exploit the deaths that resulted from the terrorist attacks for personal profit. That feels, to me, as morally repugnant as war profiteering.**

Reign Over Me (2007)

Like ***25th Hour***, **Mike Binder's *Reign Over Me*** deals with characters living in post-9/11 New York. However, rather than mainly visual references to the tragedy (as in ***25th Hour***), this film propels the narrative through a character who has lost his family on one of the planes that hit the World Trade Center. **Adam Sandler** plays Charlie Fineman as a man suffering from post-traumatic stress and in one particularly upsetting scene finally breaks down to describe the feelings he has over what happened to his family. Some critics argued it

treats the tragedy of 9-11 in a personal and apolitical fashion that is admirable

Atkinson, 2007

whereas others made accusations that the film

tastelessly uses 9/11 as a launching pad to tell its story…Binder thought it was fitting to use the memory of a past national nightmare to frame his dopey narrative.

Koban, 2007

Remember Me (2010) SPOILER!

Similarly, **Allen Coulter's *Remember Me*** has also been accused of insensitivity.

Summit Entertainment, the studio behind the film, isn't advertising the connection to Sept. 11 in pre-release publicity. And to be fair, the film is not about 9/11.

Avila, 2010

The film opens in 1991 and then moves to 'ten years later'. **Robert Pattinson** plays a young man with family/girlfriend problems and out of the blue in the last five minutes of the film, the audience sees a blackboard in a classroom with the date written on it. Cut to Pattinson looking out a window; the camera pulls out to reveal he is high up in one of the World Trade Center towers.

It's a stunning shot, an indelible image that will stay with audiences long after they have left the theatre. For many people in the New York area who witnessed the attacks up close, it may be too much to handle, even more than eight years later.

Avila, 2010

Others consider it 'exploitative in a way that deserves an article in itself. Put it this way, Coulter, there are over 3000 true stories you could have told, and this film may insult every single one.' (Seymour, 2010)

Some conclusions

Some of these films have tried accurately to portray the events of 9/11 in an honest and realistic manner. Some have used 9/11 to push a political message. However, more recently some films have used 9/11 as a plot twist or as a means of creating emotion in narratives featuring fictional characters. Nevertheless in most cases the audiences going to see these films are totally aware of what they are about to watch due to the marketing and publicity. However in a few cases, and most notably in ***Remember Me,*** the audience has no forewarning that 9/11 will be a key part of the film. This could be very distressing, particularly for the nearly half a million New Yorkers (http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/aug/18/usa.terrorism) suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder because of the unforgettable events of that day. Professor Sturken of New York University argues:

If the Sept. 11 films are being made as commercial enterprises… they are also an important way for 'our various cultures' to work out the meaning of the events behind them. The way these stories are told has much to do with the 'way that we want them preserved.

Timmons, 2006

Pete Turner teaches Film and Media at Bracknell and Wokingham College, and is undertaking a PhD in Film Studies at Oxford Brookes University.

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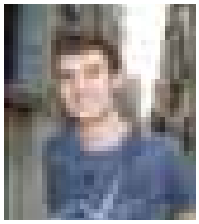
Moving on up: Studying production in Higher Education

September means UCAS time for A2 students, and the agonising decisions about what to study and where, whether there's any future in a Media degree course – and whether you've got any chance of getting onto one. Follow the dream – or settle for something safer? The following articles from current Media undergraduates might help you decide. **Alex Fraser** describes his experiences at Leeds doing Broadcast Journalism; **Tim Hodson** gives the lowdown on Media Production at Lincoln and **Tara Cox** explores law, shorthand and multimedia journalism at Bournemouth.

Alex's story



It's June of Year 12 and suddenly that horrible situation hits you. The looming spectre of UCAS and university are coming straight towards you. What are you going to do with the rest of your life? You don't feel ready for a career yet but still have no idea what to do at university. This is the exact situation that I was in three years ago.

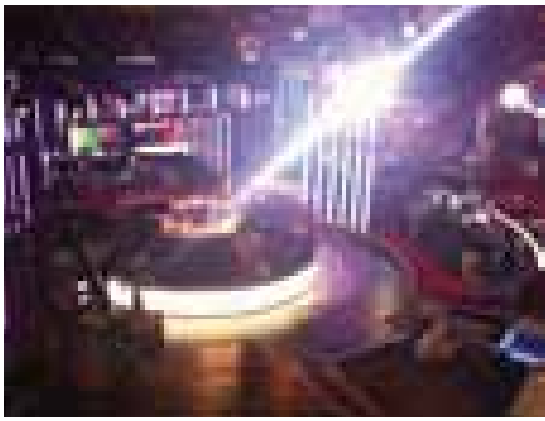
I am now finishing my first year at the **University of Leeds** where I am studying **Broadcast Journalism**. The course is well respected throughout the industry and academia for its mix of both theory and practical skills. It is seen to be one of the best courses in the country of its kind, with over 70% of graduates ending up in the media or news industry. But this comes at a price. As a result of its success the course is heavily oversubscribed – with over 1000 applicants for under 50 places. This same situation is apparent across many different media degree courses. So the question is: how do you make yourself stand out from the crowd during that crucial UCAS stage?

Focus your interest

The decision I took was that if a Media degree was what I wanted to do, then I should decide what my favourite part of the subject was. This is something I would recommend to anybody taking a degree in the field with the aim of breaking into the media industry. The Head of Training at the BBC College of Journalism (www.bbc.co.uk/journalism), **Alex Gerlis**, told my class in a lecture that the organisation

> **...doesn't look too fondly upon a general media degree, but applicants who study specialised degrees in the media are preferred even above Oxbridge graduates**

From this it is clear to see that it's definitely worth thinking hard about the aspect of media you particularly enjoy. For some, that may be camerawork or editing, whereas for others it may be print, online or, like myself, broadcast journalism.



Getting experienced

Once I had picked my field – and before I even thought about searching for courses – I realised that if I wanted to stand out from other candidates, I needed **varied, good quality work experience** in the field that I wished to enter. It's often surprising how even the most distant connections can get you into a media company. Local radio stations, newspapers and television local news are all great places to get an odd day here or there, shadowing staff and seeing what goes on.

Work experience is also crucial in relation to your **personal statement**; using your experiences from media placements to illustrate points in your statement allows you to stand out from other candidates. As far as universities are concerned, all their applicants were probably involved in a sports team, or made a film opening or a music video; but that's not what they really care about. What they are really looking for is passion, commitment and initiative.

Neither is it necessarily about how long your placements are; all mine were relatively short, with the majority just a day at different media organisations. Admission tutors clearly want to see that you have **demonstrated a keen interest** in the subject and work experience backs that up.

So what did I do for work experience myself? My first placement was at BBC Worldwide at White City, West London for ***Gardeners' World*** magazine. Most of the tasks I was given involved researching competitors' magazines and answering readers' letters. Although this may not sound too exciting, I'm positive that this first work experience breakthrough enabled me to get other placements.

From there, I managed to get a day shadowing **chief correspondent Alex Thomson at Channel 4 News**. This gave me experience in a high-pressured news environment. I got a real taste for what the profession is like, and how dramatically things can change across a live news broadcast, which really benefited me and, more importantly, made my personal statement more appealing.

After the hardship of running around studios frantically or (in my case at one stage) answering Alan Titchmarsh's fan mail and composing the finest personal statement known to mankind, the question that you will want to know the answer to is: Is it worth it? Of course it is.

The pay-off

Some politicians will have you believe that going to university is all about making yourself employable for when you graduate; and although that is of course one of its purposes, there are many others. University is a place that will shape many of your experiences for the rest of your life; and certainly for somebody aspiring to go into the news industry, it is a great place to **network and make contacts**.

At Leeds University I currently live with a medical student, a history student, a nanotechnology student, a classics student and a television production student. This demonstrates the variety of people at university you will come into contact with. Most of my friends don't take the same course as me, and the majority are people that I met in the first few days at my halls of residence during Freshers week. So go with no fear, because everybody else is just as nervous as you are when you start.

My course

Perhaps you are wondering what sort of people would study broadcast journalism?

My personal tutor at university describes them as **'nosey news nerds'.**

What I think she means by this is people who are inquisitive, confident and ultimately interested in news and journalism. My classmates on my course come from all kinds of different backgrounds, with some from London, Wales, the Scottish Highlands and (due to the course's very good international reputation), even as far away as Russia and India.

My course is taught from a range of different perspectives and is **multidisciplinary**, consisting of **television, radio and online journalism**. In an average week I usually have about six to eight lectures and around four seminars. In most weeks I also have about two to three hours of practical sessions.

These sessions are usually led by ex-industry professionals, as well as academics. I am taught **Media Law** by a former court reporter for BBC Radio 5 Live, and **Ethics** by the university philosophy department. I study **British Politics** with students who are taking political degrees. A former producer of BBC Radio Four's *Today* programme runs the **Radio Journalism and Audio Editing** aspect of the course and the head of the course is a former News Editor for BBC ***Look North***.

Alongside this, most weeks we have a guest lecture from someone in the media. This year we have been visited by journalists from the BBC College of Journalism, Radio 5 live, CNN, *The Guardian*, Associated Press and other news websites. This wealth of experience from within the industry is a vital part of my course, and is great because it keeps everything current. This has introduced plenty of new concepts to my studies, and has particularly influenced the way in which I now go out looking for news, such as the use of social media including Facebook and Twitter, to find and research stories. Many of the guest lecturers were former students on the course who are now in the industry, so it is clear to see there are paths into the industry from straight after graduation.

Graduates from Broadcast Journalism at Leeds University have gone on to work at Sky News and Sport, BBC News, BBC Sport, CNN, ITV GMTV and Channel 4. One of the most high profile graduates from the course is **Georgie Thompson** who is a presenter for Sky Sports News and host of Sky One's quiz show *A League of their Own*.

But do you actually produce anything?

Many Media A Level students will be keen to know about the practical side of the course. During the first year I have had access to some HD cameras and Avid Media Composer which is used in the industry for editing video. The university also has a television studio equipped with green screen and its own radio studios. From the first term onwards, students are encouraged through regular projects to build up contacts and to be researching potential news stories for radio, online and video projects. This experience has been invaluable to me as I have interviewed a whole host of different people, including Head Teachers, Trade Union officials, Members of Parliament and charity leaders. Other students on my course have spoken to Football Managers, Rugby League players and one student even interviewed former Prime Minister Gordon Brown. The course certainly helps your confidence and your ability to speak to just about anyone.

I am assessed through a variety of different forms, including essays, exams and some practical work, where I have produced radio interviews suitable for broadcast, and currently in a module on video editing, a documentary on a fictional boy band.

Another element of my course that I believe sets it apart from many other media degrees is that there is a **whole module dedicated to a media placement**.

Work experience is at the beginning of the third year of the course, where students are given help to find a placement. This module again is assessed. The university has great links to the BBC. The organisation is relocating some programmes and departments to Salford in nearby Manchester, which is expected to take a lot of students from the course at Leeds, as the organisation looks throughout the North for new and emerging talent.

But that's not all ...

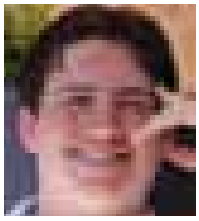
As well as studying, part of what makes university such a rewarding experience and exciting time in your life is the sheer number of things that are going on. Universities are full of many different societies. At Leeds these range from the normal kinds of drama and art-type societies to the bizarre such as LARPing, which means Live Action Role Playing. (Think ***Peepshow*** meets ***World of Warcraft)*** and the IKEA society (for those who enjoy Swedish flat pack furniture.)

At university I am a member of LSTV, which is the student television station where I am a presenter for their live weekly broadcast that goes out online (www.lstv.co.uk) and around campus. There is also a student radio station, LSR, which is very popular. Student radio stations are common across most universities and are great places to develop your interview skills by interviewing fairly high profile people.

Ultimately university should be a chance to develop your skills and meet new and exciting people. So it is worth taking a degree you are sure that will interest you and not feel you must do what anyone else is telling you. Some people will tell you that Media Studies A Level will not be regarded highly by universities and gives you absolutely no chance in the media industry. It is quite clear that this is simply a myth; and as with all subjects, if you work hard you will certainly reap the rewards and be able to transfer the skills you have learnt to any aspect of life or career.

Alex Fraser studied Media at Long Road Sixth Form Centre. He has worked for Apple and now studies Broadcast Journalism at Leeds.

Tim's story



The Media Production course I'm studying is a blast. The workshops are really fun, the seminars are interesting enough and nobody else turns up to the lectures.

The transfer from sixth form to uni was a lot easier than I thought. The skills I had picked up at sixth form college, be it animation, editing, camerawork or essay writing have all helped significantly with my studies at uni. The problem I had was that I had perhaps learned too much at sixth form; for the first few weeks of workshops at Lincoln, we started at a snail's pace, and I felt wildly under-challenged.

As the course progressed, however, we got more challenging work to do and the tasks got more complicated. In the first term, we studied **Digital Media, Script & Screenwriting, and Photography**.

I had used post-production programs such as After Effects for work in the Sixth Form, but never really got the hang of it. My **Digital Media** class at uni allowed me to tackle After Effects and develop my ability to create a better-looking animation. We were told to make two 20 second animated film openings. Apart from being given a title and the names of actors, the project was completely open to interpretation.

Scriptwriting was a whole new experience to me. On the Diploma course in the sixth form we had created films with scripts, but I had never bothered actually writing one. This was a really interesting aspect of the course, but I found it really challenging. The brief was a 5-minute short film, with only one main speaking character, which is harder than it sounds if you haven't done it before. It was fun at the end when we got into groups and had to film them, though. The first year equipment isn't the most amazing, but works very well for what you need.

We also did **Photography** in the first term, and I thought this was good. I already enjoy photography, so I figured I'd be quite good. I was – but I'm not continuing it into the second year.

After Christmas, we swapped modules, and this was a lot of fun. This time round we were doing **Production Planning (Multi-Camera), Design & Visual Communications and Radio & Sound**.

This was the part of the course I was looking forward to most, as I had never done any of the modules before. There were bits I had studied – cameras are the same whether in a TV studio or outside – but the concept was new to me.

For **Radio**, we had to create a 28 minute 'as-live' radio show, which would be recorded and played on **Siren**, the uni's community radio station. This had to include a live interview with a guest, two pieces of music and pre-recorded pieces.

For **Design**, we had to create a press pack, two book covers or a magazine. This wasn't so much fun for me, as design isn't my strong point, but it was quite interesting to see how everyone else worked around the brief.

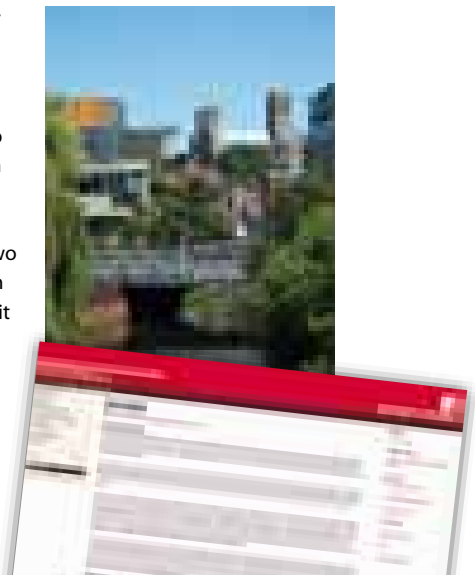
Production Planning was my favourite module by far. We got to use the TV studio to make several short shows in preparation for

a 15-minute children's show at the end of the term. There's so much going on in a studio it's fascinating to be part of, and it's great fun. The studio is a decent size for first years, but I'm looking forward to using a bigger studio next year, as it's much better.

The main thing I dislike about my course is the relatively short week. I had about 12 hours of timetabled lessons, which I just didn't think was enough [Ed: I think Alex has a better deal in Leeds!]. However next year I'm hoping to work on more projects with my course mates outside of uni. Along with many others, I don't like the grading system for the first year. Many people think the first year should just be pass/fail instead of the First, 2:1, 2:2 system they have, as it causes unnecessary stress for students when the actual grade doesn't matter.

My sixth form experience helped me tremendously to adapt and get on at uni. The class size is similar, and the (in)formality of my class at sixth form and at uni is very similar. My Diploma class at sixth form really helped with my confidence and 'people skills', as they made me sit around and make friends. Being with them so much made that easier, and it's a similar thing at uni. Sixth form also gave me opportunities to go and work with/for different people; I had to learn to speak up and be confident in myself when talking to someone I'm going to work for, which gave me the confidence to apply for other work such as ***Dickinson's Real Deal*** and a couple of professional-level short films.

Tim Hodson did the Creative and Media Diploma at Long Road and is now studying Media Production at Lincoln University.



Tara's story

As soon as I saw my course advertised, I was hooked. Journalism had always been a subject I had been interested in, so **Multimedia Journalism at Bournemouth University** sounded perfect. I have always been a hard worker, but college prepared me a lot for university. I was particularly used to working to deadlines, collaborating in a team, and overall progression in teaching and learning. The work I completed on the Creative and Media Diploma was even more useful, because techniques such as editing in Final Cut, filming, interviewing, creating podcasts and the variety of work I produced meant I could transfer all these skills to my university work. The fact that the course was so different was also a huge factor; out of the 100 students on the course, I think I am one of the rare few who had studied the Diploma. I still believe to this day that if I had chosen the normal 4 A Levels route, I would have stood less chance of being accepted.

One of the first things I was told on Enrolment Day was: 'Congratulations for choosing one of the hardest courses at the university!' Little did I realise what they meant . . . . Hearing stories of 2 or 3-day weeks at university with the odd essay here and there, I was admittedly naive. What I didn't expect, however, was the 5-day weeks and the sheer level and complexity of the work I faced. Yes, I had been used to essays, academic writing and media editing, but some of the subjects I've studied have taken the concept of hard work to a whole new level.

Term One

In the first term, I studied **Media Journalism and Society, News, Features, Media Law, and Teeline Shorthand.** News was the most fun; chasing our lecturer down three flights of stairs, across the university and back again, all

to find him in various interview scenarios, was fantastic experience. This was helped further by a writer from Bournemouth's local paper the ***Bournemouth Echo***, and by writing to timed deadlines for assignments. Being sent to interview and vox-pop members of the public was 'different', especially when, as a group of two, we were serenaded by a very old man singing Unchained Melody. **News Journalism** introduced us to writing under different scenarios, and various styles of writing for newspapers and magazines. News Journalism also includes trips to court to sit in on cases, and maybe even practice your shorthand.

Media, Journalism and Society was an interesting and different unit, although not many people turned up to the lectures. Being up at 9am on a Wednesday morning was hard enough, but sometimes presentation slides and in-class debates just got a little too much. This unit included presentations, written essays and critical analysis of a chosen subject, in addition to exploring **globalisation** and the idea of **'New Media'** in today's society. We also all took part in **Media: Unplugged**, where all students attempted to go without any technology – this meant no phone/internet/laptop/TV/radio for 24 hours – and then reflected on our experiences. **Features Journalism** also introduced me to new ways of writing, including creating a layout from a target magazine. It also developed my confidence, due to having to ring and email people for interviews, including the Poole Harbour Master.

Media Law is one of the hardest modules, having to recite black letter law [i.e. the basic principles accepted by the majority of the legal profession and not open to interpretation] 'like a parrot' and quote this in the exams – including **defamation, contempt of court and the PCC/ OFCOM codes of practice**. This helped to know the information I can report, particularly when reporting a story, in court or on a newspaper/ magazine, and in the work of my future career. We also look at up-to-date law cases, including **injunctions, the Human Rights debate and ASBOs.**

Teeline Shorthand is by far the hardest unit. It is similar to a whole new language, and learning to write this at increasing speeds is hard enough, without the looming exams and a 30-unit book to learn in one term. It starts with the alphabet, and increases until you can write practically any word and take notes at 60 words per minute. This increases further to 80 words per minute in the second year, and 100 in the third. The little symbols, theory and speed-building catch up with you soon enough, until you're practising shorthand to songs by artists such as Bob Dylan and Owl City. Needless to say, some faster songs are simply impossible!

Term Two

The second term introduced me to **Public Affairs, TV, Radio, and Online Journalism**. **Public Affairs** (alongside Shorthand) was the most difficult for me. I have never understood government at all, so to learn everything in one term and sit two exams in May seemed impossible. Our lecturer is the Assistant Editor of the ***Bournemouth Echo***, so this helped immensely because he talked us through recent topics in the news and showed us how to integrate these as case studies in our exams. Unfortunately for us, it also meant lectures from 5-7pm every Tuesday and Thursday. To me, this is my dinner time, not lecture time – I often imagined sneaking a Pot Noodle into the back row!

Radio Journalism was a really fun unit, but something I had never thought I would enjoy. I have never been confident with speaking publicly, but radio speech training and working as a team on Radio Newsdays was excellent. I learnt how to present and engage the listener, and on Radio Newsdays we had many roles to choose from, including presenter, sports presenter, entertainment presenter, editor and producer. We also produced a radio package which combined recent news and phone-to-phone interviews – again raising my confidence and presenting skills!

TV Journalism followed. This combined skills from the Radio Journalism unit and those I had previously developed on the Creative and Media Diploma. I had learnt numerous camera skills, shot types etc and confidence with filming and interviews from the Diploma course, and this was enhanced further by the Radio unit and then TV. Due to my Diploma experience I also felt a lot more confident using a camera, unlike other students who were just trying cameras out for the first time. It also helped during editing, as I was able to get my work finished quickly and then help others who were new to Final Cut and were using it for the first time. I had also had experience with interviews and communication, which helped a lot when looking for news stories and finding interviewees.

What I enjoyed most about these modules was the freedom in the projects you could create. I was used to this from the Diploma, which prepared me excellently for the course in terms of production. When producing my Radio package, I was already used to editing audio fairly quickly and easily, especially from working on my Diploma book trailer and music video units – and this really gave me a step up in terms of producing and editing work quickly. I avoided all the mishaps and trial and errors of a first time audio user with the flash mics and editing; the Diploma had prepared me so well for this.

For the TV unit, we had to create a TV package on a news story of our choice – preferably one we had sourced ourselves. Production in terms of Final Cut and After Effects, editing effects/ transitions, and camera rules such as the rule of thirds and the 180 degree rule were all strongly reinforced as a consequence of the Diploma, and therefore I felt much more confident when producing my TV and Radio work.

Online Journalism included blogging, producing online Royal Wedding podcasts and learning how to present news online. We also did a critical analysis of *The Guardian* as a website, and researched world-famous bloggers such as **The Sartorialist** and **Guido Fawkes.**

Professional accreditation

Another great advantage to this course is the accreditation that accompanies it, including qualifications from the **NCTJ (National Council for the Training of Journalists)** the **PTC (Periodicals Training Council)** and the **BTC (Broadcast Training Council)**. In fact, it is suggested that your NCTJ qualifications are almost as important as your degree. In the first year we start by tackling the NCTJ exams in Public Affairs, Media Law and Shorthand – so wish me luck with these!

We are also urged to look for work experience, and have to find six weeks in total for the three years, which is proving difficult. This has shown to me how competitive the journalism industry really is, and just what I am up against. I have always enjoyed writing, so any experience is good experience in my opinion.

Overall, reflecting on the course has made me appreciate how much I enjoy it, despite all the work, stress and exams. While university is one of the hardest things I have ever done, I can say without a doubt that I don't regret it for a second. Come on, the next two years – I'm ready for you!

Tara Cox did the Creative and Media Diploma at Long Road Sixth Form College and is studying Multimedia Journalism at Bournemouth University.

How to make a good online portfolio

Whether you're a photographer, film-maker, illustrator or musician, an online portfolio seems essential if you're intending to struggle your way through today's creative industries. But how exactly do you make an online portfolio? How exactly should you make an online portfolio? Here, two such strugglers – one a web-designer by trade, the other by necessity – give their opinions…

OD:	Name: Owen Davey Occupation: Musician (known as Catgut) website: **www.littlecatgut.com**

CA:	Name: Callum Alden Occupation: Web-designer of the *Leither Magazine* website: **www.leithermagazine.com**

Where do I begin?

CA: Anyone who loves web design will tell you that a website is never finished, and perhaps the same statement applies to the portfolio (of both the on and offline varieties). In both cases, the best way is to **start with a blank sheet of paper**. Bullet point your most prized works, add **'contact info'** and **'social network links'** and there's your web page. At this stage you should actually:

- draw a browser window
- scribble out text boxes and
- grab a new sheet for every additional page.

Base your ideas on what is possible. Look at the tools outlined in this article – at this stage the free (outsourced) 'embeddable' YouTube videos or Flickr galleries should be the most technically advanced elements. Work out how to use them and you're half-way there.

Why bother?

OD: Fundamentally, because you wish your work to be appreciated by more than just an audience of one, right? But think carefully about **why your specific work needs a public forum**, and what you want to gain from it. The most important reason to have an online portfolio (and to start making it now) is because it's the easiest way to forge a connection with both **the public and professional worlds**, and for both those audiences to be demonstrated to one another. You might leave university with a creative degree, but it'll still be your portfolio everyone will look to.

What's in a name?

CA: This is more than just a case of identification. Although Google (which tries to magically index the internet) won't interpret the URL as a representation of the website's content, the user who searches may. It is good to register your own domain and use a clear **URL**. **Leithermagazine.com** is a fine url, and will make for a more consistent **'brand'** when used across all publicity (think social networks). This in turn will boost the relevancy of that URL. To maximise the power of Google, you need links to your site from as many (relevant) pages as possible. A URL can be purchased online instantly with the use of a Paypal account. I'd recommend **lowdot.us** as a cheap and cheerful provider.

OD: Names are important. The cleaner, the better. Even if you use a **consumer network** (a popular subscription or ad-funded website like YouTube) to host your portfolio, at around £15 a year it's worth buying a URL in order to distinguish yourself, even if it leads back to the network. But remember that this is just a **name** you're buying, and *not* server space on which to host your portfolio. That's an altogether more expensive matter, which is another reason why hosting your actual content on YouTube, etc, is a nifty idea. My band name is **Catgut**. Catgut.com/co.uk were already taken, so my next logical step would have been catgutmusic.com. I went with **littlecatgut.com**, because I think it's cuter, but even that distance from the brand (catgut) will have lessened traffic. Of course it's not cool for musicians to think of themselves as brands. However, the alternative is to wait around for a record label to *tell* you that you're a brand.

Who are you trying to impress?

OD: Not yourself, I hope. Remember that you're building a **portfolio**, and not a work of art in itself. The website has a function: to communicate your work. I'm not interested in securing commissions; my main aim is to put bums on seats and cursors into iTunes. So I've designed my own website as a base at which my music videos, which are hosted on **Vimeo**.com (like YouTube, but nicer), can be found and shared, thus creating a 'buzz'.

What's the least you can do?

OD: Restricting your portfolio is one of the most important decisions you can make, and designing something simple is much more difficult than throwing everything into the mix. I know how tempting it is to feel that you have to please everyone. But do think to yourself, literally, 'how little information can I get away with communicating through my portfolio while still exposing my work?'. If you start small , it's so much easier to build up than to start big and reduce in hindsight.

CA: If your reel or back catalogue is too diverse, consider cutting a short mix. Be bold and use this as the first item on your website. From there you can find further info. Keep those contact details accessible. Trust that anyone interested in your work will find their way around the website. Also, if the URL/brand is consistent with your presence on social networks, Google will help visitors find you there too – and in turn they will be directed to the website.

This one's important...

OD: Sever any links from your personal online profiles (i.e. Facebook) to your professional one. A client does *not* expect to see photos of you drunk at the weekend when they google your name. So use an alias for your work, if you can, or **make all personal profiles private** if you work under your real name.

Give and take...

OD: There are no definitive rules for the displaying of your work, just as there are no definitive rules for the work itself. The **interactivity** of your portfolio is something that may change in importance from website-to-website. Littlecatgut.com, for instance, is certainly more like a speech than a conversation, mostly due to my keenness for simplicity. However, I do put a prominent link on every page to Catgut's Facebook profile, where 'likers' can follow a more relaxed, 'bloggish' account of what's happening in the Catgut world and where they can leave messages for myself and others as easily as I can. Facebook, although poppy, seems to me the most logical network from which to outsource my daily 'news', as it's the platform most people use and where my updates will be most easily noticed and shared.

Man the phones...

OD: As time goes on, more and more of us will be using **smartphones and tablets** and whatnot to browse the internet; and it can be a real nuisance to design your website to accommodate the frustratingly inconsistent displays of devises and browsers. My own website, for instance, looks okay on an iPad, structurally unsound on an iPhone, and just lame on Internet Explorer. I don't have answers for this, but just remember that you're making your portfolio to be used by not just yourself, on your particular computer, but by **many people on differing devices**. A simple Google-search will give you websites that let you see how your site looks in different browsers, and it's a good idea to politely borrow other people's devices in order to test out the aesthetic of your site.

CA: Again, developers like YouTube and Vimeo know the future of the web and the way it will be viewed. Another fine reason why it's time-saving to outsource your heavy-duty code to them. If your website is simple in layout, and uses embedded content, you essentially have a team of devotees working day-and-night to make your art more accessible.

The nitty-gritty...

OD: Yes, hmmm, **how exactly does one build a website**? I have smooth-talked friends of much greater technological capability than me to build my websites in the past. It can work, but as reliable as they may be, you can't expect perfection from people whose time you can't pay for. In my opinion **simplicity and updatability** are the most important qualities of an online portfolio; ideally you should learn how to build, update and design your website yourself. Look on the bottom of many portfolios and you may see smallprint, like 'powered by wordpress'. **Wordpress** is **open-source**, which basically means it's a piece of software that's free, both financially and structurally. These downloadable pieces of software are developed by enthusiast communities, and allow you to log into a back-end editing menu and set the styling and content of your website.

CA: **Wordpress** is the best route to take for anyone starting a website, full stop. There are two kinds of websites: those which you buy and host yourself and those that are hosted on 'shared land'. Wordpress.com is a social network that is on shared land, and that's a good thing. Think of it as a serviced apartment block. After signing up to the free service, you're given an empty room in the form of a **customisable blog**. You can choose one from hundreds of **'themes'**, write and display your first text 'post' right away, or embed a slideshow from **Flickr** (using the 'share' button). The same goes with YouTube, etc. It's a serviced apartment, so updates to the wordpress core are dealt with automatically. The cost of the apartment is covered by the landowner, who asks for nothing in return. Though they sell advertising on their website, your blog is ad-free. As you have a lot of neighbours, getting help isn't a problem. A quick search for **'wordpress photography portfolio theme'** will pull up a hundred hand-made (usually free) **templates** that can change the structure of the blog. Adding your purchased URL using wordpress.com's 'domain mapping' ties it altogether.

What's new?

OD: That's what second-time visitors will be asking themselves as they type your address into

their browsers. And sadly, you can't survive on an audience of first-timers. So make at least one aspect of your online portfolio something – like a blog – that is **regularly (weekly, if not daily) updated**. For me, it is my front page, which displays whatever the newest video may be, and my consistently linked-to Facebook page.

Nobody does it better?

OD: Of course there will always be websites that blow yours out of the water. But think about the specifics of *why* they work well, consider whether it would work for you, then try to **steal their ideas**. Nobody owns copyright on presentation.

The content, however...

CA: In terms of copyright, it's best once again to outsource. You won't need to hire a lawyer when you can use a system such as **Creative Commons**, who 'provide a flexible range of protections and freedoms for authors, artists and educators' free and open-source. They'll do little more than an all-excluding **'All Rights Reserved'** notice; but if you are willing to allow visitors to mash-up or build upon your artworks, without commercial gain at your expense, then CC have some very solid, well composed **disclaimers and copyright notices**.

If you're under 30 years old and suspicious of sharing your artistic endeavours on the web, you're in trouble. It will be our generation who will have to redress the piratical nature of unlimited downloads and non-stop 'free' downloadable entertainment. Your website does not have to compete with MTV's loud homepage, nor should it be a clone of some popular indie band's site. This is **an extension of your physical portfolio or recorded work** – it should instill your artwork's **personality**; and if you care about your portfolio then you will find people who care about your art. Caring and respecting artists' individuality will save us from the pirates.

Owen Davey is a freelance journalist and musician.

The MediaMag 10th Anniversary Production Competition!

ARE YOU...

– mad about media production?

– proud of your practical work in video, print, audio or web design?

– making your own media in or out of school/college?

– keen to see your own production work published online?

If you've answered yes to any of these questions, this competition needs YOU!

Competition!

To celebrate our forthcoming 40th issue and 10th birthday, MediaMag is holding a competition for the most creative, competent and impactful productions created by our readers.

The details:

Deadline: Wednesday 1st February 2012

Prizes: Up to four generous prizes for the most inspiring productions across any of the categories listed below, plus online publication for all shortlisted entries in a special web supplement

Entry rules:

1. No set theme or topics – content is completely up to you!
2. You can submit work in any of the following formats:
   - Video – shorts, openings, TV ads, trailers, music videos, docs, animations, etc: Minimum 30-seconds, maximum 4 minutes, saved as a Quicktime or .wmv movie
   - Audio: Maximum 5 minutes, saved as MP3 files
   - Print/web – ads, magazine or newspaper spreads, graphic novels, posters, web pages etc: Maximum 4 pages, in A4 dimensions, saved as PDF.
3. Please keep copyright issues to a minimum and use your own or royalty-free material where possible.
4. Your entry must be accompanied by the official entry form, downloaded from the *MediaMag* website http://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/mm/index.html including:
   – The context of production, and details of your role
   – a 25-word pitch for the production
   – your signature authenticating it as your own work.
5. Entries can be either individual or a group production, in which case the prize will be awarded to the name on the entry form, to be divided among the group.
6. The results: Shortlisted entrants will be informed by email by Wednesday 14th March 2012. Final winners will be published in *MediaMag* 40, the anniversary edition, April 2011, and the shortlisted entries will appear online at the same time.

For further information, Terms and Conditions, and the official entry form, visit http://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/mm/index.html
For further enquiries, email jenny@englishandmedia.co.uk