

APRIL 2012: **PLAY**

MM **edia** magazine

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Playing with the Past: Post-feminism and the Media
Californication: Parody, Profanity and Play
Dead Space & Rockstar Games
Dangerous Games: Play, Pleasure and Panics
Anyone Can Play Guitar
Children's TV
Sky Atlantic: Playing Games with Audiences

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English & Media Centre

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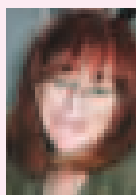
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So what were you doing 10 years ago? Playing *GTA3*, watching *Big Brother*, collecting Eminem memorabilia, playing out, preparing for your SATs tests at school? Here at the English and Media Centre, we were frantically putting together the very first issue of *MediaMagazine*. On pages 3 and 4 you can read about some of the topics and texts we covered – and remind yourself of just how much the media world has changed in the last 10 years.

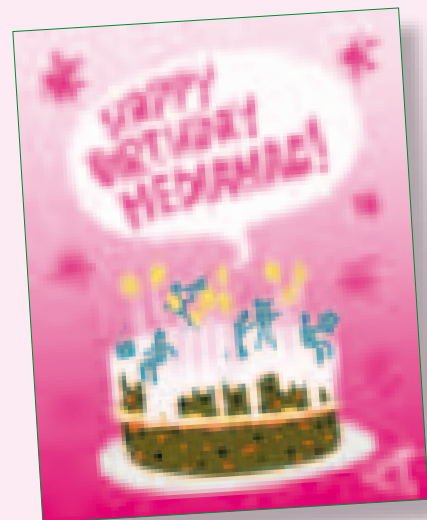
Appropriately enough to celebrate our 10th birthday and 40th issue, *MediaMag* is enjoying some play-time. Once again our writers have taken up our challenge and come up with imaginative, fun and thought-provoking interpretations of 'Play'. Professor David Buckingham kicks things off by suggesting that as media students we should take play seriously and in its own right – not just as a preparation for the real, adult world. Taking up the baton Steph Hendry considers the history of moral panics around play – and asks why it is that popular culture and 'entertainment for the masses' provokes such anxiety. Much play in the twenty-first century centres on video games (the subject of frequent moral panics) and not only among young men, the stereotypical gaming group. A cluster of four articles each take very different angles on gaming play from an analysis of the increasing convergence of film and game to a case study in marketing – fascinating reading, even if you are not a gamer yourself.

By now you should be well aware that play is not just for children, and in two linked articles on children's television, you can both indulge your inner child and discover the serious side of the programmes that keep your younger siblings 'informed, educated and entertained'.

A defining feature of postmodernism is its playfulness and, as Phil Dyas discovers, *Community* lives up to its billing as a postmodern sitcom, teasing its audience with its playful knowingness. Steve Connolly suggests Sky Atlantic is also playing with audiences – albeit with a darker, commercially-driven edge.

Throughout *MediaMag*'s first 40 issues we've foregrounded the role of production work in your courses, in the industry – and in your free or play time. We're endlessly impressed and delighted by the inventiveness of the work students send us for the magazine or for our competitions. Those of you who entered our latest competition have maintained the high standards set by your predecessors and on page 3 you can read all about the shortlisted entries.

Exams loom, revision calls but the sun is shining and with *MediaMagazine*'s 10th birthday issue you have every excuse to indulge in a little 'play' time.



Jenny Grahame

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

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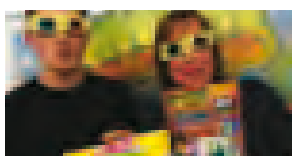
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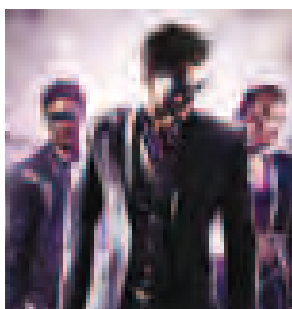
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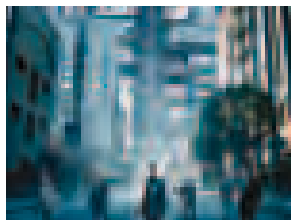
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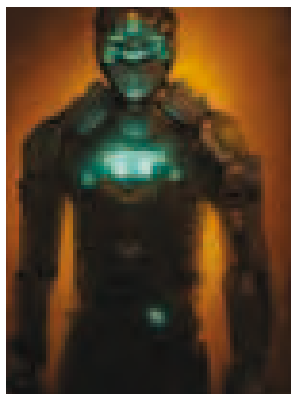
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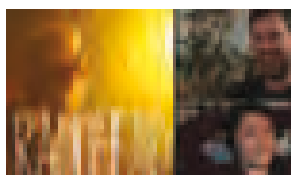
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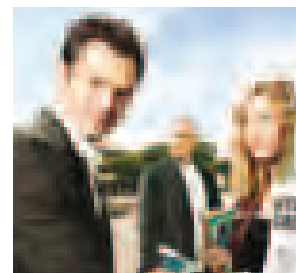
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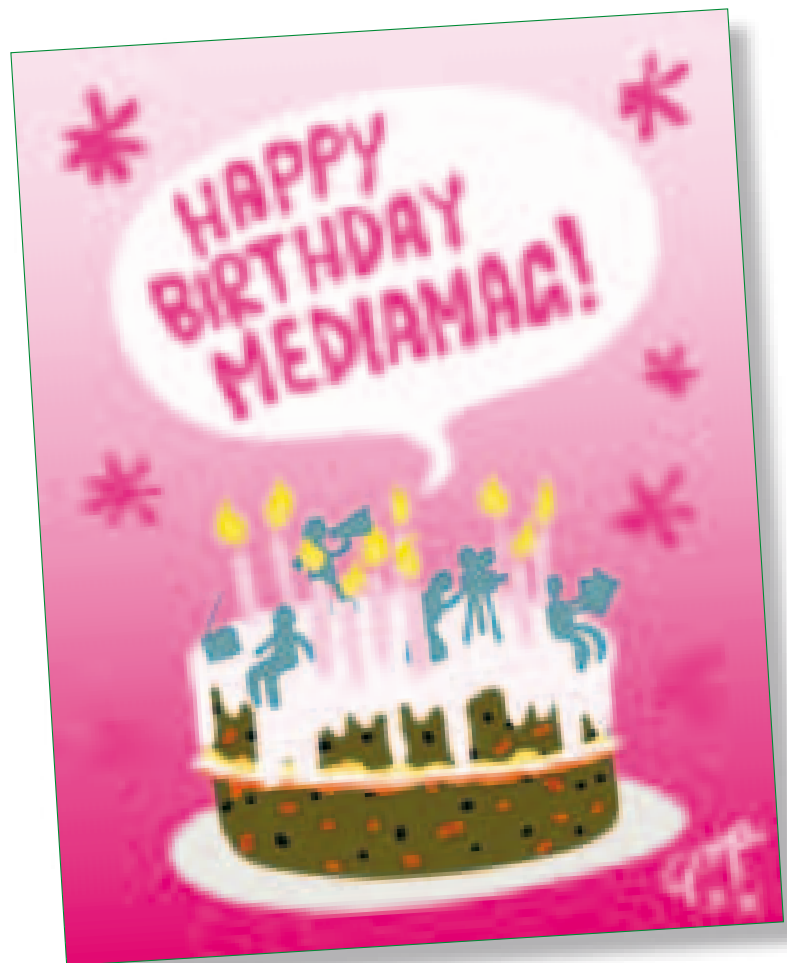
Front Page News

This is **MediaMagazine's** 40th issue – and its 10th birthday. This is may not be of great interest to anyone beyond the **MediaMag** editorial team – except that over the last 10 years the media landscape has changed almost beyond recognition. So what's changed?

In September 2002 ...

- The iPod was in its earliest stages of development.
- **The X Factor** did not yet exist.
- Freeview had not yet launched, and BBC3 did not yet exist.
- The Xbox was new to the UK.
- Facebook was not even a glimmer in Mark Zuckerberg's eye.
- iTunes was not yet born. Nor were HD, 3D, social networking, Twitter, crowd-sourcing, etc.
- **Friends**, **CSI** and **ER** were the top-rated US TV shows; **Big Brother** was in its 3rd series; **The Osbournes** reality show was just starting.
- The Sony Ericson T68i had just been launched as the first ever phone to support Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS).
- The Surrey Police already knew about the hacking of Milly Dowler's phone. It took 9 years for the news to be released.
- **The News of the World** was by far the biggest selling Sunday newspaper, with over 4 million copies sold.
- All quality newspapers were selling almost double their current circulation. The imminent war with Iraq was the subject of wrangling between the major news broadcasters.
- Brits winners for 2002 were Dido, Kylie Minogue, Robbie Williams, Blue, and S Club 7.
- One of the most complained-about ads was an Xbox ad featuring the life cycle from birth to death with the slogan 'Life is short. Play more'. It was withdrawn. Another was for FCUK on account of its language implications.
- The biggest video game controversy was around **Grand Theft Auto 3: Vice City**.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO US!



What was hot – and where is it now?

The first-ever issue of *MediaMag* (2-colour only!) included features on the following:

24 Hour Party People

A preview of Michael Winterbottom's great movie about the Manchester music scene of the 1980s, featuring nostalgic parodies of Joy Division, Happy Mondays et al. Since then, Winterbottom has gone on to make a further 10 movies and a 6-part TV series, covering topics from the plight of Afghan refugees, to adaptations of Thomas Hardy and Tristram Shandy, to Guantanamo Bay.

Biggie and Tupac

Nick Broomfield's edgy doc on the unsolved murders of Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls. The cases were never solved, although evidence points to Suge Knight, head of Death Row Records, with the collusion of the LAPD. Broomfield has made six more doc features, most recently one on Alaskan politician Sarah Palin.

Tony Garnett on The Cops

The legendary veteran of British TV drama on his gritty realist drama series. Still chair of World Productions, he continues to fight for the importance of innovative and risk-taking TV drama. Meanwhile crime drama is still a prime staple on British TV.

Levi's Odyssey

We investigated the then-groundbreaking ad featuring beautiful people crashing through walls, intended to reverse the decline in the sales of Levi's. Recent innovative campaigns have featured Facebook, crowd-sourcing, 'Social Shopping', workwear for Real Workers etc, but have they stopped the decline?

Violence in the media

Professor Martin Barker suggested that the research and debates around media effects on audiences were misleading, partial, unscientific and inaccurate. He also suggested a rethink of the ways we talk about audiences. These arguments continue to the present day.

So, to quote a famous title, 'We've come a long way baby' – or have we?

Johnny



The MediaMag 10th Anniversary Production Competition

Very many thanks to all of you who entered our competition – we've had a fantastic time revelling in your creativity, skill, and imagination. Congratulations to all of you.

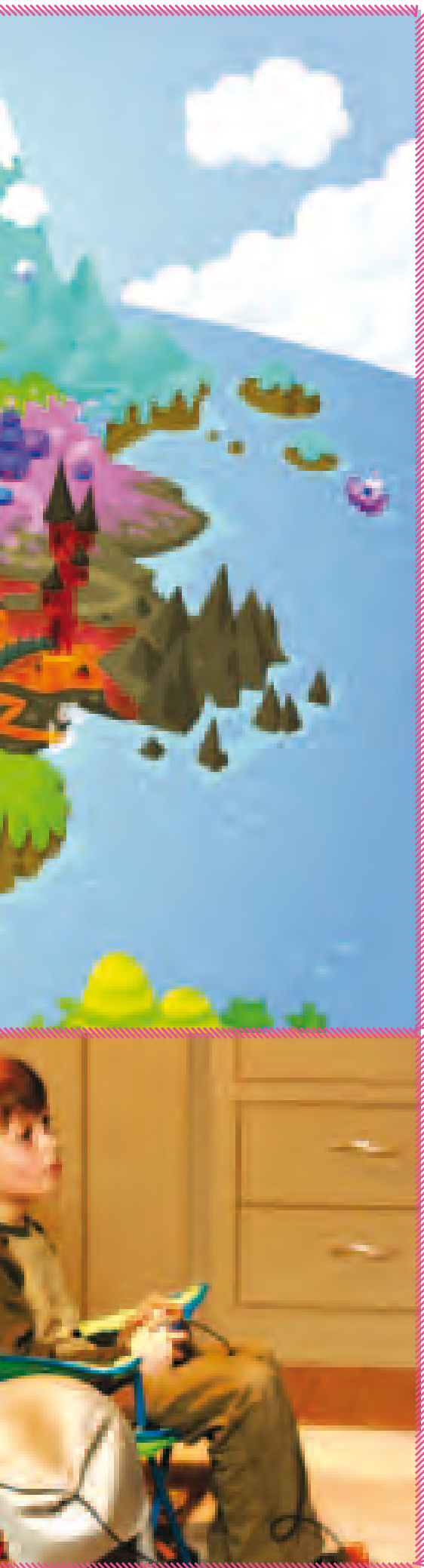
And very special congratulations to the creators of the following shortlisted entries:

- Eva Callard-Waller with Robbie Lardi and Eoin Brogan, the Latymer School, for 'Witchcraft'
- Olivia Cole with James Reader and Frank Tan, the Latymer School, for 'Going Down'
- Charley Packham, Odelia Yu, Jessica Wilson, the Latymer School, for 'Stripper'
- Michael Cassidy, Daniel Sheldon, Adam Romo, the Latymer School, for 'Promises'
- Holly Jade Finlay, Charlie Lindsay, Patch Wadsworth and Oscar Jackson, Hurtwood House, for 'Let You Go'
- Fergus Brown, Imi Holmes and Laura Cheese, Hurtwood House, for 'Climbing Up the Walls'
- Susannah Bradley, King Edward VI Upper School, for 'Post-it'
- Alasdair Gibson, James Peters, and Marcus Allan, Claremont Fan Court School, for 'Firewall'
- Sophie Grieg, Charlie Manton and Catherine Ward-Thomas, Hurtwood House for Blitz
- Amy Watts, Sarah Whichal and Jo Bligh, Hurtwood House for 'Gemini'
- Riley Clements, Claremont Fan Court School, for 'The Great Escape'

The producers of the three winning videos will be invited with family or friends to a special Award event in London in July, with a presentation from our celebrity judge, filmmaker Corin Hardy.







Child's Play?

The View of Media Theory

David Buckingham explores some theoretical and everyday assumptions about the role and meaning of play, and suggests that in terms of the media, there are some adult issues to address.

Play is one of those warm and fuzzy words, like creativity or community. It's difficult to argue against, particularly when it comes to children. We might assert that adults shouldn't be playing about, wasting their time; but when it comes to children, play is almost always seen as healthy, necessary and valuable. Children, it's often argued, **have a basic right to play**.

The idea of play is often used in discussions of media, especially in relation to children – and especially when people want to challenge claims about **harmful effects**. For many, computer games are synonymous with **violence**, while the internet is perceived as being rife with paedophiles, pornography and cyberbullying. Describing these media as **opportunities for play** is a way of challenging 'moral panics', and justifying children's engagements with them.

Play as learning

Such arguments often invoke a particular idea of **play as a focus for learning**. From this perspective, play is an indispensable part of children's development, which helps them





to develop important intellectual and social skills. This is an idea of play that goes back a long way in educational theory, to the work of psychologists like **Jean Piaget** and pioneering educators like **Pestalozzi** and **Montessori**. According to Piaget, play was the work of childhood – a means of exploration, discovery and problem-solving, through which children could learn to cooperate with others and become independent adults.

This is a view of '**play as progress**' – a view that the leading theorist of play, **Brian Sutton Smith**, identifies as one of the '**rheterics of play**'. Yet as Sutton Smith reminds us, there are other rhetorics – other ways of looking at play, and other aspects that might not meet with such general approval. The emphasis on learning results in a rather safe, sanitised view of children's play, which appeals to adults (and perhaps especially to teachers), but doesn't really reflect a lot of what's important for children.

For example, Sutton Smith also talks about **play as frivolous, play as power, play as imaginary** – aspects of play that are not about learning, but about **irrationality** and **subversion**, about **risk** and **danger**, about **conflict** and **destruction** and **violence**. And of course, it's precisely these aspects of children's media use that alarm some adults: these are the aspects they want to control, and if possible eradicate.

Yet rather than trying to justify children's use of media in terms of learning through play, we need to recognise that some of its value comes precisely from the elements of danger and risk that it entails.

Playing Games

In the case of computer games, writers like **Mark Prensky** and **James Gee** argue strongly for this view of 'play as progress'. Far from leading

children to a life of violence and depravity, they see computer games as **a wonderful medium for learning**. They show that game play can involve a whole series of **intellectual skills**, such as **information processing, hypothesis testing and strategic planning**. They claim that game play – not just in 'educational' games, but also in mainstream commercial games – produces much more challenging and authentic forms of learning than traditional forms of education.

It's certainly true that playing computer games does require learning. You could argue that being a successful game-player requires a complex set of skills and knowledge – and a high level of self-discipline. But talking about games just in terms of learning ignores all the other things that are going on: the emotional intensity of play, the feeling of immersion in the game world, the sensation of losing your sense of self, of time and place – not to mention some of the less acceptable aspects, like competition and aggression.

People often make the same argument about chess: learning to solve problems in games will help you to solve problems in life. There's an implication here that **learning in the game will transfer to real life**. Yet this is a claim we should question – not least because it seems to imply that gamers, or indeed chess players, will have fewer problems than the rest of us.

Online Play

Similar arguments are made about online social worlds like **Club Penguin**, **Moshi Monsters** and **Neopets**, which are massively popular with young children; and about online communication, in the form of **social networking, instant messaging**, and so on.

In these online activities, children have



to master the rules and etiquette of quite complicated forms of communication. They can explore aspects of **personal identity** and **relationships** in ways that might not be possible face-to-face. And as with games, much of this learning involves active exploration, discovery and **'learning by doing'** – styles of learning that some argue are much more authentic and engaging than most school learning. According to some educators, these online spaces give kids opportunities to learn **'twenty-first century skills'**, which they need to prepare themselves for adult life.

Here again, the idea of **playful learning** helps to justify something that is often seen as trivial, time-wasting, or positively dangerous. But talking about this in terms of learning means that a fair amount is being left out. In social networks, children are learning the rules of particular kinds of communication; but it's not all about sensible, well-regulated behaviour. There's also a lot of abuse and frivolity and deliberate outrage and

humorous stupidity – and that's why it can be such good fun.

Beyond 'Play as Progress'

This points to the fact that play might well have **important anti-social aspects**. The idea of 'play as progress' – as all about learning – seems to represent it as wholly benign. It ignores the irrational aspects of what's going on, the bits that are unacceptable to adults; and it presents what children do, not in its own terms, but as a kind of preparation for the future.

In trying to move beyond this approach, there are four points to consider:

1. Firstly, we need to question the idea that play is always a free space for self-expression or creativity. This is an idea that's often tied up with sentimental views of the naturalness and spontaneity of childhood: let children be children – let them play!

However, a great deal of play – and certainly all games – involve rules. Rules make play possible;

and although they may be negotiated and reinvented, rules are not wholly determined by children themselves.

Certainly when it comes to media-related play, much of this play is **regulated and constrained – and ultimately produced – by adults**. It's mostly adults who create the spaces in which children play, and the images and media materials they play with. It's adults who buy the things children need to make play possible, and who observe and regulate what they do in those spaces. Play – and indeed childhood itself – is not just a free space in which children naturally and spontaneously invent themselves.

2. Secondly, there is a commercial dimension to this – although this is one of the things that's often missed out in the general celebration of digital media. It is generally the market that makes these experiences available, and also constructs them in particular ways.

This is fairly obvious in the case of games, although it's perhaps less so with social

networking or online worlds. Yet online interaction depends on you conforming to particular templates or structures that limit how you can communicate or represent yourself. These are often tied up with consumerism: we are encouraged to participate by using commercial icons, or in branded spaces. And as we do this, the **Mark Zuckerbergs** of this world are busily gathering information about us that they can sell to other companies who are trying to target us with yet more marketing and advertising.

This isn't necessarily sinister, although it is often much less overt than traditional advertising. However, it does suggest that **commercial interests often define the forms of play that children can engage in**; and children themselves have relatively little say or control in that process.

3. Thirdly, we need to **move beyond the view of play** as somehow always a rehearsal or a preparation for adult life. We need to look at play as a form of pleasurable activity in the here and now – and to look at children for what they are, not just what we hope (or fear) they will become.

That means looking in an unsentimental way at what children are doing – not from the perspective of a worried adult, endlessly concerned that they will be damaged, and seeking to protect them; nor from the perspective of the educator, constantly seeking to assess what they do in terms of what they can learn and hence become better people in the future.

4. Finally, we need to **pay attention to the other aspects of play** – and in particular, we need to remember that a fundamental characteristic of play is precisely that it is 'just pretend'; that it is not real.

So, in thinking about the risks of violent games, or about 'stranger danger' online, we need to recognise that **risk** may well be necessary in terms of learning: children won't learn how to deal with risk if they are always kept away from it. We also need to recognise that the irrational, subversive, fantastic elements of play are often what makes it pleasurable. For better or worse, we need to experience these things, not just in order to learn about them, but also because they're exciting in their own right.

That means paying more attention to **the pleasure of risk** – and, particularly for children, the fascination of sex and violence, which in different ways are often crucial to play. And we need to recognise that historically adults' attempts to police that thrill, to prevent it and contain it, have never been, and are never likely to be, very effective.

Adults at Play

Play used to be seen very much as a children's domain. Yet adults also play – and it may be that digital media are allowing them new opportunities to do so.

The games industry is fond of claiming that the average age of computer gamers is rising all the time: it's now around 30 – and apparently **the largest demographic is middle-aged women playing online puzzle games**. There's also a generation – mainly of men – who grew up with Nintendo and Sega and are still assiduously playing games well into middle age. This market

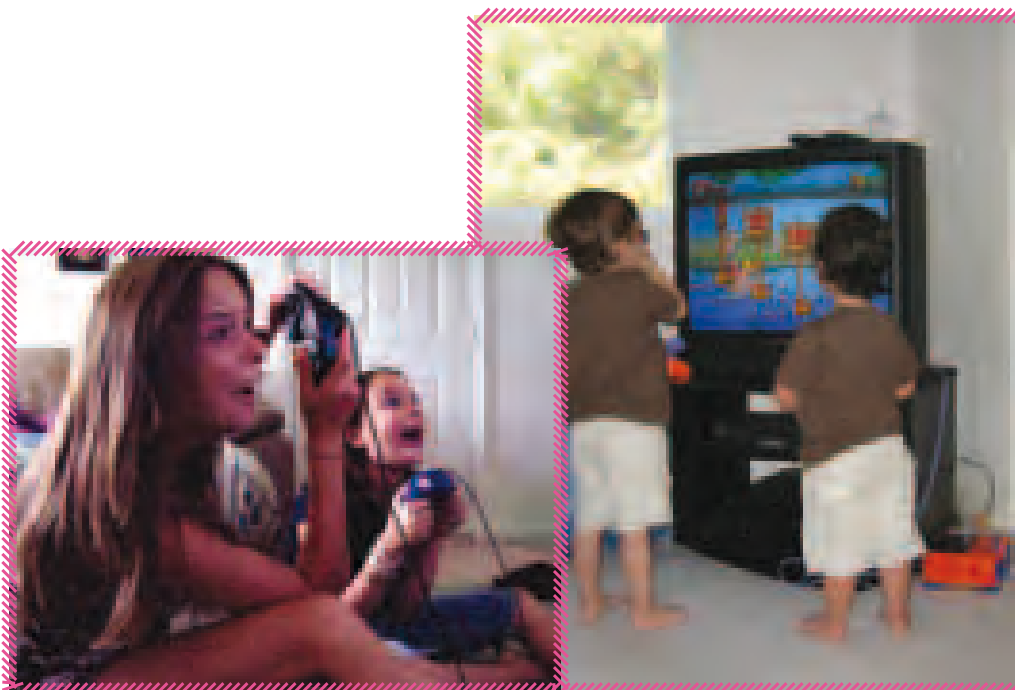
of adult gamers is particularly lucrative, because most blockbuster games are far from cheap to buy. Meanwhile, we've also seen the advent of the Nintendo Wii and other games devices successfully marketed for the whole family.

This could be explained purely in economic terms – that the industry has reached the point where **its core market of adolescent boys has become saturated**; and so it needs to reach out to new markets if it's going to continue to be profitable. This is most obvious with games, but it's also apparent with other digital media. In case of social networking, there is a continuing chase: as adults move in to spaces that used to be dominated by young people (like Facebook), the kids begin to move on.

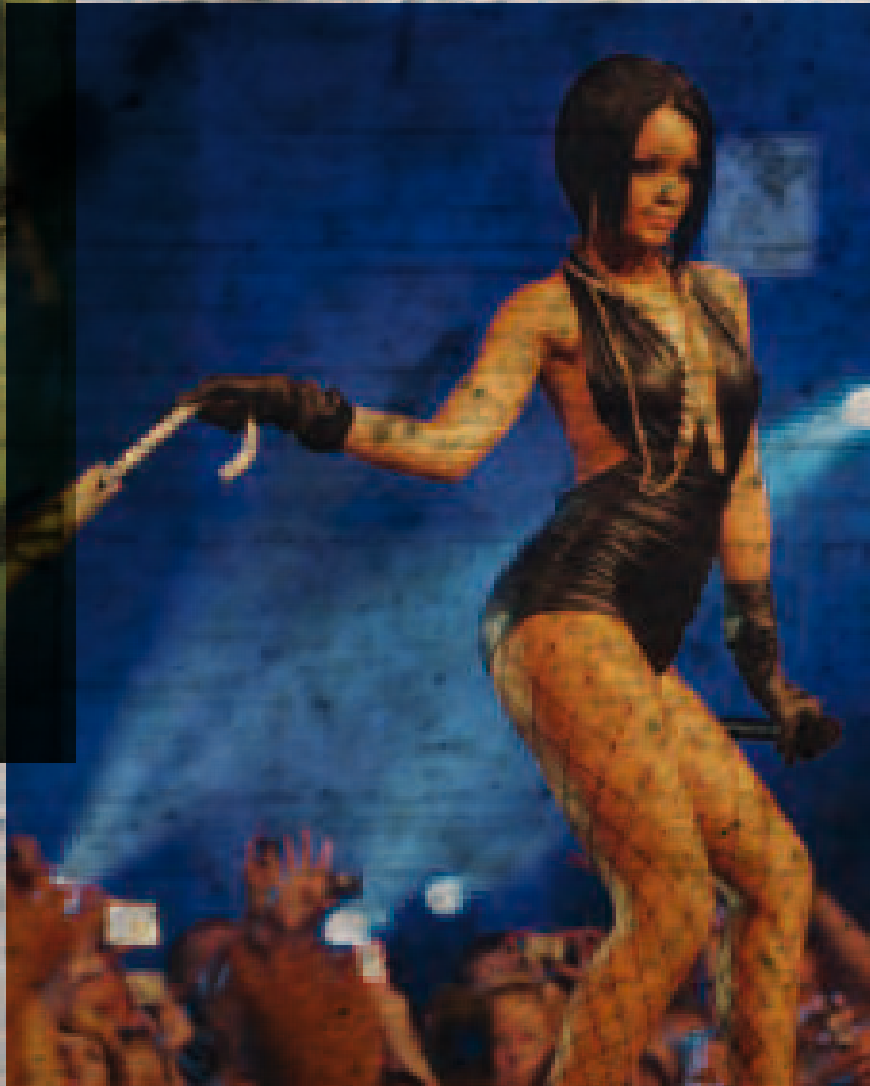
The US historian Gary Cross describes this in very negative terms in his book *Men to Boys: The Making of Modern Immaturity*. He argues that we now have a generation of young men who are never going to grow up and learn to take responsibility; and for him, this is particularly apparent in adult men's obsession with computer games.

However, we might ask whether this apparent **infantilisation** of adults (or of adult men) is anything new – or indeed especially negative. Certainly, some people would see it as a kind of liberation. It's not so much that technology has blurred the distinction between the adult and the child (or perhaps just the man and the boy), but rather that it is giving adults permission to play – and in doing so, it may have offered them a temporary means of escape from some of the boring responsibilities of adulthood. Perhaps 'media play' is no longer just *child's* play...

David Buckingham is Professor of Media and Communications at Loughborough University.



DANGEROUS GAMES





Play, Pleasure and Panics

AQA examiner Steph Hendry considers the long history of public concerns about both the dangers of popular culture and the attempts made to control and sanitise it.

The pursuits of the masses in their leisure time have long been seen as potential sources of social, moral and cultural decline. Many methods of control have been put in place to protect those seen as vulnerable from entertainments that were assumed to be potentially corrupting. In 1807, for example, **Thomas Bowdler** wrote new versions of **Shakespeare** for families, removing passages that were deemed inappropriate either in terms of the content or the language used; while **in the 1940s comic book reading** was seen as deviant and potentially dangerous behaviour, continuing to be pilloried into the 50s and 60s, with a National Union of Teachers campaign against the evils of American imported horror comics. Today the release of a computer game or film still has the potential to generate controversy, and different media forms are monitored, reported on and at times censored should any media text be judged to be inappropriate, too rude, too violent or offensive.

New cultural forms have often been seen as potentially 'dangerous' – especially forms that are radically different from previous ones, or those that use new technologies. In the early days of the cinema, concerns were raised about the images and ideas that Hollywood was offering its steadily growing audience. **The Hays Code** was

in place in Hollywood between the 1930s and 1960s and, even though it was a voluntary code, it managed to restrict filmmaking in ensuring that specific representations were avoided and certain moral values upheld. The representation of 'ministers of religion' could not be comic or villainous and 'excessive and lustful' kissing could not be shown. In Britain we still have the **British Board of Film Classification (BBFC)** which classifies films and often suggests cuts to keep films within certain certification classifications. The BBFC can refuse a classification for a film if it does not fit with current ideas of acceptable taste and decency. A recent example of this was the controversy over **The Human Centipede** series. The second of these films was refused a certificate until 32 cuts were made removing some of the more extreme images of violence.

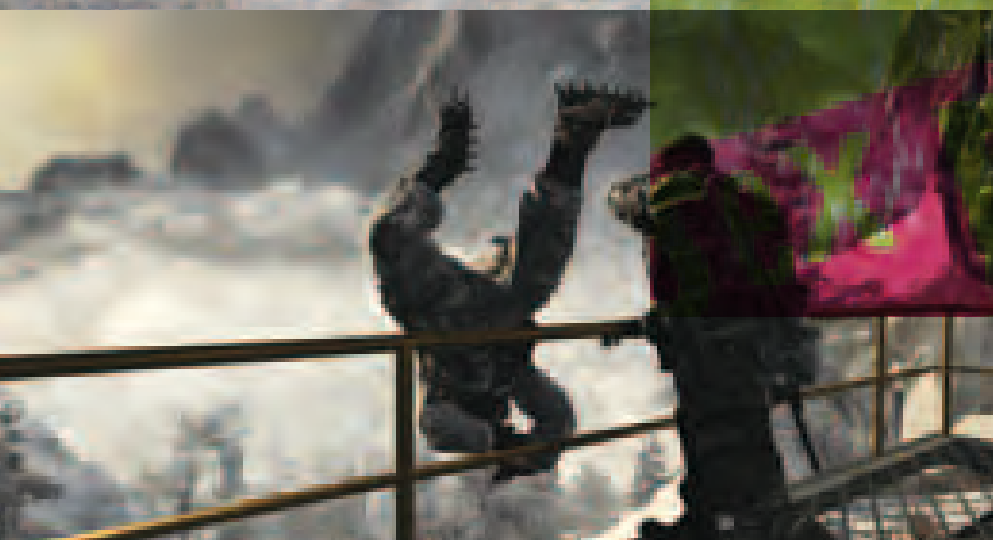
The history of the mass media is littered with examples of **censorship, banning, moral outrage and controversy**. Self-defined guardians of 'moral decency' such as tabloid newspapers, influential pressure groups such as **Media Watch**, highly visible websites like **Mumsnet** and even **Twitter** all seem to focus most often on the same three areas when raising concerns about media texts: **sex, violence and escapist fantasy**.



NEVER MIND THE BOLLOCKS

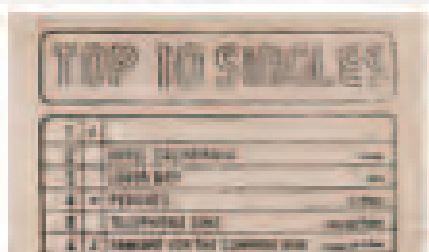
HERE'S THE

PISTOLS



Sex 'n' Drugs 'n' Rock 'n' Roll

Pop music has often been a site for moral panic – particularly regarding **adolescent sexuality**. Rock and Roll's first big star, **Elvis Presley**, was seen to represent subversive sexuality and hedonism by conservative factions in the USA and (albeit to a lesser extent) the UK. Due to public concerns, Presley's performance, specifically his 'gyrating hips' was censored; his **Ed Sullivan Show** performance in 1957 could only be shown from the waist upwards. The **moral panic** that grew around Presley identified a distinct '**generation gap**' – a disconnect between the older and younger generations where the adults simply didn't get young people's culture and the young people saw adults as being 'square' and out of touch. Pop music has returned as a point of controversy many times over the years. Two infamous examples are the omission of **The Sex Pistols** from the singles chart in June 1977. This was the week of the Queen's Silver Jubilee and the week when **God Save the Queen** was the biggest selling single. The published chart listing looked like this...



The omission of a number one single could indicate the concern caused by a song that so actively went against the established order of the day. The Sex Pistols offered an escapist fantasy where the political and social controls of what was a very economically depressed and restricted period were challenged, and a new order was being called for.

A **ban** could sometimes be the best thing to happen to an artist as it would create publicity and generate public attention. In 1984, the Radio One DJ Mike Reid decided to declare 'Relax' by **Frankie Goes to Hollywood** sexually 'inappropriate' for **Radio One** audiences and the BBC subsequently banned the song. The following week it went to number one in the charts and remained there for five weeks, selling over a million copies. It was 1984's second biggest selling single after Live Aid's 'Feed the World'. The ban was soon lifted; but this begs the question as to what people thought would happen if people listened to the sexual innuendo of 'Relax'.

Fear and panic about media texts tends not to bear much logical analysis; the panics generally come from an **irrational fear** which, ironically, is in part generated by the media itself. The fear and panic is often communicated and amplified by the media themselves. In 1985 the **Parental Advisory label** began to appear on CDs and cassettes in an attempt to pre-warn the buying public of troublesome content. Like many bans and restrictions before it, the RIAA parental advisory sticker probably acted as a **marketing tool** generating interest rather than subduing it.

These examples may seem quaint and old fashioned; but music continues to be the site of

modern concerns regarding sexual imagery and behaviour. Artists such as **Rihanna** have been cited as examples of a trend towards the overt sexualisation of pop lyrics and video imagery. It is a similar argument to the one made in the 1950s when Elvis 'shocked the world' – Rihanna was seen as a threat to decency when she performed on **The X Factor** wearing a skimpy outfit in December 2010.

Direct Effect Theory

When looking at some of the responses to controversial media texts it's possible to see the general acceptance of an idea that is based on a largely discredited audience theory – the **hypodermic syringe theory**. This theory claims that the media 'injects' its passive audience members with ideas, values and attitudes that can directly influence behaviour. This simple **cause and effect** perspective of media influence fails to address the complexities that make up the collective audience and indeed its individual members. To assume that people are susceptible to the extent that they can be directly influenced in this way does not give people any credit for personal moral and behavioural decision-making. Clearly some individuals are more easily influenced than others, but the idea that the media can corrupt or be the direct cause of violent behaviour seems actively disproven by the fact that we are not living in a lawless, violent dystopia.

The idea that the media has a direct effect on people is often used by tabloid newspapers and politicians when responding to violent events. Of the many examples often cited are the claims that the music of **Marilyn Manson** and the game **Doom** were to blame for the **Columbine High School shootings**; and that the film **Child's Play** was influential in the murder of Jamie Bulger. A belief in the direct influence of the media led to Oliver Stone being taken to court accused of being responsible for crimes which were allegedly influenced by his film **Natural Born Killers**. The case was dismissed in 2001 when a judge ruled there was insufficient evidence that the filmmaker had 'incited' violent acts by making the film.

This idea that the media is responsible for violence and antisocial behaviour can be seen as **scapegoating** – attempting to apportion blame and reduce a complex problem to a simple solution. Scapegoating suits the simple narratives of both politics and tabloid reporting alike. Both parts of the establishment benefit by providing demons for the public to hate or fear; and they can both look good by adopting a zero tolerance stance against these demons. Tabloids can call for censorship and politicians can reinforce these calls. Both then appear to be acting in the public interest even if the real cause of events such as these is not fully addressed.

The Desensitisation Argument: Horror Violence

Another area of the media that has been demonised many times is the **horror genre**. Since the early days of film horror this genre has created controversy and caused concern as to the effect on the audience of seeing disturbing and violent images. This came to a head when there was a moral panic over the availability of



uncensored and unregulated 'video nasties' in the 1980s.

When home video technology was first available in the 80s, there were no restrictions on the distribution of films on video other than the ones imposed by the film industry itself. Blockbuster films were not available on video (film studios were worried about income loss) and so early video culture was dominated by budget films, many of which were horror films – of varying quality. Many concerns were raised as to the effects that exposure to these ideas and images might have on the viewing audience. Assumptions from the hypodermic syringe theory were made; and once regulation was put in place many films including **Texas Chainsaw Massacre**, **Last House on the Left** and **The Exorcist** were banned from video release.

Even though **direct effect theories are too simplistic**, the horror genre provides some potential evidence that repeated access to types of imagery (and potentially attitudes and ideas too) can cause **desensitisation** in the audience. Put simply, **audiences become used to the type of violence that they access in films** and therefore if they are to experience the same visceral pleasures, the violence needs to increase. Early horror had barely any on-screen violence, and scares were generated through the creation of atmosphere rather than gore. It wasn't until the late 1960s that horror started to become more visceral and literal in the violence it showed. Creaky doors and foggy moors had become cliché and passé at that point, and there has been a slow but steady acceptance of more and more explicitly violent images.

Recently **CGI has replaced physical effects** in modern horror, and so contemporary gore tends to appear more realistic. Audiences are clearly less shocked at the 'shocking images' of horror from previous decades and as the images have become more graphic audiences need more and more visceral experiences to be able to respond with the emotions related to the genre; revulsion, shock and fear. Evidence of this escalation can be seen in the '**torture-porn**' sub-genre with films like **Hostel** and most specifically **Saw** increasing the levels of graphic realism in their imagery in an attempt to continue to shock and horrify their viewers. Some of the images shown on mainstream TV today in series like **CSI** are explicit and gruesome, suggesting that modern audiences are far less likely to be shocked, and providing evidence that we may have become desensitised to violent imagery as we have seen more of it.

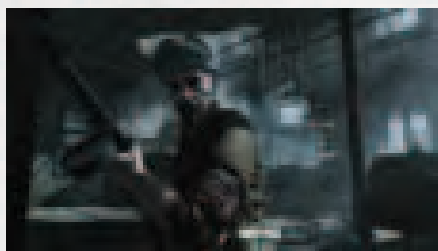
Gaming

The violence of computer/console games has led to bans, restriction of sales through classification, censorship and hundreds (indeed, probably thousands) of panicked articles on the **negative influence games have on their audience**. Amongst other things, games are accused of **reducing attention spans**, **desensitising** young people to violent imagery, **stunting social development** and creating **'anti-social' desires**.

The case for gaming has not been helped by reports of young men dying of exhaustion (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/4137782.stm>) or deep vein thrombosis (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-14350216>) at their PCs whilst gaming – or by the many cases where **real world violence has been linked to gaming culture**. For example, a shooting in Holland in April 2011 was linked to *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* and a French man retaliated against an in-game stabbing by actually stabbing his gaming opponent.

Many research studies have been undertaken in this field. Some findings appear to suggest that games can **heighten** violent traits, **normalise** violent acts and can be a **catalyst** for violence when combined with other factors – personality disorders, environmental pressures etc.

Ferguson's study in the area states that media



texts have a weaker level of influence than the other factors cited whereas **Kooijmanns** gives more credence to the direct influence of gaming on behaviour. Some see gaming quite differently; and there is an argument that violent games can relieve stress and dilute violent impulses as the player acts them out in a safe, non-destructive environment.

Even if researchers cannot agree as to how dangerous gaming may or may not be, what is clear is that the texts that cause most concern are almost invariably **mass media products created with a primary function to entertain mainstream audiences**. High art such as opera, literature and painting is often revered because it is difficult, and requires some form of intellectual engagement. Low art, whether a computer game or a horror film, *The X Factor* or *Pirates of the Caribbean*, is about being both easy to access and creating an emotional response. Cultural products that provide simple entertainment are seen as more dangerous than those products deemed art. Perhaps it is simply **the size of the audience** that causes concern, as these texts will be experienced by more people. However, when looking at the areas that generate moral panics it becomes clear that one of the concerns is the **stimulation of emotion or desire** in this mass audience.

Sex and Violence

The most problematic texts are those that **challenge contemporary social norms**. Sex and violence, as we have seen, are the main problem areas. Overtly sexual representations, imagery and liberal sexual values have the potential to create cultural shockwaves. Much concern has been focused recently on the **sexualisation of young girls** in the media and in society generally. When YouTube accepts videos from pre-teens covering songs by performers who regularly use overt sexuality as a marketing tool, people become uncomfortable and the artists themselves are blamed; but the values of the audience that keeps this market alive are not questioned. Sexualising young females is what the fashion/magazine/beauty industries and advertising 'do'. Sexualising and fetishising youth helps generate low self-esteem around ageing and helps to keep the fashion/beauty industry alive. In addition, the way tabloids report 'outrage' is often questionable. *The Daily Mail* used photographs and screen grabs of *Rihanna* after her *X Factor* performance that ensured that the most 'offensive' images were replicated; and they were clearly intended to provide a voyeuristic sexual pleasure for the audience (whilst they were getting more outraged of course).

The social taboo of taking pleasure in violence could go some way to explain why computer games have been problematic. It is frequently argued that games such as *GTA* encourage consequence-free violence for its own sake through the narrative of the game. Players in these types of games can immerse themselves in the narratives; and the game-play means that they **identify** with the violent protagonists and receive **rewards** for violent actions. Unlike an action film which bases its violence on **'justifiable' motivation** like revenge, survival or saving the family/state etc. the violence in games is largely perceived as **'unjustified'** and presented as fun or just a way to pass the time; it is therefore more likely to be seen as morally reprehensible.

Fantasy

Texts which encourage escape into imaginary fantasy worlds are also seen as potentially dangerous and therefore of concern. The taboo of gratuitous violence can be explained by a discomfort in people receiving pleasure from what would be criminal acts. The fear of the breaking of sexual taboos within media texts speaks of a mainstream sexual morality that does not tally with an audience's expression of sexual desire; but perhaps it is the **fear of the fantastical** that tells us most about the motivations behind moral outrages and panics. Fantasy escapism is imagining the possibility of an **alternative social/political structure** and this has been identified by the Slavonic philosopher and cultural critic **Zizek** as being a pleasurable experience (he uses the term **jouissance**) – especially where reality provides little in the way of pleasure. However, too much consideration of alternatives could be potentially threatening to the status quo, which maintains its power by normalising its own values.

Recently a new demon has risen and communication tools such as Facebook have generated many concerned discussions about

the way people are spending their leisure time. The conservative American social historian **Caitlin Flanagan** in her recent book *Girl Land* has created much online debate by suggesting **that social networking is particularly problematic for girls**. This is because of the social pressures created by the 24/7 'socialising', particularly the peer-pressure and self-esteem issues generated by a world where privacy is practically non-existent. The rise of digital media and new communication tools have also made old forms of censorship and control practically redundant. **Technology** has made controlling people's leisure time much more difficult. If the BBFC refuse a film a certificate or if the BBC ban a song from their playlist, these 'controlled' texts can be accessed in any number of ways regardless. The internet means that **effectively there is no such thing as a 'banned' or 'censored' media text any more**; thus the ability to control the viewing of sexual, violent and fantasy images has largely vanished.

However, this doesn't stop the establishment trying to control. **Julian Assange** has become a well-known figure due to his website **Wikileaks** publishing previously restricted information. Assange was called a 'terrorist' for his actions and is currently involved in unrelated legal proceedings which may see him extradited to Sweden. There is speculation that from there he may be extradited to the US where he could face serious national security charges.

On the 18th Jan 2012 Wikipedia shut itself down for 24 hours in a protest against **SOPA** (the proposed **Stop Online Piracy Act in the USA**) as the site's creators believe that the act would threaten Wikipedia directly and freedom of information on the internet generally. This high-profile protest highlighted the political and legal conflict that is ongoing between some new media producers and governments as restrictions are both put in place and resisted.

If censorship reflects the cultural values of the establishment, then what gets restricted changes as a culture's values alter. The cover for the Beatles' album *Abbey Road* was acceptable in 1969 but has been edited to reflect recent changes in attitudes to smoking (it should be noted this censorship was done in the USA and did not have Apple Record's approval).

Much of the restrictions today are centred on the **flow of information, electronic reproduction, copyright and ownership of digital material**. The 'values' under threat are those based around **profit generation**. History tells us that too much pleasure in our leisure time can strike fear into the heart of mainstream culture – sexual, violent or escapist pleasure has been censored and controlled again and again; but in doing so acceptable versions of these pleasures have been packaged and sold, creating vast profits for those involved. Increasingly we are indulging our leisure time pleasures for free, and away from any form of central control. Dangerous games indeed.

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

Follow it up

Ferguson, C. J.: <http://ideas.time.com/2011/12/07/video-games-dont-make-kids-violent/>

Kooijmans, T.A.: <http://www.personalityresearch.org/papers/kooijmans.html>

Papadopolous, L.: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100418065544/http://homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/Sexualisation-of-young-people.html>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2012/feb/03/girl-land-caitlin-flanagan-review>

On Moral Panics around comics, and much more:

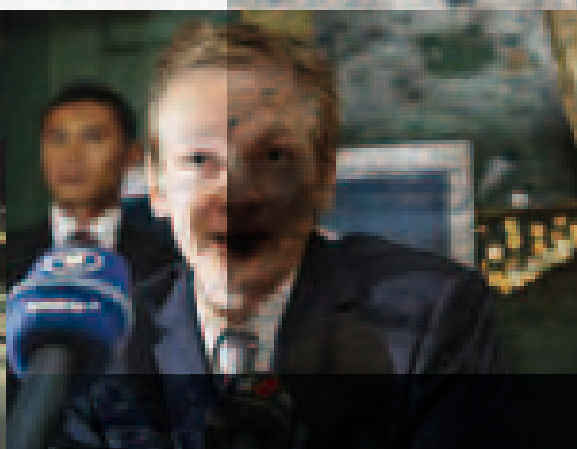
Barker, M.: *Comics: Ideology, Power and the Critics*, Manchester University Press 1989.

On Moral Panics around the media/violence debate:

Barker, M. and Petley, J.: *III Effects*, Routledge, 2001



Abbey Road: 1969 (l)/2003 (r) – Spot the Cultural Difference? Clue: Look at Paul's right hand...





Playing at Parenting

Exec-producing *The World's Strictest Parents* – A conversation with Eve Kay

How do you produce a TV show which exports badly-behaved kids to far-away places to be transformed by traditional parenting with strong values? What are the risks, challenges and rewards? Kate Domaille talks to Eve Kay, the Executive Producer of the award-winning BBC3 show *The World's Strictest Parents*.



At the end of 2011, *The World's Strictest Parents* finished its fourth season on BBC3. It has had a consistent autumn spot in the schedules since 2008. **TwentyTwenty**, the production company responsible for *The World's Strictest Parents* bills it thus:

...[it] takes some of Britain's most obnoxious, materialistic, drug using, education shunning, drink fuelled hedonistic British teenagers abroad, to give them a dose of good old fashioned, traditional parenting.

You all know this programme, surely? It takes British teens and sends them to stay with strict parents in new destinations. Series 4 saw badly-behaved teens turning up in Argentina,

in a Muslim family in Turkey, and at a pair of gay mums' house in South Africa. All of these volunteer parents are determined to change the ways of these lost British teens.

In addition to its popularity with audiences, in December 2011, the production team picked up an Emmy award for the Best Non Scripted Entertainment Series.

But how realistic is this show? It seems to take teenagers who are quite beyond being managed by their parents, and in a short space of time turns them around. I won't be the only person bleating on the BBC blog to ask the question:

Really? Does this programme really turn these teenagers around? REALLY?



EVE KAY: TV Credits

2011 Executive Producer

World's Strictest Parents (TwentyTwenty) for BBC3

2011 Edit Executive

Cookery School for Channel 4

2010 co-exec Producer

Kids in Care for BBC Panorama (Winning the RTS Television Award)

2008 Series Producer

Jamie's Ministry of Food for Channel 4 (RTS Award)

2007 Series Producer

Classical Star, Shine Ltd for BBC2

2007 Series Producer

Badger or Bust for Sky One. Ruth Badger was runner up to *The Apprentice* in 2007 and this programme saw her troubleshooting with businesses down on their luck.

2005 Series Producer

Would you Buy a House with a Stranger for BBC 1/3

2003 Series Producer

Boss Swap, 3x60 for Channel 4 at 9pm. Two bosses swap jobs and run each other's company for two weeks.

2003 Series Producer

Masters and Servants, 4x60 for Channel 4. Families take it in turns to play being the master and then the servant with each other.

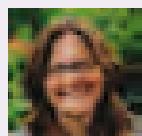
2001 Series Producer

Shipwrecked 3 – 12x30 for Channel 4 & T4 at 6pm Reality teen series filmed in Fiji.

I interviewed the Series Executive Producer **Eve Kay** after she received the award, keen to find out how the programme works.

MM: Can you tell us a bit about yourself and how you came to get this award?

EK: I worked my way into television like most creative professionals, from a low position – a receptionist at a Brixton production company. I gradually built up experience in editing and producing/directing.



My big break came from **RDF Productions**, who hired me as a development researcher, back when the whole company could squeeze into a Mini. Then **Channel 4** commissioned me to develop an idea I had which turned into **Scrapheap Challenge**. I stayed eight years and produced other programmes like **Shipwrecked** which is still screened on Channel 4, and **Boss Swap** (Channel Four, 2003) – a variant on a popular series **Wife Swap**.

I went freelance in 2007 and continued my interest in producing factual programmes – two others of which have won other awards from the Royal Television Society: **Jamie's Ministry of Food**, and in 2010, best current affairs film for an observational one-hour Panorama special, **Kids in Care**, which I co-exec produced. The reality is it's really hard to get started, but once you start building up TV credits, and have an award or two, then you become much more 'saleable'



to production companies. The realities are still that I work across a number of projects in a year and however good the jobs, television is ever-changing and you keep moving forward.

MM: Your role as described in your credits has changed from development researcher, to series producer to executive producer. What do all these titles mean?

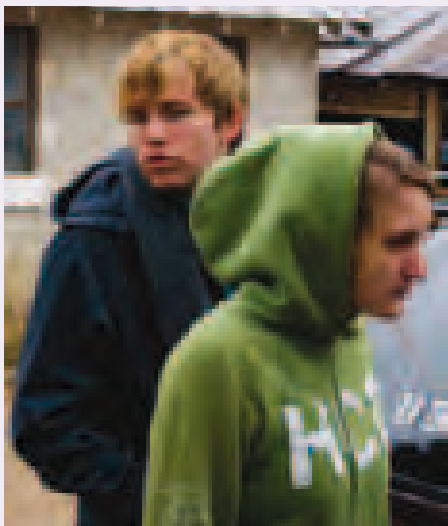
EK: Well, my first real job in TV at RDF was to **develop ideas**. The first one was **Scrapheap Challenge**. This is a great role for one's creative juices, but as many ideas fall on the floor as ever come to the screen. It was a step up to be **producing/directing** on **Shipwrecked** where I had a big role in everything from casting the people to be in the programme, through to getting the equipment out to Fiji. **Producing** is really about the organisational aspects of the programme, ensuring you've got everyone on board and recruited, and that the programme can be made in the most cost-efficient and enjoyable way. This means keeping to a **schedule** and ensuring that the **shoot and edit make it to schedule**. **Editing takes up to ten times longer than shooting** and the vast majority of the work takes place after the shoot, ensuring that a story is told.

A step up to **Series Producer** means overall responsibility for bringing a programme **from conception to completion**; but the original idea for the programme may not

necessarily have been mine – often that has already been established. A series has to have some common reference points and the Series Producer maintains consistency across the series format. You can see that **The World's Strictest Parents** has a **very clear format and set of messages**.

The Executive Producer has overall vision and organises the programme – everything from recruiting into the field, getting assistant producers to work on specific episodes, and other crew including the directors, editors, sound technicians – everything! The important aspect of the Executive Producer role is to realise **the vision for the series**. It's my responsibility to bring the series in **on budget** and in keeping with the **format**.

The World's Strictest Parents Series 1, which aired in 2008, had just five programmes, plus an Update programme. In Series 2 this went up to eight episodes and an update, but by Series 3, it had risen to 10 episodes – and the shoot was out of control. Firstly, I had to look at getting **Series 3 back on track**. This not only involved extensive **editing** of the material that had already been shot, but also required me to ensure the programme got **back on schedule** to go out as expected. Series 4 was much more focused, with six episodes. As you can imagine, recruiting teens, recruiting families, recruiting crews, travelling abroad to unfamiliar destinations and keeping to a schedule, a budget and a vision is challenging!



MM: Why do you think *The World's Strictest Parents* is such a popular programme?

EK: Well, you were right to identify programmes that are similar to it that have been screened in the Noughties, such as *House of Tiny Tearaways*, *Supernanny*, *Brat Camp* and *Who Rules the Roost*.

It could be argued that programmes like this come out of a staple diet in parenting programmes that became popular in the last 20 years, in response to a publicly-aired concern that we have somehow lost control of our young people in this country. This could be traced back to the **Young People's Act of 1989** which suggested that parents' right to make decisions for their young people and control them diminishes as the young people get older.

MM: The Act says: 'As a general rule of law, except in situations that are regulated otherwise by statute, the right to make a decision on any particular matter concerning the child shifts from the parent to the child when the child reaches sufficient maturity to be capable of making up his or her own mind on the matter requiring decision.'

EK: Yes, and that's of course open to interpretation. At the same time as the Young People's Act appears to promote more independence and decision-making, there is a coincidental slow-down in young people living beyond the parental home and by their own means. Consequently we seem to have a problem in this society of **how to manage 'grown-up' young people under our roofs**. Coincidentally there is a concern that teenagers grow up very fast and their desire for 'adult' substances and ways of life **puts a lot of pressure on families**. I think that's why these programmes are so popular: people can either pat themselves on the back that their families aren't so out of control, or hope for a solution and a possible change to the very bad circumstances they've been living in with their teens for a while.

MM: The programme has a very familiar format.

EK: Yes – you can see the set-up straight away. Indeed **the first nine minutes** are always the same. The goal of *World's Strictest Parents* is to **take young people at the peak of a crisis in bad behaviour and mirror that back to them through a different style of parenting**. We meet each of the young people in turn; there's a montage of what their lives are like, and why they seem to be 'out of control', followed briefly by a sorrowful appeal from their parents for change to take place.

This sequence might say something like: **'Meet Georgie – she loves to party'**, with a shot of the girl swigging from a bottle, but it tries not to make a judgement about the behaviour, just to show it. Each young person gets a two-minute introduction, as do their families. The other important establishments in this first nine minutes are the teens meeting each other, the shots at the airport and then the journey to the host family home, so everyone gets a feel of how different it is going to be. The final part of this sequence is the scene where the new family 'establish the rules'. The rest of the programme is an edited sequence of what happens over the week, and is **edited to tell a story about transformation and change**.

One of the principles is that they should be as far removed from what they know as possible. This, in itself, is going to challenge the way they think and behave. They are in an unfamiliar home, an unfamiliar town, governed by different culture and values. That's a lot to think about – it's a lot to think about apart from themselves, which is what they have thought about for so long.

MM: How do you find the young people and parents?

EK: The young people are **self-selected**; they come forward. Our research team make contact with local youth groups, or schools, to identify possible candidates; but the young people have to want to be in the programme. The profile is fairly consistent; they're at least 17 years old, approximately 70% from single parent families and they've been living their lives 'at the edge' for a while. The programme is *not* trying to make a moral commentary; but in nearly all of these cases there has been a crisis in parenting where the relationship has broken down, and where both parties are thoroughly fed up with how they are living. The programme is sympathetic to the struggles of the parents and wants to support them.

MM: You often send them to very affluent families in big houses. This might suggest that their behaviour is affected by whether or not they have access to an en-suite bathroom, something they



wouldn't have back at home?

EK: That point is often made. But what we're trying to do is show young people that their lives could be lived differently; and whilst many of the families are doing well economically, they also have not forgotten where they came from. Part of the process is to try and get the young people **to aspire to be something other than they are**. So, I'd argue that this offers a glimpse out of their situation, and into a possible other world. Often the host families are involved in community work and ensure their children do voluntary work too. It isn't all about them going home and hoping they will get rich; it's about taking back some of the values that have kept their family together, like trust, honour and manners.

MM: How do you find the families? Who would want to host such rude young people?

EK: (laughs) This is the role of the researchers on the programme – but again the **families are self-selected**, from church groups or community organisations. These are families who have **strong views on**

child-rearing and on **how values are communicated**. They have largely had success in their own families, but equally they have faced challenges. So, with one family in Series 4, for example, the mother was in a wheelchair having suffered a serious injury in an accident earlier in her life. She was overcoming a grave situation in her life but still felt that she had much to offer her own family, and to share that with the visiting teens.

MM: There is a big potential for conflict, which is often captured in the programmes shortly after the rules have been read out – how do you ensure this doesn't escalate?

EK: Obviously, this is a key part of the drama and the appeal of the programme. Nobody expects that a plane journey to another country will straight away make them want to change their ways. Nevertheless the programme takes enormous care to ensure that nothing bad happens to them whilst they are away from their own families. This involves a careful process that starts a long way back in pre-production, and the **programme has its own safeguarding officer who**



advises on any issue. It is also part of my role to oversee that the young people are **safe** and the experience is not detrimental to their well-being. They're **carefully vetted for suitability**. They are subject to a **psychological assessment**, and many are rejected as there is far too much going on in their lives and this 'experiment' in alternative parenting is not the answer to their problems.

During their stay, **the production team are present at all times**. We can capture the door-slamming and running down the street on camera because we are actually there.

We do select where they will be sent with great care, and often they don't have the courage to make a bolt for the exit with the first tantrum they have. There *have* been some examples of the conflicts escalating. In Series 4, there was a huge argument between the mother of the host family and the girl, which caused a great deal of upset. But it is resolved later in the programme, as the experience tends to settle and re-focus the minds of the young people. It is as common for us to catch an apology on camera as it is a row.

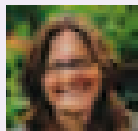
Sometimes the production team have to talk to the participants off-camera and persuade them to keep going with the project. Often they can be brought around by reminding

them of why they wanted to participate in the first place, that they wanted to make a change. The young people have to be at a point where they themselves are becoming tired of their own behaviour and want to change. That's the **willingness to 'take the journey'**. It probably wouldn't work without them being at that stage.

The emphasis across the whole programme is on the **'heroism'** of the parents – both the host parents, for enduring the bad behaviour of strangers, and the 'heroism' of the parents who they've come from. So, each episode does follow a similar format – a **reveal** of their behaviour, a **collision** of values, a **journey** that shows them how they might change, and **the change**. The fact is that the young people do go through that process at different paces and with different impacts. The programme cannot lie that they all reach some kind of epiphany by the end and want to change, but **the camera probably does conceal how complex a process it was to get them there**. One of the most satisfying aspects of the programme is that the young people do return with an intention to change, and the Update programmes that go out at the end of series do record how they have reached some new peace with their families and how some of their very difficult behaviour is changing.

MM: Nevertheless there must be some ethical challenges in there too?

EK: Ensuring the programme stays within child protection law of UK is vital.

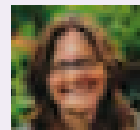


We are putting young people in different cultures where it might be acceptable to use a form of physical restraint or chastisement to control young people. In the UK this isn't allowed, and we take every

precaution to ensure that no young person could be harmed in the making of the programme. Equally, we don't want the host family to be placed in a situation where they feel threatened in any way. It's a delicate balancing act.

MM: There are versions running in the US, Australia, Denmark and Germany – but nobody sends their young people to the UK to get sorted out. Does this mean that there are no strict parents in the UK?

EK: Good question. Perhaps it would be worth



exploring sending inner-city teens to the Shetland Islands, or young people from Bognor Regis to Northern Ireland. Perhaps the concern is that it's not different enough in the UK to effect a change. But good idea! I'll pass it forward!

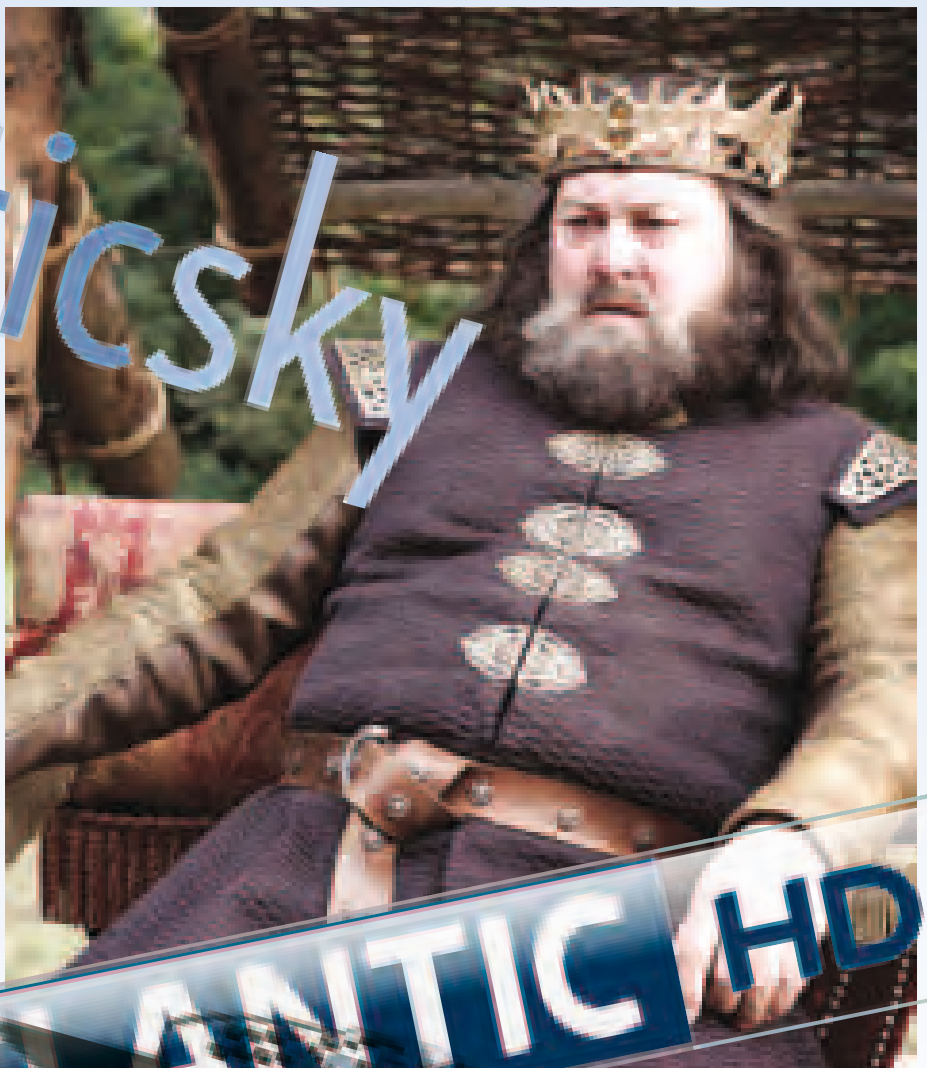
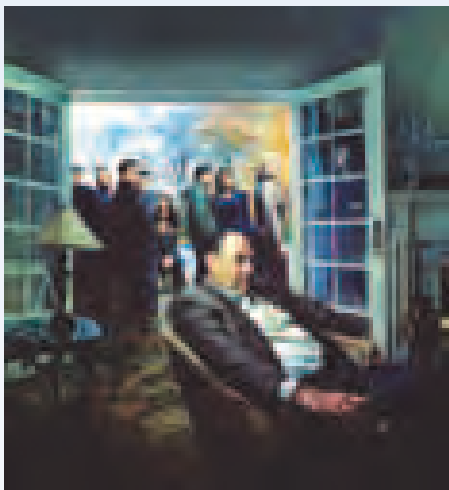
Eve Kay was interviewed by Kate Domaille.

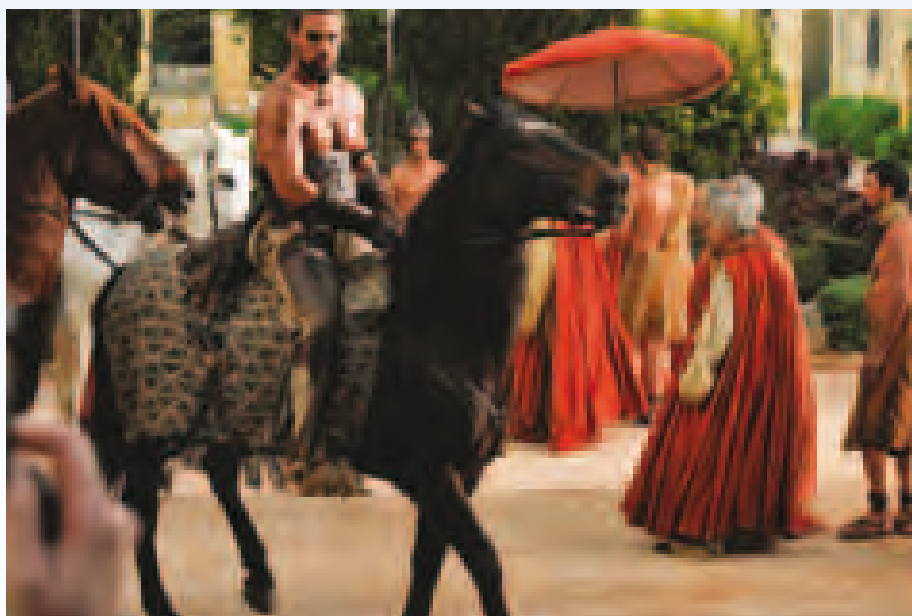
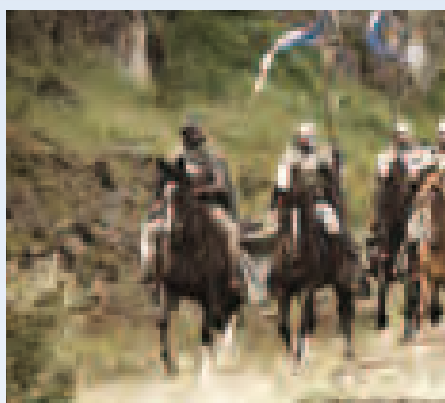
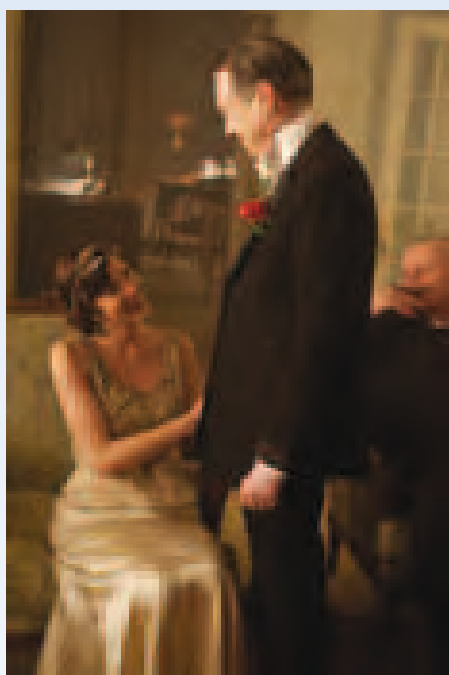
Follow it up

What a brilliant challenge for Media Studies students devising pre-production briefs for programmes in their practical tasks! What would the **The World's Strictest Parents** set in the UK look like? What does 'strict' mean? How would it be enforced? Is there a 'national' element to parenting, or is it familial, cultural, regional?

Playing games with audiences

atlanticsky





Why Sky want you to make the Atlantic Crossing

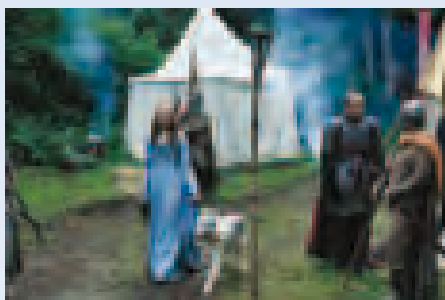
If you're not a Sky subscriber, you're missing out on a wealth of superb US TV drama which has been cunningly kidnapped by Sky Atlantic. Steve Connolly set out to ask why – and learned a great deal about the TV industry and its ruthless approach to audiences.

Imagine a TV channel that showed a seemingly perfect mixture of American drama, with the latest epic dramas such as *Boardwalk Empire* and *Game of Thrones*, alongside classic US series that you might have missed the first time round, such as *The Wire*, *The Sopranos* and even the earliest episodes of *ER* and *The X-Files*. Throw in a bit of new British drama and comedy and see what happens...

You are probably aware that a channel like this does exist already. It is called **Sky Atlantic** and it makes for **an interesting case study into the way the business of TV works**, on both sides of the Atlantic. It also illustrates how TV relies on quite a complex set of business transactions in order to bring audiences what they want (or at least, what they think they want!).

In the year or so that BSkyB's flagship drama channel has been on air, Sky Atlantic seems to have divided audiences. On the one hand, there are those people who love the idea of having all that juicy American drama all in one place and being able to set their Sky+ box to record an entire series at a time and watch it at their leisure. On the other hand, there are those people who see Sky Atlantic as a rather expensive way of





watching a lot of repeats and material that you will be able to get as a DVD box set in the fairly near future anyway. For this second group of people, there are also some implicit criticisms in their view about the way BSkyB makes its money and markets its products. As people studying the media, we need to know why Sky Atlantic divides opinion in the way that it does and what it can tell us about **the relationship between a broadcaster such as BSkyB, its platform (Sky) and the audience** it both reaches and wants to reach.

If we want to understand what is going on with Sky Atlantic, it is important to make some distinctions about it right from the start. Sky Atlantic is a **channel**, which is one of several hundred carried on the Sky **platform**. Both Sky Atlantic and the Sky platform are owned by the **broadcaster** BSkyB. The Sky platform carries BSkyB's own channels (such as Sky Atlantic, Sky 1, Sky Sports 1 etc) as well as other channels (BBC 1, ITV1, etc) who pay a fee (known as a **carriage fee**) to BSkyB so that they can have space on the platform. As an aside, this is a fairly substantial part of BSkyB's income – for example, it currently costs the **BBC around £10m a year** to have their channels on the Sky platform. This may seem like a complicated arrangement, but it has come

about because of **the way that the BBC, a public service broadcaster, and BSkyB a commercial one, co-exist with each other.**

Paying for Exclusivity

The key thing here for audiences is that **Sky Atlantic is a paid-for service**. It is not a free-to-air channel carried on the digital **Freeview** platform and neither, at the time of writing, is it available to Virgin Media customers on their **cable** platform (though there is the suggestion that Virgin will carry it some time in Spring 2012). This means that the only way that you can watch it is if you are a paying Sky customer, in possession of their satellite dish and set-top box. As we shall see, this wouldn't necessarily be a problem if the programmes shown on Sky Atlantic were available elsewhere; but they aren't – owing to the fact that BSkyB has signed several **exclusivity deals** to ensure that people can't see them anywhere else.

So what's on the channel that makes BSkyB think that they can brand a new channel in addition to the ones that they already have? Well, one big selling point is the **exclusivity deal** (there's that term again) that they have signed with **HBO (Home Box Office)** which is an American cable network responsible for a lot of high-end TV dramas such as *The Sopranos*, *The Wire*, *Game of Thrones* and *Boardwalk Empire*. This means, fundamentally, that no other UK broadcaster can now show these programmes. BSkyB have done this deal because they know that audiences will watch these kinds of high-quality dramas, where each episode is effectively a film in its own right, with big name stars (a look at the cast list of *Game of Thrones* is a bit like a Who's Who of British character actors) and several complex story arcs. These audiences might be considered small compared to the scale of terrestrial viewing figures; *Game of Thrones*, for example regularly tops the BARB ratings for the channel, with figures topping out at slightly under a million and a half viewers, not including timeshift or repeats. However, they are clearly significant – or perhaps more correctly, wealthy – enough for Sky to create a channel almost completely dedicated to them.



Chasing a Different Audience

A closer look at these shows themselves, along with some comments made by **Stuart Murphy, the director of programmes for Sky 1 and Sky Atlantic**, point towards the idea that BSkyB are going after an audience that they have previously ignored. At the launch of the channel, Murphy said that:

Sky Atlantic HD is a key part of our strategy to help further grow the content gap between what you can get with Sky, and what you can get elsewhere.

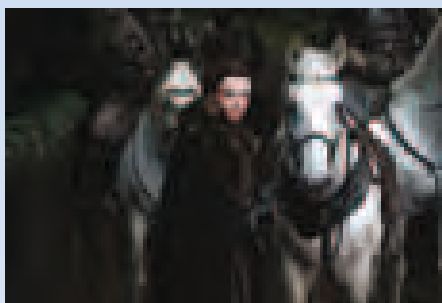
This thinking has been accompanied by the idea that there is a section of the British population who are not yet entirely 'sold' on the idea of Sky. These are older, wealthier people who don't feel catered for by mainstream TV (i.e. they don't want to watch stuff like **The X Factor**) but nor are they attracted by one of the key reasons people might have for subscribing to satellite TV, such as football or movies. The HBO shows, and others such as **The Borgias**, are generally complex, adult, sometimes difficult pieces of work which will appeal to these kinds of people. A show like **The Wire** (widely regarded as one of the greatest pieces of TV ever made) requires its audience to be literate, focused and generally 'stick with it' in order to enjoy what it has to offer; **Keeping up with the Kardashians** it ain't!

The Churn Factor

There are other aspects to BSkyB's tactics here as well though. Market research suggests that **an older and wealthier demographic** is likely to create less 'churn' (the word marketing executives use to describe the effect of people subscribing to a service or product for a short time and then dropping it after a few months for something else). **Churn rates** in cable and satellite TV are particularly high (with many people switching between BSkyB and Virgin Media quite frequently if they are offered a tempting 'new customer deal' for example). By securing **an older and more affluent customer base**, BSkyB are trying to insure against the churn.

This tactic of creating **a high-value, high-quality, subscriber channel**, does raise some questions though. Firstly, there is **the role of the Sky+ box** in all this. It may sound odd to suggest that a piece of technology might have something to do with a particular TV channel, but the opportunity for the viewer to record an entire series of a show and then watch it when they want is quite important here. The kinds of series that Sky Atlantic runs are meant to be watched as **series**. As a result, its greatest competition comes not from any other TV channel, but from the extensive market for DVD box sets which has been growing steadily for the last few years. We could speculate that BSkyB would not have tried to launch Sky Atlantic prior to the launch of the Sky+ box. Without the **Personal Video Recorder (PVR) technology**, people would have been unlikely to want to watch a channel where missing one episode of a flagship programme would have rendered watching the rest of the series meaningless.

Secondly, there is the question of what the channel shows when it is not showing high-end,



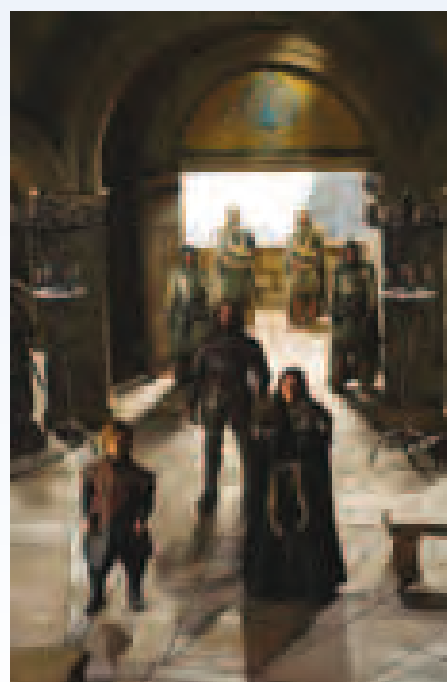
adult TV drama. You couldn't show the extremely swear-y **Sopranos** at 11am when there was a risk of little kids seeing it, for example. The answer is, of course, repeats. Lots and lots of them. This is where the people who have a problem with Sky Atlantic find most of their ammunition. They argue that the whole channel is simply about rebranding a lot of Sky's old content and selling it under a new name to make more money out of it, as well as denying it to viewers on free-to-air channels which don't have the same purchasing power as BSkyB. Additionally, there is the feeling that if audiences move their attentions from homegrown British TV drama to the shiny, expensive stuff on Sky Atlantic, there will be less money, particularly for British commercial channels, to make that homegrown drama.

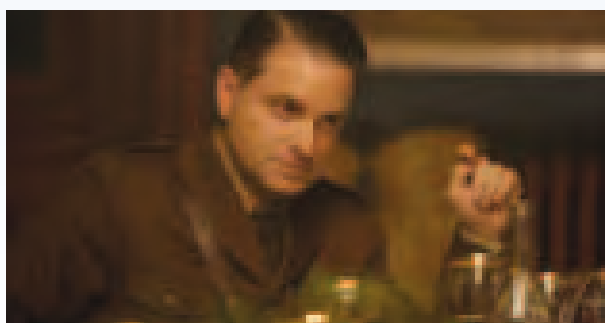
Perhaps the most powerful argument for the critics of BSkyB and Sky Atlantic to use is the fact that, at least on first impressions, **the strategy of having a premium channel chock full of high-quality drama does not seem to be working.**

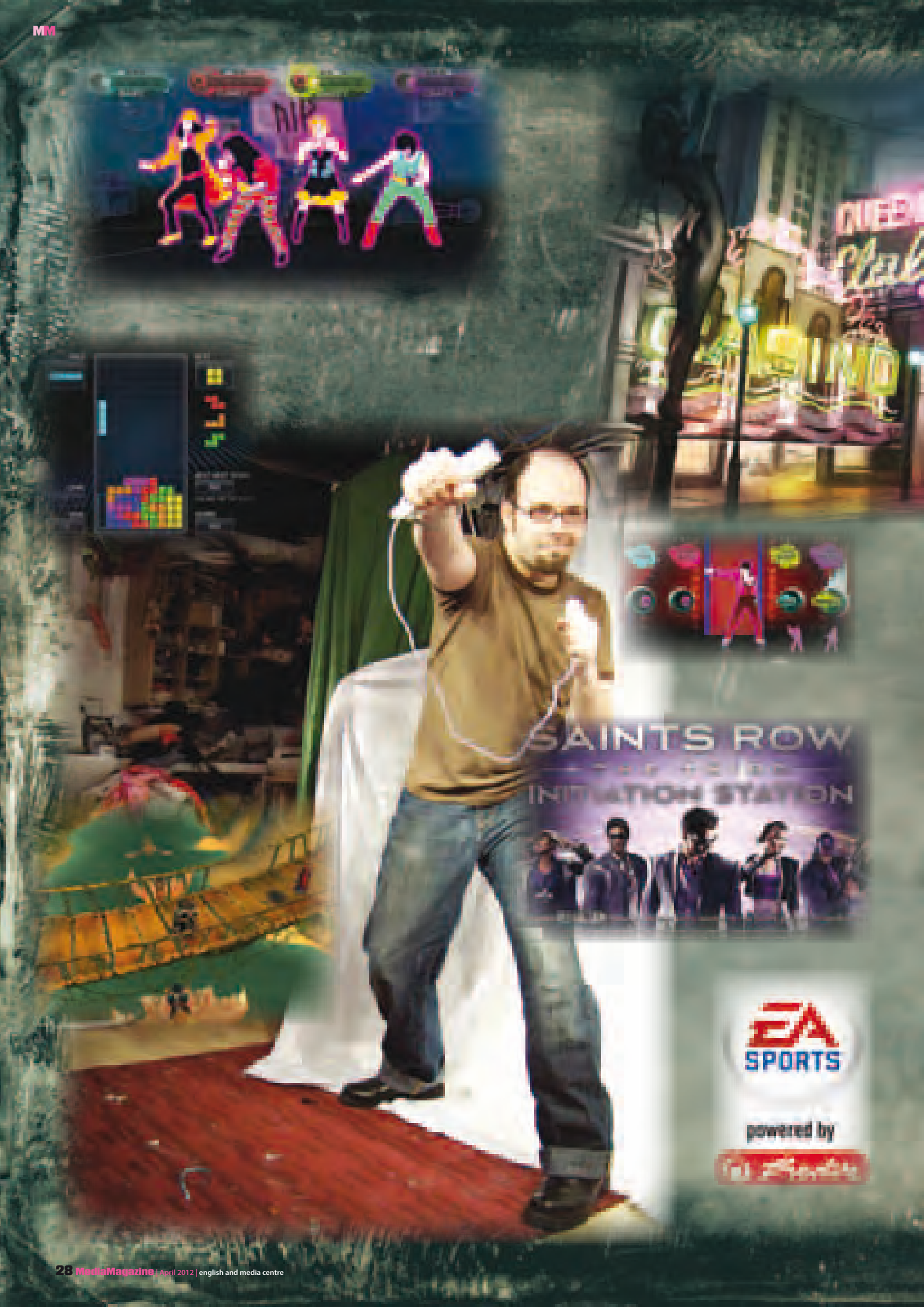
Recent figures suggest that the number of new subscribers to BSkyB is falling, with Sky forced to sell new products and services to existing subscribers – and indeed, one could argue that this is exactly what Sky Atlantic is: an attempt to re-sell quite a lot of stuff that BSkyB owns to people who have already seen it.

So what are we, as Media students, to make of this 'game of audiences'? While it seems that the public's appetite for TV drama has not receded – as demonstrated by the impressive audience figures achieved by **Downton Abbey** and others – there does not seem to be quite the same appetite for what Sky Atlantic offers. A comparison between Sky One and Sky Atlantic, for example, shows that the top viewing figure for a UK drama such as **Mad Dogs**, (around the 1.6 million mark, and at the time of writing, enjoying another series on Sky One) is not dissimilar to those top ratings for, say, **Game of Thrones**. This suggests that Sky Atlantic is attracting **a different audience, rather than a bigger one**, and may be doing the job that BSkyB wants it to do. What is clear is that Sky Atlantic is **a significant weapon in BSkyB's battle to reach a different kind of audience**, and provide something that other broadcasters cannot. However, it remains to be seen whether British audiences want to play that particular game.

Steve Connolly is a former Head of Media Studies and is currently completing his PhD.









THE GREATEST ESCAPE

Why audiences REALLY play video games

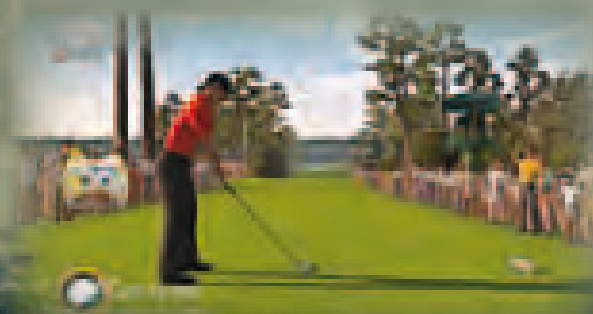
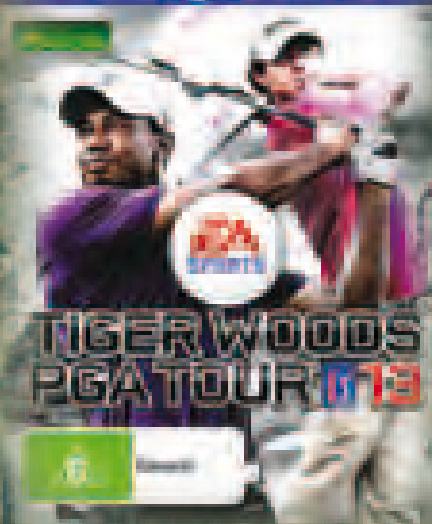
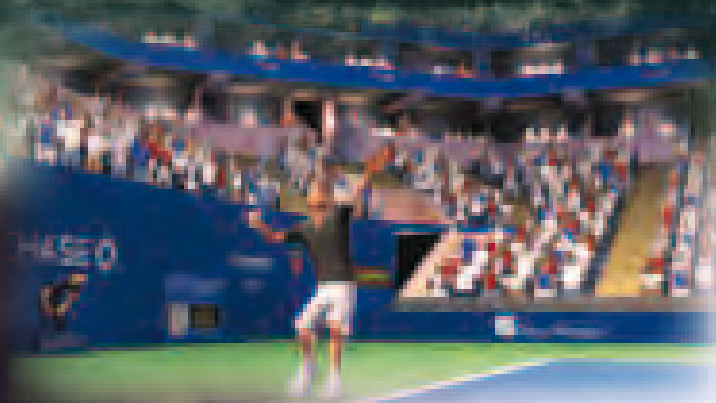
In the first of a series of articles about game play, Steve Kennedy ranges across a variety of game genres and theoretical approaches to considers what's in it for the player.

With the proliferation of games consoles, laptops, iPads and various smartphones it is fair to say that these days most people under the age of 65 will have had some experience of playing video games of one sort or another. However, a growing number of people worldwide of all ages are spending increasing amounts of time playing games. Though difficult to fully establish because of its sheer size and variety, a range of studies put the global gaming audience at between **450-700 million people** with an average **11 hours of gaming per week**.

So gaming is massively popular. Why? What is it that video games offer their audiences? Surely it has to be more than just aimless play!

Conventional media theory such as **Blumler & Katz's uses and gratifications theory** provide rather broad ideas about how fictional texts offer escapism for their audiences, transporting them to a different emotional place and diverting them from the mundanity of their real lives. This article offers a whistlestop tour around some of the video game industry's most popular genres to explore a question often posed during the A Level study of contexts surrounding the Media... **what exactly are all these people escaping from?**

It is at this point that we can start to use less conventional theory tools to unlock the true nature of the ways that audiences use computer games to satisfy un-met needs in their own lives.



Dyer's Utopian Solutions

The first theory worth bringing to bear in unlocking what video games offer is **Richard Dyer's utopian solution theory**. This has a relatively simple premise: entertainment texts offer audiences a utopian or perfect ideal that they can access through media consumption. This 'utopia' is in contrast to the imperfections and difficulties audiences face in their own social lives.

In short, **escapist texts offer quick wins and rewards that fix the gaps in our social and emotional needs**. In real life, clear rewards are rare and much harder fought for.

Applying the Theory: Puzzle Games

Puzzle games are consistently ranked as the **most popular genre of games** with both males and females of all backgrounds, most of whom would not consider themselves gamers.

Tetris is a perfect example. The ordering of random blocks that drop from the top of the screen at increasing rate into rows that disappear once a full row is achieved. Good decision-making is rewarded with points. If poor decisions are made and full rows are not achieved they do not disappear, the screen becomes clogged up with unspent blocks and the game ends when the random falling blocks can no longer enter play.

The key utopian solution that is offered in this game is the audiences' ability to maintain Order over Chaos. By contrast, individuals find themselves managing different priorities and responsibilities in their lives, their families, friends or their workload – with no easy answers. Puzzle games such as Tetris allow audiences to manage a chaotic situation, creating ordered rows with measurable reward – the awarding of points for completed lines and the ability to play on, creating further order out of increasing chaos.

Maslow's Hierarchy

A second theory that offers insight into the needs of video game audiences is the consideration of the human needs of the audience as outlined by **Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of human needs**.

In Western society most of our 'lower order' needs are met: we have food, shelter, we are healthy and we have the support of our families. However, the upper two categories of **self-actualisation** (becoming the best we can be) and the resulting **self-esteem** and praise by others can only be met by individual action and achievement of socially recognised goals. As we explore each genre of games in turn, we will see how computer games offer audiences ways to access these needs easily through play.

Now we have some tools to use, we can apply these to the experiences offered by some of the most successful gaming genres that have dominated the market over the last few years.

The First-Person Shooters (FPS)

First Person Shooters (FPS) such as the record breaking **Call of Duty** or **Halo** series position the player in the body of a militarily capable protagonist, from their point of view using a

range of firearms to eliminate opposition. The player takes the role of a single soldier who is central to the progression of a largely linear narrative that normally involves saving the world or defeating an organisation through their individual acts of tactical heroism.

According to Dyer, the predominantly male audience is offered an **energetic escape from the sedentary lifestyles that most males are involved in their place of education or work**. Likewise this allows male audiences a means of asserting dominance upon a virtual battlefield with their tactical movement and skill in handling virtual weaponry. **The rewarding of this dominant and physically capable behaviour is a means of the audience becoming the most masculine male they can be**. This is a form of masculine self-actualisation.

When the experience is taken online, players can take their virtual selves online and achieve real-world dominance over their friends in a virtual environment. One of the reasons **why computer games are popular with the parents of gamers is the safety of masculine expression it offers their children, compared to the dangers of old fashioned group play** from days gone by – boys used to play 20-a-side football in the street back in the 1950s – it's nothing new. In this way, **online play is offering communal activity in an increasingly fragmented society**.

It is worth considering that the single-player experiences of best-selling action titles such as **Batman: Arkham Asylum** and **Assassin's Creed** offer a very similar experience to a first-person game but from a third person perspective, where the camera is set behind the protagonist.

The Sports Simulation

Simulation games such as the **FIFA Football** series, **EA Sports Golf** or **Formula 1 2011** offer their audiences a way of **participating** in sporting events that they are **consistently positioned to aspire to** within their real lives. Players are positioned to take control of a team or individual sports person to participate in a virtual form of the sport at the highest level.

These games offer their audiences highly realistic verisimilitude of the decision-making processes involved, such as whether to keep the ball on the deck if the pitch is wet, or which golf club to use. The **physical mastery** of a golf swing or taking a free kick is replaced by the relatively simple sequencing of pressing a combination of buttons for specific lengths of time.

This is in great contrast to the actuality of true sporting success. It is said that it takes 10,000 hours of focused practice to achieve mastery of an art, sport or other physical discipline. As a child, David Beckham practised free kicks for hours at a time, shooting and replacing the ball until called in for his tea.

These games offer an intensity of sporting experience that is in opposition to the monotony of unfocused practice that real life normally offers. As these sports are normally male-dominated in the real world, success within these games offer their predominantly male audiences an **affirmation of their gender identity** as they have self-actualised their potential, experiencing







both visual spectacle (scoring a 30-yard volley against Barcelona), and also the **self-esteem boost** for success in creating it.

The Role-playing Game (RPGs) & Massive Multiplayer Online Role-playing Game (MMORPGs)

Role-playing games such as the recent *Elder Scroll V: Skyrim* and the *Dragon Age* series allow the audience to recreate an **alternate persona or avatar** of themselves within some form of science-fiction or fantasy setting. Notably, the character that is created will follow a particular vocation or character class.

This is the type of game where 'Dave from Accounts' has spent 40 game hours becoming a level 20 half-elven wizard armed with a hand crafted spear of ice. As the player progresses through the game's large and **non-linear narrative** they are **rewarded with experience and treasure that will raise the level and capabilities of his ideal self**. Within a conventional role-playing game, their characters' decisions and **moral choices** determine the path through this non-linear narrative.

Gamers play these games because unlike other games, the **character that they create has real consequences** for the narrative journey. The gamer is fully actualising in a world **abundant** in magic or technology, this is in contrast to their own lives where they can effect little change.

In Massive Multiplayer Online Role-playing Games such as *World of Warcraft* the grand narrative arc of the single-player experience is dispensed with as players take their avatar into a shared online realm where they can fully actualise as a citizen of a virtual world **without a demand to complete a narrative quest** unless they choose to. Groups of *World of Warcraft* players were even found to have been playing Bingo.

Sandbox Games

So called because of the ability of players to **freely create situations from a blank canvas environment**, the most popular of these games are the *Grand Theft Auto* and *Saints Row* series.

These games offer players the ability to take control of a relatively normal human being in an massive urban environment, with the options of undertaking criminal missions or behaving in a violent and anti-social manner whilst evading the virtual city's law enforcement in a more **experimental** way.

A typical mission might involve stealing a particular type of car with a reward of in-game cash to spend on items within the game such as weapons or clothing. However, if the character is killed during his misdeeds, then the player starts again in hospital with less money. This offers the **safety** of knowing that they won't really die or be imprisoned, in contrast to the real world.

These games offer their players an **abundance** of wealth as they progress and **participation** within the American underworld that can only otherwise be experienced remotely through Hollywood crime fiction. Masculine dominance and emotional detachment in **committing crimes for the sake of personal gain is rewarded** with notoriety within the story world.

The money that the player earns can then be used to buy a range of items (clothes and guns etc) that allow the gamer to self-actualise and own these items in the virtual world. This is in stark contrast to the gamers' everyday lives, where **actual disparities in living standards in capitalist countries are widening** – the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer.

Motion Controlled Games

With the advent of effective motion-based controllers such as the *Xbox Kinect*, games such as *Just Dance*, *Zumba Fitness* and *Wii Sports* allow players to participate in sports, games or dance contests onscreen by mimicking the physical action required using an infra-red controller or sensor.

As a physical, energetic experience, these games are used in a number of unique ways. Zumba Fitness can be used as a private motivational tool to participate in a **physical activity – but without the public embarrassment** of going to the gym. This is especially important for mainstream female audiences where being slim and toned

reinforcing dominant ideas of feminine beauty and desirable behaviour.

On the other hand, *Just Dance* and *Wii Sports* titles are often used as **competitive, communal party games that invite observation**. In *Wii Sports* it might be an archery contest or in *Just Dance* a 'dance-off' to popular hits against a friend. Whether competing with friends or alone, the experience of trying to match physical performance with an onscreen goal offers the gamer the ability to test themselves and rate their performance. This is a **source of self-esteem** if they achieve a suitable standard. The recognition and **acceptance of their peers through a group gaming activity** also taps into their needs for **love and belonging**.

The Overview

To sum up, the theories we have applied in this whistle-stop tour of the most popular gaming genres offers an interesting insight as to how the theories of Dyer and Maslow could be applied to gaming texts. This is by no means exhaustive, as even the games mentioned offer subtle elements from other gaming genres and the pleasures that come with them. Each game is an incredibly rich text that is deserving of further study... if you can get away with calling it that.

Steve Kennedy teaches Media Studies at Alexandra Park School.

Follow it up

Dyer, R.: *Only Entertainment*, Routledge, London, 1992.

<http://videogamewriters.com/psych-study-finds-gamers-play-their-ideal-selves-18763>
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http://socialscience.stow.ac.uk/psychology/psych_A/george/maslow.htm Checked 20/11/12



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OF THE WORLDS

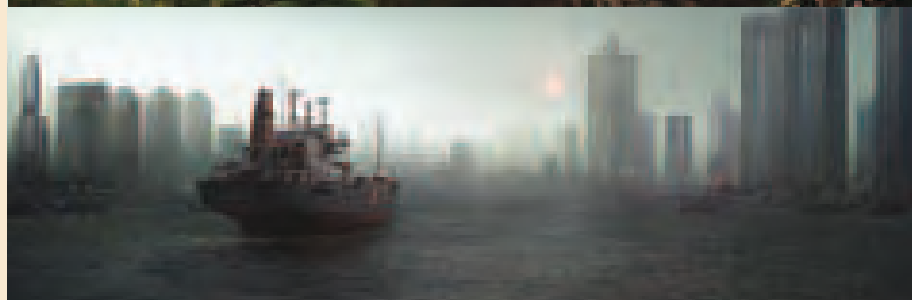
The convergence of films and games

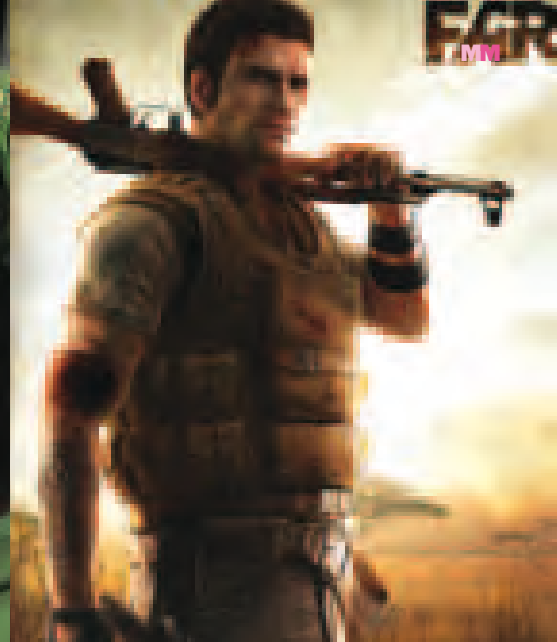
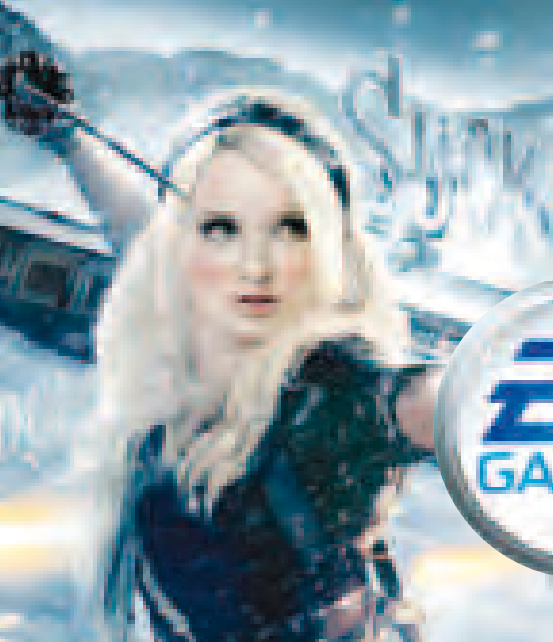
The parallels between the worlds of film and of video games have never been more marked. In recent years the two forms have adapted to each other's styles, with film narratives such as *Inception* conceptually structured around levels of a mission, while the newest games increasingly offer the experience of interactive movies. Michael Ewins explores this interesting cross-over and wonders where we will go next.

In September 2005 Parisian games developer **Quantic Dream** released *Fahrenheit*, a third-person thriller which employed motion-capture technology, context-sensitive controls and quick-time play events to create the **world's first interactive movie**. Rhythmically cutting between four playable characters (and therefore four different perspectives) this innovative gameplay style required players to assess their environment and make split-second decisions to pivot the story in entirely different directions.

The game marked a conscious shift toward narrative-driven drama within the industry, and as the next generation of consoles established themselves on the market it became clear that video games were beginning to take a more cinematic approach to storytelling; *Fahrenheit's* Lynchian overtones are complemented by an Angelo Badalamenti score.

Fast-forward five years and Quantic Dream have released *Heavy Rain* for the **PS3**, employing Wii-influenced **Move** technology to allow the player unprecedented access into the game world – literally allowing for their physical movements and intellectual calculation to impact the direction of the plot. It'll come as no surprise to learn that **Warner Bros.** are fast-tracking a movie adaptation, set for 2014. But are the





movies already a step behind Quantic Dream's breakthrough?

Indeed, not content with churning out endless adaptations – everything from *Super Mario Bros.* (Jankel, Morton, 1993) to *Dead Or Alive* (Yuen, 2006) – it seems that Hollywood is now mass-producing video games for the multiplex, and compromising great stories along the way.

Inception

Consider **Christopher Nolan's** sci-fi blockbuster *Inception* (2010), in which dream thief Cobb (Leonardo DiCaprio) recruits an eclectic crew to invade the mind of corporate heir Robert Fischer (Cillian Murphy), and plant an idea which will lead to the liquidation of his father's energy company. This concept allows for **different layers of reality** to be engaged with at the same time, each containing a specific set of goals to be completed. Nolan's screenplay is entirely expository, functioning as a kind of **in-film instruction manual** which checklists the various achievements available in each level. Scenes of the team formulating the heist essentially perform as **cut-scenes**, and Ariadne (Ellen Page) acts as the **training icon**, ensuring that we're keeping up with how to proceed through each mission ('**wait, whose subconscious are we going into?**'). The action itself – Fischer's kidnapping, the hotel chase and snowy HQ siege – forms the basic **mission structure**.

Sucker Punch

The same deconstruction applies to *Sucker Punch* (2011), a fetishistic fantasy conjured by writer/director **Zack Snyder**. Much like **American McGee's Alice** video game series which warps Lewis Carroll's popular fairy-tale, the plot here finds a female protagonist institutionalised and imagining an outlandish underworld to cope with emotional torment. McGee's macabre masterpiece succeeded in genuinely empowering the Gothic, dollied-up Alice by allowing the character strengths key to her personality, but Snyder's ingénues are mere cardboard cutouts, arranged in schoolgirl and burlesque costumes. His unchecked imagination finds them battling WWII zombies and fire-breathing dragons, with each 'interlude' posing a different task to be

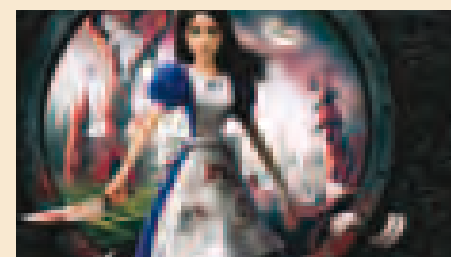
completed. The training icon here is Scott Glenn's Wise Man, who instructs the girls that they **will need to find five items... a map... then fire... then a knife... and a key. The fifth thing is a mystery.**

The cut-scenes here illustrate the girl's trials in Lennox House, and the gameplay has them squaring off against myriad mythic foes (recalling *Resident Evil*, *Ninja Gaiden* and *Dragon Age*).

Changing Narratives

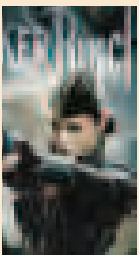
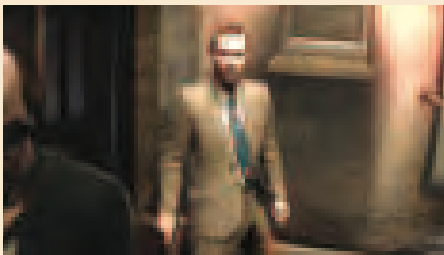
In the years since *Fahrenheit*, cinema has made an unusual effort to distance itself from narrative, instead building stories around **set-pieces** (or as we would call them **levels**). With a gap left in the market, video game developers have stolen many a great tale from under Hollywood's nose, and every effort made to adapt one – the recent *Max Payne* (Moore, 2008), for example – has been a royal stuff-up.

It's true that games have always strived for the feel of cinema. I remember playing *Chase The Express* as an eager pre-teen and thinking how cool it was to control the lone soldier caught amid a train siege. Even at their crudest, games have sought to replicate the thrills of a cinematic adventure like *Die Hard* (McTiernan, 1988), but personally I don't see them attempting to become movies – I think they're trying to fill in the narrative gaps that movies just don't have time to consider. I'm thinking particularly of *Far Cry 2*, which pits the player into the middle of an African nation consumed by civil war. In cinema the protagonist would be tasked with bringing down the oppressive regime, and within a 120-minute timeframe they would do so – and the focus must always be on action, as within this constrained timeframe there is little room for politics or character development. The game features a real-time day/night cycle, genuine weapon degradation and no **HUD (Heads-Up Display)** to guide the player, instead demanding a crinkly old paper map be used to get from Point A to Point B. In so many action movies we see the character outnumbered and outgunned, forced to improvise in impossible scenarios. We know they'll always make it. But in *Far Cry 2* tension is established for the fact that you are tasked with improvising, scouting out each location, finding the best place to strike and ensuring that you



have enough ammo to down every thug in the guerrilla camp. Firefights are not coordinated in a linear fashion – if you run out of ammo you have to hide and hunt out more, or in a worst case scenario retreat and be hunted by those you sought to destroy. This is the sort of experience that only video games can provide, and in this sense it's arguable that they have overtaken movies not only in the storytelling stakes, but also in atmosphere and immersion...

To illustrate the point further I'll focus on *Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days*, a gritty, plot-heavy shooter with as much psychological depth and visceral action as any Hollywood thriller. The cinematic reference point would be **Michael Mann**, whose grain-filled digital aesthetic is beautifully recreated to paint the neon-lit dystopia of Shanghai. Throughout the game (and not only in cut-scenes) **shaky-cam, lens flare, soft focus and piercing sound design** are employed to amplify the experience, pinning the player into the middle of each firefight. The L2 button makes Lynch sprint through the landscape with the camera tracking breathlessly behind, blurring perspective and creating a kind of head-rush effect, like the acid fusion of **Wong Kar-wai** and **Tony Scott**. Suddenly the camera takes each corner with an increased and unpredictable velocity, with rogue light and blood specks ensuring that every part of the world feels real. So many contemporary action movies employ the



same effects, but rapid-fire editing disorients the viewer and displaces them from the geography of the firefight. *Dog Days* succeeds because there's a **constant third-person focus** and we control its line of sight – **we are the film crew, essentially**, pulling the director's vision into a coherent whole.

And Now ... the Moral Panic

Let's also consider the bigger picture – video games have irrevocably succeeded movies as the media's pitchfork topic, constantly decried as the source of society's moral decay. I remember the uproar surrounding *Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, and the *Newsnight* edition where journalist **Paul Morley** levelled the charge of **bloodthirst without consequence** at the game and its players. But the same charge could be levelled at the FPS tie-in to *Quantum Of Solace* (the film is also referenced in this edition by **Maxa Zoller**, who notes the narrative structure as being 'replaced by levels'), developed by *Call Of Duty* provocateurs **Treyarch**. The 12-rated Bond game features markedly less gore but the same level of intensified combat, guiding the player through loosely connected set-pieces in which the sole aim is to slaughter scores of faceless targets.

Film critic/author **Mark Kermode** used the game's release to draw a parallel between video game controversy and the video nasties. Indeed, the **politics of gaming and cinema** have

become almost interchangeable. **Rockstar's Manhunt** was banned in Australia, New Zealand and Germany for the charge of sensationalising violence and indulging torture – but what authorities missed was the game's Orwellian temper, with an omnipresent dictator (an ex-film director) forcing the player through a series of 'scenes' for his snuff film. The repugnant acts of violence, rated on a 1-5 scale for audience satisfaction, is clearly mocking of a Big Brother culture, and the game's bleak social commentary means that the violence is supposed to be barbaric – our emotional investment depends on it. Largely misunderstood, the game was even removed from UK GAME shelves in 2004 when it was implicated in the murder of Stefan Pakeerah – recalling the earlier blame of *Child's Play 3* (Bender, 1991) in the torture and murder of James Bulger. Both game and film were eventually rejected as substantial evidence.

It seems that nowadays the film-going public are much more accepting of violence in cinema, with most 12A titles containing quite harsh and impactful action (*The Dark Knight's* pencil-in-eye-gouging springs to mind). But games come under scrutiny for their interactivity with violence, and therefore **the idea that they implicate us – the player – in crime and decadence**. The defenders of *Modern Warfare* face the same opposition as supporters of *The Evil Dead* (Raimi, 1981) did back in the early 80s, when a series of gory slayers found themselves on trial for obscenity and – laughably – the potential to corrupt a majority of their audience. This led to the creation of the **Video Recordings Act 1984**, which decreed that all films distributed for home entertainment must be classified appropriately, and stickered with a corresponding rating by the BBFC (British Board of Film Classification).

In the days of PS1, **ELSPA (Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Association)** handled the certification of video games, but in recent years developers have submitted their works to the BBFC for statutory approval – another way in which they have become more like movies. Avid gamers will note that there were instances of the BBFC approving PS1 games – including *Resident Evil* and *Fear Effect*; but in recent years, as games have made a conscious move toward narrative, cinematic storytelling,

so has the number of officially classified titles increased. We no longer live in an 8-bit world. Video games can now depict sex, drug use and torture – they can pin us into the middle of war-zones, alien worlds and zombie outbreaks.

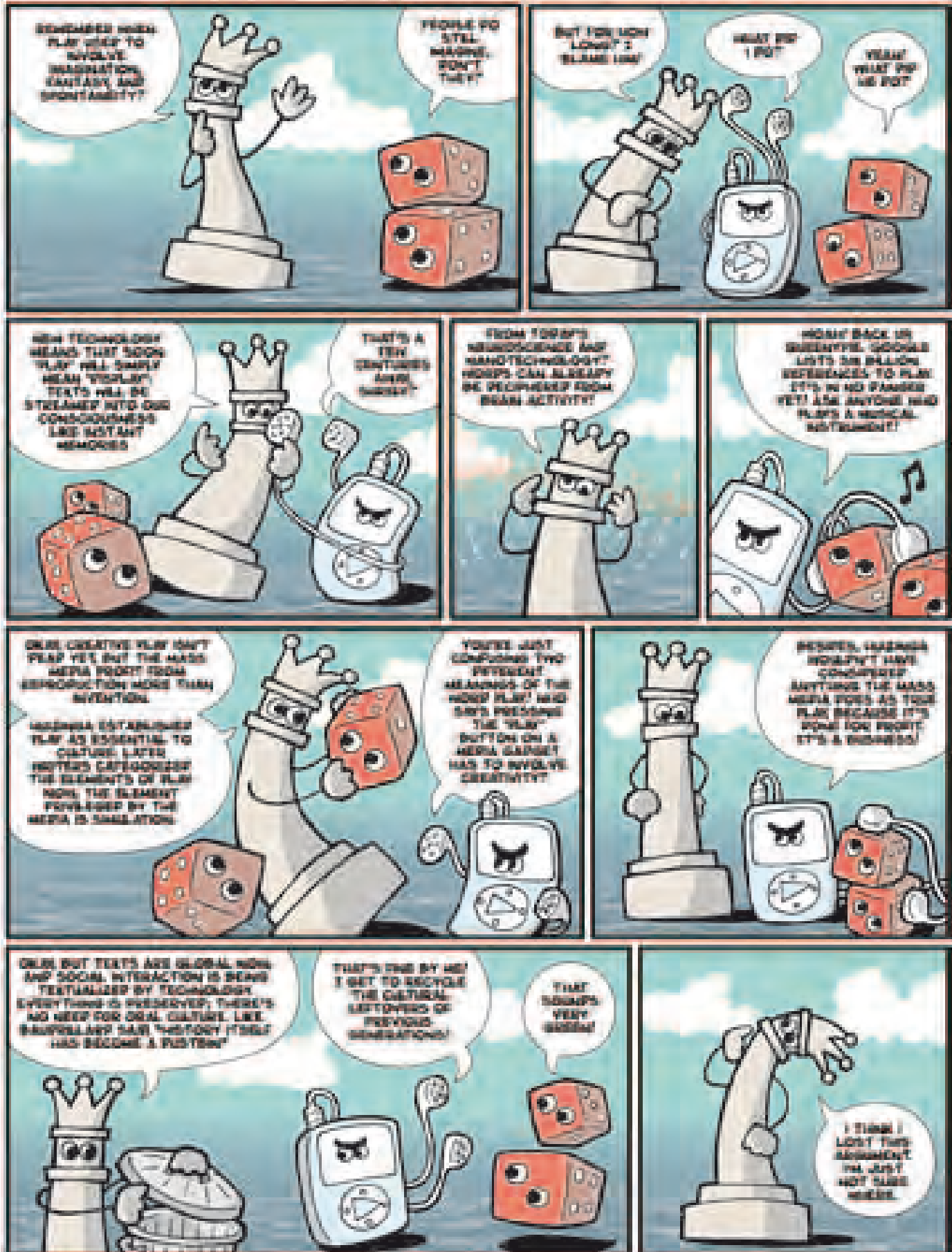
While my article has suggested ways in which games have overtaken cinema, the debate of video games vs. films isn't one we need to be having. Each art form has a considerable impact on the other – *Sucker Punch* and *Heavy Rain* are practically interchangeable in their medium. Of course, films still hold the monopoly and many video games take their inspiration from Hollywood – look at **Pandemic Studio's WWII** adventure *The Saboteur*, set in German-occupied France, where you play a revolutionary plotting against the Nazis. The game starts in black-and-white, but areas of the map are infused with colour as you liberate them from the Reich's grasp. This reminds me of *Pleasantville* (Ross, 1998), about two 90s teens who became trapped in a black-and-white 50s sitcom, which slowly morphs into Technicolor as the kids introduce sex, love and art into the hermetic apple pie community.

It's practically impossible to predict where these parallels will take us next, and where they will end – when we have the technology to create a virtual reality video game, and fully immerse the player into a discernible, sensory world, will we scoff at flimsy 3D movies? Or will cinema have caught up, and found a remedy to the visceral immediacy presented by games like *Far Cry 2*? Or, with the growing number of level-based, CGI blockbusters, and equally the narrative-based work of developers like Quantic Dream, will the two art forms literally merge into one universal storytelling medium? Unfortunately, I don't have the answers. But I can't wait to find out...

Michael Ewins is a freelance film critic.

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Rockstar Games



Retrofitting the Future of Gaming?

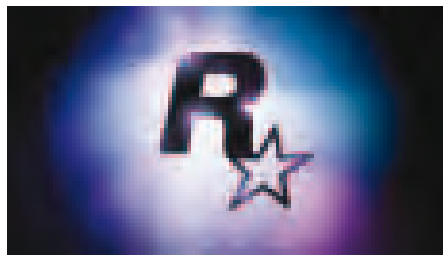
Jonathan Nunns takes a look inside Rockstar Games' game-changing genre-reviving *LA Noire*.

From early arcade games such as *Pacman* and *Defender* in the 1980s to *Lara Croft's Tomb Raider* franchise in the 2000s and *Call of Duty*, *Assassins Creed* and the evergreen *Super Mario* franchise today, gaming has changed beyond all recognition.

Rockstar Games have been at the forefront of console games design and evolution since their early days in Edinburgh. They created one of the medium's great tent-pole franchises with the *Grand Theft Auto* series. Early versions had been interesting but technically conventional; however in *GTA 3* they produced a game changer. They pioneered open world gaming with the creation of an L.A. around which your gangster avatar could roam at will.

Another attraction was the opportunity to wreak havoc, shooting, killing and, naturally, stealing cars. Rockstar's success was propelled by controversy; earlier titles, like *Bully*, *Manhunt* and *Manhunt 2* were subject to sustained criticism for their violence. *Manhunt 2* became the subject of a high-profile legal dispute with the British Board of Film Classification, the organisation currently responsible for age classifying games.

The BBFC refused to provide a rating, preventing the game's UK distribution. However, at the end of the legal tangle, Rockstar won and the game was released with cuts. Rockstar's *GTA 4* title, a massive hit, was just as contentious. The protagonist is a misogynistic gangster, and the game became notorious for scenes in which the anti-hero could hire a prostitute, have sex with her and kill her to get his money back.



Rockstar's Recent Work: Still Cutting Edge?

Red Dead Redemption was their big title of 2010, now itself likely to become a major franchise. This was, at heart, another version of *GTA* in which a violent anti-hero was given an almost infinitely explorable and expandable world and a mission to accomplish.

The twist was that the thinly-veiled New York of *GTA 4* was replaced with a stunningly realised recreation of the nineteenth-century American West. This time and place was familiar to the fans of the renowned film directors John Ford and Sergio Leone, but it was a genre that had fallen resoundingly out of favour. Other than postmodern genre hybrids such as *Cowboys and Aliens* (Favreau, 2011), there had been little life in the genre since the Oscar-winning movie *The Unforgiven* (Eastwood, 1992). *Red Dead Redemption* provided a visually stunning game world to an audience largely too young to have much experience of the Western. The world produced was heavily influenced by Sergio Leone's revisionist Westerns of the 1960s, whose brutal nihilism and anti-hero protagonist had chimed with the audiences' jaded outlook at the time of the Vietnam War. This was not the heroic west of John Ford. Introducing this landscape to the gaming experience was a masterstroke. Further hybridity came via the zombie-themed

expansion pack, which introduced the un-dead to the Western. *Red Dead Redemption* was strikingly different, but still very much in keeping with the anti-hero ethos and violence established by the *GTA* franchise.

Reinventing a Genre, Renewing the Gaming Experience

So what of Rockstar's most recent title *LA Noire*? Seven years in the making, Rockstar had struck a deal with the Australian company Team Bondi in 2004, aiming to produce a radically new gaming experience. It would still be open world but it would play by very different rules.

The development of *LA Noire* took a route pioneered by *Red Dead Redemption*, reinventing a dormant movie genre for a gaming audience to whom it would seem fresh and new. Film Noir, with its striking black and white cinematography, loner anti-heroes with a past, and glamorous and dangerous female characters known as *femmes fatales*, had been a hit genre in the 1940s. It made stars of actors such as Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall and reflected the insecure mood of America at the time. It had fallen out of favour with the coming of colour in the 1950s, and the return of American national self-confidence. It has since been revisited in colour with occasional success. Perhaps the best of these neo-noirs were the brilliant *Chinatown* (Polanski 1974) and the equally outstanding *LA Confidential* (Hanson, 1997). These films included the explicit sex, violence and perversity which had been central to the genre but, due to censorship, had only been implied in the original films rather than actually shown.

What have Rockstar done with Film Noir?

LA Noire is an open world recreation of late 1940s Los Angeles. The fastidious attention to detail in the recreation of that world is a key signature of the game. Grauman's Egyptian Theatre, a famous Hollywood landmark, features in the game and alongside it sits the Pig and Whistle, a pub not yet built when the cinema opened. However, it exists today and would have been there in 1947 when the story is set.



For some, simply being able to roam and explore an extraordinarily attractive, visually stunning 40s L.A. is a major attraction in itself. Interestingly for *Noir*, the game world is rendered in colour and the *mise-en-scène* reflects more modern neo-noirs like *LA Confidential* rather than the original black and white noir films being made at the time the game is set.

A further indication that this is neo-noir is the level of violence and sexuality involved. The backbone of *LA Noire* is not the open world mayhem of the *GTA* franchise. The protagonist here is an L.A. cop, with a strong moral compass, investigating real-life crimes that genuinely occurred in late 40s L.A. Hence, the player is able to investigate the real life **Black Dahlia** case in which a wannabe actress was found dismembered. The horrific nature of the case was too strong for the 40s, so in including this in detail, the game is **representing** the era with a modern attitude to sex and violence. The **narrative** world created is, in fact, very similar to that of the **modern noir** author **James Ellroy**, whose book *LA Confidential* inspired the film – which in turn, seems to have inspired the game.

Everyone Loves a Good Story

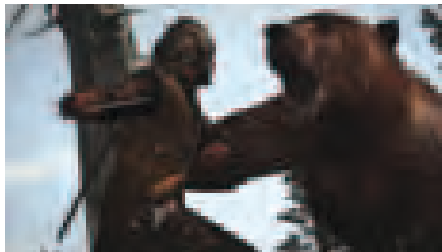
Rockstar have often created a detailed **back-story** for their key characters. *GTA 4's* Serbian gangster Niko was the product of the brutal Balkan war of the late 90s and existed in a **hyper-real** New York renamed Liberty City. Alongside the mayhem, the game contains an undercurrent of sharp and **satirical** criticism of the selfish and empty extremes of American **capitalism** and the mass media.

The protagonist of *LA Noire*, Cole Phelps is, true to his **genre**, a World War Two veteran with a dark secret, deep-seated guilt and self-loathing and a need to redeem himself. The characters he encounters are, as in *Red Dead Redemption*, **genre archetypes**. In the process of his investigations Phelps encounters **corrupt cops**, **shifty hustlers**, **criminals**, **gang lords** and **femmes fatales**. *LA Noire* is as rich a re-imagining of a neglected genre as *Red Dead Redemption*. So, does the game offer anything new, other than applying an unusual genre to a video game and providing a particularly unusual game world?

New Meets Old

If there is a game changer here, it is in the changes that have been made to the **game play experience**. Highly developed as many games have been, **narrative depth and characterisation** has been undermined by an inability to obtain genuine human reactions from game avatars. Simple things, such as **lip sync**, have seemed unachievable. However beautifully realised the worlds of *Halo* or *Assassins Creed* are, the **lack of realistic human interaction** has been a limit on the depth of audience investment in character and story. For this reason – and perhaps this has determined the nature of the **stereotypical** gaming audience – the core of many games have been **tasks** such as **fighting**, **chases**, **puzzles and quests**. Depth of emotional engagement has been one of the elements lacking from the medium, despite the efforts of the voice actors.

Film, as a closely related medium, has been trying to address this issue in animation for some time. How to get genuine 'real world' responses from artificially created characters? **Robert Zemekis**, a major Hollywood director, has been at the forefront of the use of motion capture technology. Here key actors are filmed against a **green screen** dressed in close fitting costumes studded with sensors recording every twitch and muscle movement with the backgrounds then added in **post-production**.



Early attempts such as the *Polar Express* (Zemekis 2004) and *Beowulf* (Zemekis, 2007) were mocked for an effect called '**the uncanny valley**'. Whilst the images on screen contained a likeness of the actor, the effect still seemed unreal and lacking in photorealism. The film which has best conquered the problem so far, is *Avatar* (Cameron, 2009) which used pioneering **3D** cameras. For the first time it included virtually photo-real versions of the actor's faces, muscle movements and emotional responses. Other attempts to develop animated photo-realism have included Peter Jackson's pioneering work with Andy Serkis as the character Gollum in *The Lord of the Rings* (Jackson, 2001) and more recently, Steven Spielberg's use of the same actor in *Tin Tin* (Spielberg, 2011).

Whilst films have achieved increasing success, this level of reality and emotional intensity eluded games designers; and attacking this problem was one of the explicit aims of Rockstar in their development of *LA Noire*. An evolution of motion capture, **motion scan** was developed to film real actors' faces from every possible angle. The material was then **embedded** into the game narrative so that as the protagonist Cole Phelps investigates his cases, he is able to cross-examine witnesses and suspects directly, using evidence gathered earlier. Facial responses are used to allow the detective, and hence the player, to gauge the emotional state of the witness for the first time, allowing the player to use **emotional intelligence** to navigate the narrative.

The detective's questions and approach to each witness are determined by the evasiveness, honesty, fear or arrogance with which their emotions betray their hidden motives. Actors for the first time become more than voice performers in a game, and are able to give genuinely visual performances, which are fully rendered and

utilised as part of the game world. By enabling a greater level of narrative depth and humanity, *LA Noire* goes further than any previous game in **merging the competing and complimentary mediums of film and gaming**.

There are, naturally enough, weaknesses; and the game has not been universally liked. Only the actors' faces were subject to the motion scan process, so the characters' bodies do not feature the fully-formed naturalistic body language of actual human beings. The detective's range of responses to the witnesses' answers have been criticised as too limited and too blunt, lacking the sophistication of genuine conversation and interaction. Whilst the game does feature chases, shoot-outs and violence, some audiences have chafed at the slower, more meditative pace of a game whose main purpose is narrative and detection rather than mayhem.

These problems may have been reflected in the **sales performance** of *LA Noire*. Whilst it was the top-selling games title in Britain and America for two months after its initial release in May 2011, sales were much lower than those of the more traditional *GTA 4* and *Red Dead Redemption*.

LA Noire was clearly a risky experiment, which may come to nothing. Or it may be the first step towards to a sophisticated evolution of the medium, possibly creating an experience closer to that of film or literature, but with the player controlling a fully developed thinking, reasoning, emotional, human being. It might be better not to contrast this game with other Rockstar titles but instead to compare it to a film, *The Polar Express*, a partially successful experiment which pointed the way to a dramatic advance of the medium in every possible sense.

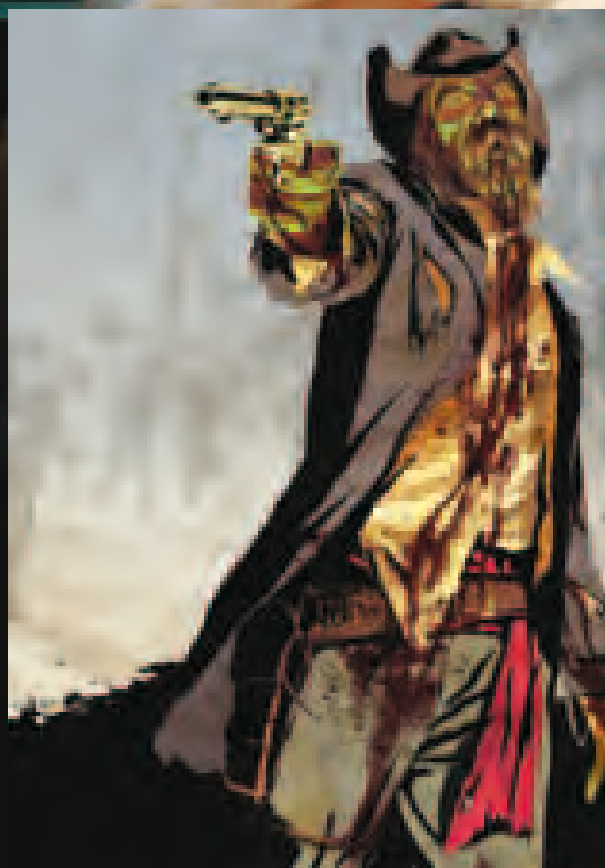
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Read Nick Lacey's analysis of the generic influences in games and films in our online Play supplement.

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DEAD SPACE

A Console Game Study

James Rose provides the low-down on a game that not only helped to redefine and re-brand its publishers, but prompted a franchise which, via a provocative and arguably offensive marketing campaign, exploited the whole range of gaming platforms, and yielded a wide variety of transmedia products.

In May 2009 games publisher **Electronic Arts (EA)** announced that they were changing the name of their Redwood Shores Studio to **Visceral Games**. Before the change Redwood was a development studio that worked almost solely on licensed games such as *James Bond: From Russia with Love*, *The Simpsons* and *Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*. They also worked on *Dead Space*, an all-new, independent product.

Set on the mining space vessel the USG *Ishimura*, the player takes control of a freelance engineer, Isaac Clarke, who has to battle his way through the ship when a virus-like infection spread throughout its many levels. The virus transforms the living and the dead into grotesque and violent Necromorphs who Isaac has to kill in order to survive. These creatures – and the many others that Isaac encounters – can only be killed by dismemberment, all of which makes for an intense, violent and very gory game.

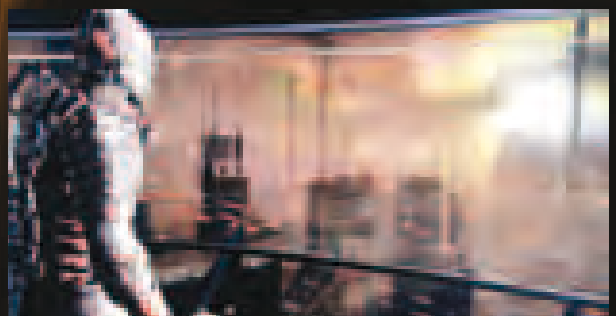
As a consequence, upon its release *Dead Space* became a significant success, selling 2 million copies world wide. The rebranding of Redwood Studios came off the back of this success, with the name **Visceral** being chosen to better reflect the studio's culture, identity, and focus on creating intense action-orientated intellectual properties.

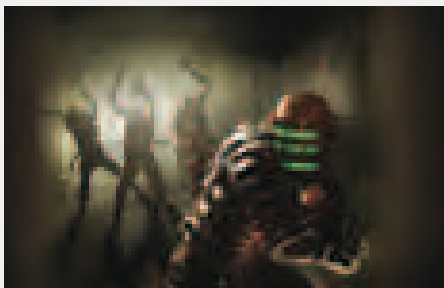
Such a quality and aspiration was founded in *Dead Space* and, as a consequence, embedded in the subsequent development of the *Dead Space* franchise.

Through the assessment of the *Dead Space* games, this article will examine how the games function – or can be interpreted – under various contexts, particularly how the games are marketed, which gaming platforms they are



**VISCERAL
GAMES**





built for and why, as well as a consideration of the various modes of **transmedia** the *Dead Space* franchise has absorbed.

Marketing Dead Space

As a case study in marketing, the *Dead Space* franchise offers a great deal of source material to consider; as indicated, *Dead Space* was Visceral's debut independent game. Because of this, it was vital that the game be a success for both audiences and critics. An essential part of gaining that success lies in getting the game appropriately marketed.

While the original *Dead Space* had a **significant range of transmedia products** associated with it (which are discussed later) in order to expand upon **the standard marketing campaign of promotional videos, adverts and game footage**, it was also rumoured that the game had been **banned** in Germany, China and Japan because of its explicit content. While this may seem plausible (and all the more so given the ever-present potential for a rise in **moral panic about the content of console games**), it transpired that the banning was indeed just a rumour.

Yet such a rumour works – perhaps predictably – in favour of the game. It indicates that the promise made in the game's adverts is true, that it is extremely explicit in its violence and imagery. In addition, such a rumour also works to support (if not compound) Visceral's identity and focus 'on creating intense action-orientated' properties. This idea of censorship of extreme content would be later used, too much greater effect, when it came to the advertising of the *Dead Space* sequel.

To promote *Dead Space 2*, EA devised a provocative advertising campaign. The premise was to show a group of selected women the most graphic, violent and gory sequences of game play, and film their reaction. 200 women were chosen, primarily because of their lack of familiarity with the content of video games. Each participant was filmed sitting in front of a large television set in a banal office space. The selected sequences were then played and their reaction filmed. The sequences they watch and respond to are not seen by the viewer; but the soundtrack – screams, groan, monstrous cries, gun fire and

blood splattering – can all be heard. This dreadful montage of noise acts as a soundtrack to the women's reactions: some cover their mouths in shock, or cover their eyes so they do not have to see any more; others scream. Some verbalise their disgust with comments such as **'This game is an atrocity'** while the advert ends with one woman looking directly into camera and saying **'Why would they make something like this?'**

The advert was probably intended to generate a **humorous response** while simultaneously making it clear – without showing it – the game's horrific content. Unfortunately it does so by trading on **stereotypes**. The advert implies that mothers do not play video games, least of all those with such graphic content. Without gaming experience, these women are **depicted as conservative and reactionary, out of touch with current youth/gaming culture** and totally unaware of the content of console games. Compounding this is the perverse message the advert potentially sends out: it suggests that if you bought the game then you will offend your mother. This is quite a provocative suggestion, one that amplifies **the divide between parent and child, between a past youth culture and a contemporary one**.

Three quarters of the way through the advert, the footage of the frightened women cuts to a brief montage of selected scenes from the game, over which a narrator states:

It's revolting. It's violent. It's everything you want in a game. Your mom's gonna hate it.... Dead Space 2 Rated M for Mature.

As the voiceover announces the game's title, the game's logo appears on screen with a web URL beneath it: **YourMomHatesThis.com**. The advert's closing dialogue functions in two ways: it reiterates the negative/sexist stereotyping constructed by the advert (which is reinforced for a third time by the provocatively titled URL) and, secondly, it compounds the game's horror by stating (indeed, almost promising) that *Dead Space 2* is every player's ideal game because of its onslaught of revolting imagery and violent action. The advert then provocatively **sells the game solely upon its violence and gory images**, promising not only immersive and rewarding game play but also a succession of graphic events and images.

Consumption and Cross-Platform Gaming

As a brand, EA has released a growing number of *Dead Space* games across the increasing number of gaming platforms: *Dead Space* was initially released on the **three major gaming platforms – the PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 and Microsoft Windows**. While it was expected that the next game in the series, *Dead Space: Extraction*, would be released onto all three platforms, it wasn't. Instead, it was released just onto **the Wii**. Whereas *Dead Space* was a **Survival Horror/Third-Person Shooter**, *Extraction* would be a **Survival Horror/Rail Shooter game** in order to take advantage of the controller system the Wii operates upon.

Releasing *Extraction* just on the Wii was an interesting decision for EA to make for two reasons: primarily because the platform is

not known for its 'mature' content titles; and, secondly, as a supposition, the experimental idea that the Wii's controller system might make for a more immersive means for a Survival Horror/Shooter game.

In his article **'Dead Space: Extraction sells a Mere 9,000 Copies on Wii'**, James Brightman states that EA were using *Dead Space* as 'a test' for mature content on Nintendo's platform. Supporting this was a comment from **EA's European Vice President Jens Uwe Intat** who, in an article by David Radd, suggested that:

There's a lot of double ownership. So people having a Wii and a 360 and/or PS3. They're really playing different types of games on those two machines, and historically up to now we assume those people will have played the more mature content on the more high-tech machine. Dead Space: Extraction is going to be a very nice test of that hypothesis, because we're really building a game where the Wii version is very different to the Dead Space game on 360 and PS3, and we'll actually see whether we can reach more people with a) a great game and b) interesting content.

As indicated by the title of Brightman's article, *Dead Space: Extraction* did not sell particularly well. Subsequent games in the franchise were released on the dominant gaming platforms with *Dead Space: Ignition* being released on Xbox Live Arcade and the PlayStation Network while *Dead Space 2* was again released on the three major platforms – the PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 and Microsoft Windows. In addition to these games, a further game, *Dead Space: No Known Survivors*, was launched onto the web as an **online experience** two months before the release of *Dead Space*.

With the *Dead Space* property, it would seem that EA are acutely **aware of how gamers are not tied to just one gaming platform but instead are immersed in a number of them**. Consequently, an opportunity to develop the franchise becomes apparent in that the *Dead Space* games and the fictional universe they exist in can be developed, evolved and **ported to the whole range of gaming platforms**.

At times, as indicated by *Extraction* on the Wii, these games need to be made as an **experiment** to see if a viable audience exists for certain gaming platforms. As Jens Uwe Intat states at the end of Radd's article, EA used *Extraction* as a way of assessing whether creating and/or porting further mature titles for the Wii was a sound business venture, saying that

If that's not going to work, then obviously the whole proposal from our point of view at least of more mature games on the Wii just does not work.

It would seem, since the release of *Extraction*, that EA may not pursue this venture after all.

It is worth noting that *Extraction* was not left purely as an experiment, but was ported to the PS3 in time for the launch of *Dead Space 2* where it could take advantage of the PS3's Move controller. The game could be purchased either as part of the PS3 Limited Edition version of *Dead Space 2* or bought as a stand-alone game as a download from the PlayStation Network.

Cross-Media Synergy

While the *Dead Space* franchise has grown across a range of gaming platforms – from consoles to PCs and, more recently, onto mobile devices – EA have continued to develop their property through a number of other media. This ongoing process was established very early during the development of the original *Dead Space* when the company made an announcement with Image Comics that **a six-issue comic series would be published prior to the release of the game**. The announcement indicated that the narrative – written by one of the game's writers, **Anthony Johnson** – would function as a **prequel** to the game.

While the comics clearly function as a means of **marketing the first game** (and function to generate further hype for the release date) it also demonstrates a further quality that EA saw with their *Dead Space* property. While the game is solely focused upon Isaac Clarke, the people he meets and the places he inhabits, all, potentially, have a 'life' of their own and so can be used to create **spin-off/cross-media products** which explore these other characters and places.

From the outset then, EA recognised the value that **prequels, midquels, and sequels** could have in terms of both marketing the game and generating further financial income. While this may be cynical, it is important to remember that game developers and publishers are **a business**, a business who must generate income but, in order to do so, must also produce popular and entertaining products. For EA, the steady release of these cross-media products works to both generate and maintain the audience's interest (particularly in the periods between the release of the major games), sustain the hype surrounding the series and, just as importantly, keep the brand in the public market place. In effect, EA began and continue to work with **a range of media platforms – websites, comics, novels and animated films** (see right) – **to create, cultivate and maintain an audience** for the *Dead Space* brand.

In relation to the audience/fan base of the *Dead Space* series, these associated products are prime examples of **transmedia storytelling** as they primarily work to expand the universe of the original game. In these **spin-off narratives references** are made, details given and events between the canon games are described and visually depicted in (usually) graphic terms. By doing this, these products maintain the style, the feel and – it is anticipated – the thrill of playing the actual games.

Dead Space: The Future

EA have yet to announce *Dead Space 3* but it is likely, given the significant success of the *Dead Space* property to date, that it is probably

in either early production or development. As ever, the internet is filling with rumours about the game, in particular the sustaining of protagonist Isaac Clarke and the possibility that the game will *not* take place on another mining ship but within an icy landscape of snow, ice and blizzards, where Isaac will find some of the surviving characters from the spin-off games. If this transpires to be the game's content then EA are clearly developing **a complex game franchise that has its own emerging sense of Intertextuality**. It is also clear that *Dead Space 3* is a highly anticipated product by gamers, the games industry itself and the critics, not only raising questions on how EA will evolve the game in original ways but how they will advertise this product to audiences old and new and how they will continue to expand Isaac's universe through other media platforms.

James Rose is a freelance writer specialising in the Horror genre.

The Dead Space Franchise

To date, EA have developed the narrative of *Dead Space* through a number of cross-media platforms, including:

- **Dead Space: No Known Survivors**

Website that was launched in two months before the release of *Dead Space* in which the users discover the events leading up to *Dead Space* from the perspective of other crew members.

- **Dead Space: Downfall**

A straight-to-DVD animated film released four days after *Dead Space*. The film was later broadcast on the Syfy Channel.

- **Dead Space: Original Game Soundtrack**

Released on Amazon.com and iTunes.

- **Dead Space: Martyr**

A tie-in novel for the original game.

- **Dead Space: Salvage**

A one-shot graphic novel released two months before the release of *Dead Space 2* that bridges the gap between *Dead Space* and *Dead Space: Aftermath*.

- **Dead Space: Aftermath**

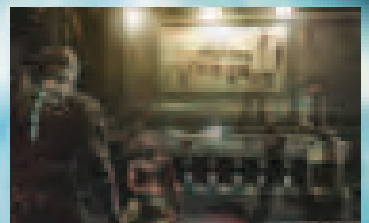
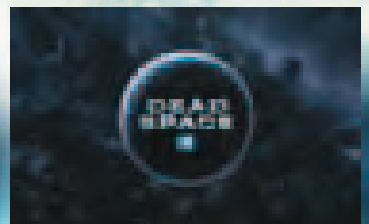
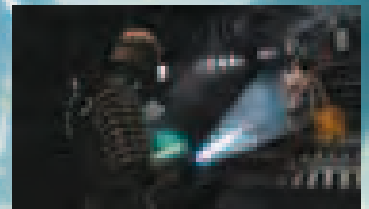
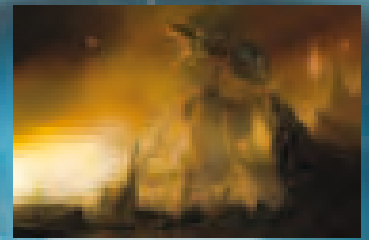
A straight-to-DVD animated film released three days before the release of *Dead Space 2*.

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ANYONE CAN PLAY GUITAR

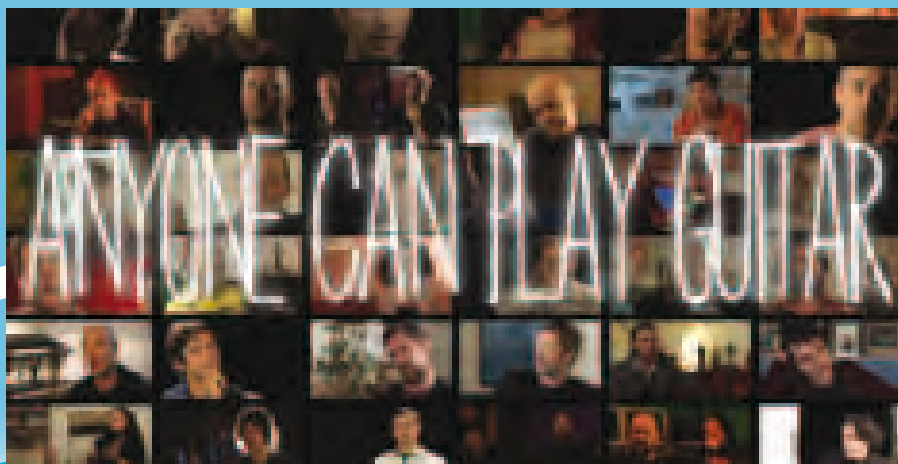
Destiny, destiny protect me from
the world

Destiny, hold my hand protect me from the world
Here we are with our running and confusion
And I don't see no confusion anywhere

And if the world does turn
And if London burns I'll be standing on the beach
with my guitar
I wanna be in a band when I get to heaven
Anyone can play guitar
And they won't be a nothing anymore

Grow my hair, grow my hair
I am Jim Morrison
Grow my hair
I wanna be wanna be wanna be Jim Morrison

Here we are with our running and confusion
And I don't see no confusion anywhere
And if the world does turn
And if London burns I'll be standing on the beach
with my guitar
I wanna be in a band when I get to heaven
Anyone can play guitar
And they won't be a nothing anymore



THE STORY OF THE SM
MUSIC SCENE THAT CHANGED



AND FOR TWENTY SIX YEARS
ONE SMALL TOWN MUSIC SCENE



When **Radiohead** released 'Anyone Can Play Guitar' they certainly were *not* nothings anymore. But it took more than talent for this band to reach the top. That's the message of a new music documentary by independent filmmaker **Jon Spira**.

Titled after the song, **Anyone Can Play Guitar** tells the story of the Oxford indie music scene that launched **Radiohead**, **Supergrass** and **Ride**. To explore the reasons why some bands are more commercially successful than others, the film showcases some of the equally talented but lesser known bands such as **Swervedriver**, **Talulah Gosh** and the **Candyskins**.

Seen from the perspective of the dozen or so bands featured, the film explores the roles of community and industry in shaping the destinies of those who play guitar. This is a micro-view of the music industry from the bottom up, avoiding the pitfalls of conventional music docs, which often present themselves as authoritative commentaries on popular culture.

Rated by **NME** as 'one of the top twenty music films you must see', the film is full of entertainment value. Loud and energetic, it captures the spirit of the local community and its sounds as played in Oxford's church halls, pubs and taverns.

The film's brand and style are described by the filmmaker as '**fanzine aesthetic**'. Much of the archive material used in the film came from local filmmakers and fans who recorded gigs. Structured as a loose chronology of events, segments follow on from each other without seamless edits, subtitles or time lines. Ignoring

formal rules – live gig footage, BBC and ITV broadcasts, even clips from YouTube and scraps of found film are laid side by side. The effect is like flipping through the pages of a fanzine.

Interviews with band members are presented as pieces to camera. This mise-en-scène of speech in the absence of a formal presenter or interviewer allows the story to unfold, rather than be told. The dramatic device also gives greater voice to the musicians themselves.

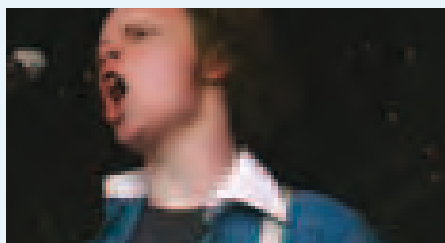
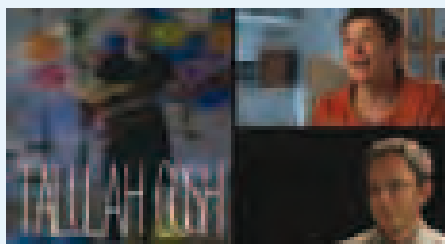
A Fanzine Aesthetic – Three Generations of Bands Inspire and Support One Another

'All bands have to come from somewhere', states alternative comedian **Stewart Lee** at the start of the film. Lee's tongue-in-cheek voiceover signifies the playful irony which with the film will survey the scene. The scrapbook style-opening montage employs stills, concert footage and humorous anecdotes to position audience in the late seventies. This is a time when punk gigs were 'more likely to produce riots than record labels' and Oxford's back streets looked like 'a hippie's turned-out pockets'.

Having filled in the backstory and established **equilibrium**, the free-wheeling narrative then charts the changing musical landscape of the scene. Moving easily through the years from Seventies chart hits bands **Mr Big** and **Dee D. Jackson** to mid-Eighties cult bands **Here Comes Everybody** and **Splatter Babies**, **Talulah Gosh**, **the Anyways** and **Swervedriver**, through to Nineties Britpop bands – **Candyskins**, **Ride**, **Radiohead** – the film shows how the community of musicians inspire and influence each other.

The cutting edge sounds of **Talulah Gosh**, for example attract the attentions of **John Peel** who in turn mentors the band **Dustball**. The roadies for the **Candyskins** – of 'Monday-Morning' fame – include the young members of **Radiohead**. Later in the film **Ed O'Brien** of Radiohead will credit early Nineties band **Ride** with 'making the Oxford music scene cool', attracting record labels executives and acts such as **Primal Scream** to local venues such as The Jericho Tavern.

In a fast-paced and lively presentation of events, cutting back and forth between live performances and pieces to camera with the band members, the film also documents **the process by which a regional music scene is established**. According to Ed O'Brien, it's via a





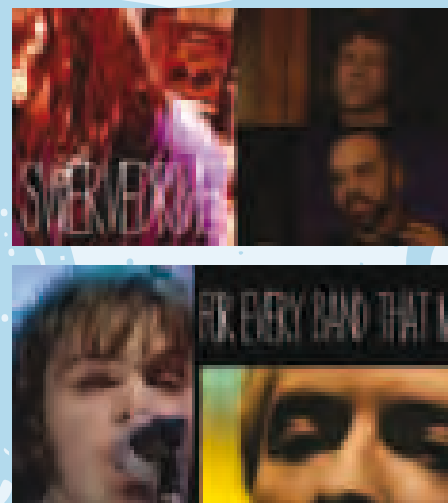
fanzine, rehearsal space and a venue. The local fanzine **Curfew** (now **Nightshift**) provides the space for the views, reviews and commentaries generating the growing fan base. But is the **Oxford Music Company** – a small group of promoters and venue operators who transform the local circuit of church halls, pubs and taverns into a grassroots music industry.

Re-vamping venues and signing up their acts as openers and head-liners, the promoters quickly create an infrastructure to support the bands – talent scouting along the way. Among them is **Chris Hufford** who takes on newcomers **Radiohead** and **Supergrass**. Another, **Dave Newton**, establishes a local record label – **Shifty Disco**. The label enables the young indie bands to gain airplay and recognition from national media and labels executives.

The film builds momentum as the local acts begin to fan out into the global marketplace. In an explosive montage of sound and images – **Ride** and **Foals** on tour, press photos of **Radiohead**, promo trails of **Supergrass** on a rollercoaster, footage of the **Candyskins** on a stateside tour with **Nirvana** and **Sonic Youth** – the scene is documented at its height.

Representation – For Every Band that's Made it, There is a Band that Should Have

The film's informal mode of address and narrative style shape its cinematic representations. Focusing on the stories of the bands themselves, **Anyone Can Play Guitar** does not include any of the iconic imagery normally



associated with commercial celebrity or music stardom. Notably absent are any glitzy mag snaps, gold-plated records, glamorous girlfriends or fan-swamped limos. Jon Spira explains the reasons why:

The point of the film is not success, it's to play guitar. That's what the song is about really. Fame does usually define bands and I wanted to puncture that and show them as real people – part of a vibrant scene of bands, fans and promoters who inspired and encouraged each other.

In almost cathartic interviews with Radiohead's **Ed O'Brien**, and Candyskins' **Nick Cope**, the film examines the fortunes and misfortunes of each band. While their friends and former roadies are touring the globe, the Candyskins are back in Oxford. Their second album with Geffen Records is shelved over royalty litigation and as they wait out their contract, **Nirvana's Nevermind** grabs the stateside market.

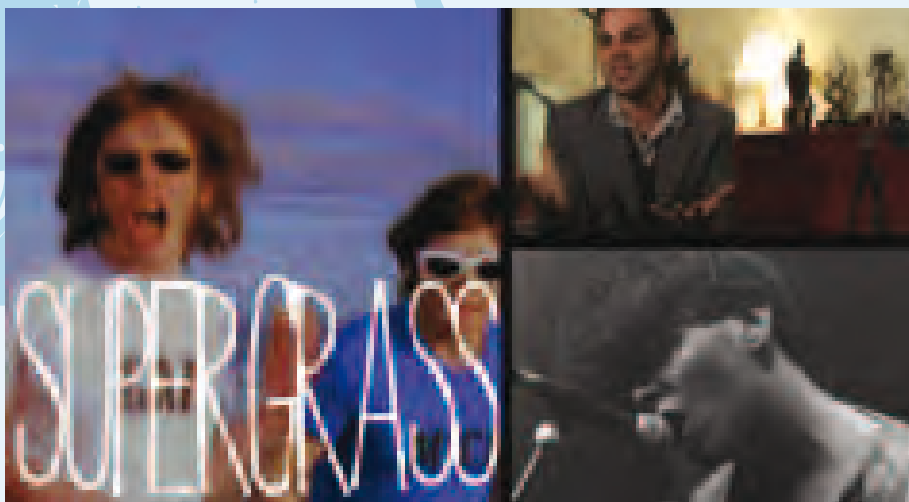
When the Candyskins finally bounce back with a British label this time and chart hit 'Monday-Morning' – the two labels go head to head releasing albums two and three at the same time. Predictably neither does well. Nick Cope's account of their final attempt to crack the market with a new single 'Car Crash' is so *Commitments*-style tragi-comic that you couldn't make it up.

The story of Radiohead, by contrast, is fairly straightforward. Like the Candyskins, the group met and began playing whilst still at secondary school. Taking a break to complete university studies, they returned to Oxford in the early Nineties when the scene was in full swing. Success swiftly followed, with the release of debut single 'Creep'.

Throughout **Anyone Can Play Guitar**, the scene is represented as a **collective of musicians, fanzine journalists and venue owners** whose camaraderie enables their definitive sounds to flourish despite the setbacks.

When Radiohead returned to the scene once more it was to support the bands and promoters who gave them a start. They part financed the *Zodiac*, Oxford's headline club, in a bid to save it from closure in 1997. And four years later, they hosted a live concert in South Parks (2001) with a cast of local acts in support.

In the piece to camera where Ed O'Brien tells his story, he pays tribute to his friends – even expressing an almost 'survivor's guilt' response to



the Candyskins' limited commercial success. **Gaz Coombes** is more sanguine, putting the whole notion of success in the music business down to 'luck and timing'. The story of **Dustball**, whose latest album is titled **Potential**, echoes that of the Candyskins – contractual disagreements with OMC also push them back.

In portraying both the highs and lows of the bands throughout the Nineties, the film reaches its resolution voiced by **Beaker singer Sam Battles**:

I used to think success was selling millions of records, but now I know it's about staying true to your ideals.

The film finishes on the last night at the Zodiac before it was sold and re-branded the Carling Academy in 2007. Dustball and Candyskins regroup for the gig. The scene documented by live footage shows the fans cheering on the bands like returning war heroes. It was this occasion, says Spira, that inspired the film.

It's a real celebration of indie culture in Oxford – DIY culture with a very strong anti-corporate message corporatisation kills creativity – when you mix commercialism with creativity.

An Indie Brand – the Small Town Music Scene that Changed the World

The poster for **Anyone Can Play Guitar** features a globe made collage-style from press cuttings taken from the local fanzine. The city of Oxford is in the centre. Yellow arrows arching outwards point towards the names of the dozen or so bands featured – Radiohead, Ride, Foals, Supergrass, Swervedriver, Talulah Gosh, Candyskins, Unbelievable Truth, Dustball, Five Thirty, Youth Movies, Anyways and Rock of Travolta. Beneath is a cartoon-like silhouette of the city and the film's tagline: 'The small town music scene that changed the world'. Spira explains its meaning.

The tagline is hyperbole – but the bands changed the world with their music. Radiohead, Supergrass, Ride are all bands that defy genre. Radiohead were the first to give fans free downloads of their music. They don't follow the herd. Ride created (and indirectly named) the Shoegaze genre; Talulah Gosh; Riot Girl, Swervedriver and Foals are now Britpop legends; and Creation's Alt-Rock heroes the current Post-Punk/Math-Rock phenomenon. These guys are leaders but quite understated and all still making music.

Something of a Tarantino character, Jon Spira trained at the **Scottish Film School** before returning to Oxford to establish **Videosyncratic**. The independent DVD rentals shop quickly attracted local scenesters and celebrity customers such as Jeremy Paxman and Richard Branson with its eclectic range of films, from 'the ill-judged forays into acting by rock stars' section to world cinema classics. The filmmaker's relationship with the bands and the scene began when he started making music videos for local bands such as **Dive** and **Family Machine**.

To some extent the film can be read as a **postmodern film** – reclaiming the local scene



back from the global commercial market place. Spira is clearly a fan of the bands he documents. What this video store guy turned filmmaker didn't know about the local music scene, he found out gathering **more than 130 hours of material and interviews** which was then edited down into the 100 minute documentary. The two disc DVD includes extras such as interviews and never-before-seen concert footage of bands which Spira says 'couldn't he just fit into the film'.

To achieve the cinematic quality required for a full length big screen feature, the filmmaker and his post-production team had to transfer and filter each piece of found film to gain the right resolution. As a true fan, Jon Spira's efforts to achieve authenticity knew no bounds as he restored seventy hours of Shake Appeal footage found in a local fan's basement. Piecing together scraps of usable content to create twenty seconds of montage was, says Spira, worth the effort:

I love the subject matter and I love making films. I am proudest of the Ride to Dustball montage – all unseen footage shot by Giles Borg years before. The uncovered scene is where everything comes to a head – and even John Peel can see that – Peel mentored the band before disputes with OMC over contracts and finances led to the scene imploding on itself. The contract included demands for office supplies and other expenses which left Dustbowl with very little.

Production Values

This is not a film about rock stars, this is a study in passion

THEFOUROFIVE.COM

Determined to maintain the film's independent status, **Anyone Can Play Guitar** was made on a shoestring budget. Three years in production, it was shelved for another year whilst Jon Spira and **producer Hank Starr** raised the money for post-production and distribution.

We made the film with very little money. Fender has sponsored us. They probably wouldn't have if the word guitar wasn't in it. I didn't even think Radio Head would want to be in it. We are lucky to have band support.

Much of the equipment used to make the film was donated by the **local film cooperative** – Oxford Film and Video Makers. The **£38,000 used to fund post-production and marketing costs was raised on Indigogo.com** – the online



fundraising platform. The San Francisco-based non-profit web company enables indie filmmakers, playwrights and artists writers to receive funding whilst retaining all copyright to their projects. A timely sponsorship deal with Fender then provided additional monies for music clearances.

As important for this film was its premiere at the **BFI's National Film Theatre** on 4 November. Distributing the film themselves, Jon Spira and producer Hank Starr opted for a **self-release strategy** – simply ringing round art cinemas. Many said no, 'only the cool ones said yes'. Its gig-like screenings however attracted sell out audiences at the **NFT's Sonic Cinema Festival** and it had short runs at art cinemas around the country.

Seeing the film is like going to a gig – its kinetic – high energy. If we had enough money we would have done a road show – to show people what Oxford music can do.

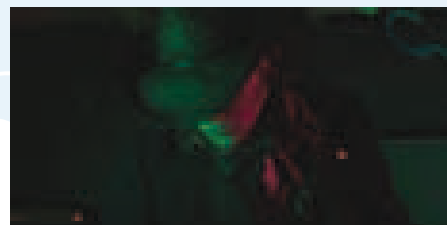
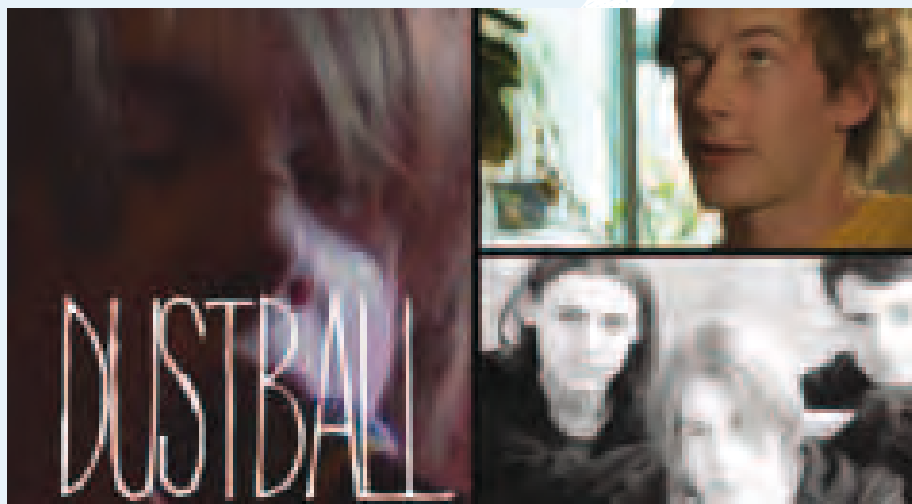
The film's cinema events featured live music and discussion with Ed O'Brien (Radiohead), Gaz Coombes (Supergrass), Mark Gardner (Ride) and up-and-coming band **Family Machine**. Jon Spira says their innovative approach to exhibition as a touring film reflects the spirit of the film.

Marnie Wood of **film-news.com** recommends the film to all budding musicians. The film's exploration of the extent to which the commercial record industries contribute to the talent pool of youth is worth consideration by any student of music. But the film also has values for all students of the creative industries. The process by which the film was financed, produced and exhibited offers a fresh example of the independent sector's potential to break new ground in worn out formats.

The film's merit as an independent film are many – its creative financing, support of local musicians, filmmakers and art cinemas, its playful approach to exhibition are all worthy of study.

Anyone Can Play Guitar continues its tour this spring – travelling to the **Brighton SEE festival**, the **Oxford documentary festival – OXDOX** – and Stateside 'if they can get the clearances'. Hopefully, the film will overcome any issues of bad luck and timing. But like a chapter from the book of Candyskins, the filmmaker recently discovered **Anyone Can Play Guitar** was ripped and downloaded onto an illegal movie site. Shiver me Timbers – indie pirates! Well, there's no business like show business – even for small independents. In the meantime budding filmmakers and guitar players can buy the film on <http://www.acpgthemovie.com/>.

Brenda Hamlet is a freelance journalist and teacher in Oxford.



PLAYTIME

When programming gets serious

Play is at the heart of children's television programming – but it's a serious business for parents and producers. In the first of two linked articles Clare Gunns explores the values and ideology of CBBC from a range of different perspectives. And on page 56, new mum Faye Jessop celebrates the first 10 years of CBeebies.







KAG TAG
AND
BORTAIL



Television programmes made specifically for children have come a long way since the original *Watch With Mother* began on the BBC in 1950. Now children's television is big business and hit programmes can make large amounts of money for their producers. The company behind *Peppa Pig*, for example, recently saw revenue pass the £200 million mark.

Although young children are the viewers, it is of course the parents who choose the programme initially and who buy the associated merchandise. It is natural, then, that parents will gravitate towards programmes that reinforce their social and political views or help to educate their offspring in a way that they agree with.

CBBC: an 'Ideological' Project?

The BBC's remit is to 'inform, educate and entertain' and in turn, its Royal Charter adds 'Sustaining citizenship and civil society' to its purposes. With this in mind, it is clear that its children's programmes will not only conform to these values and ideologies, but also seek to teach and consistently reinforce society's norms.

Of course, we would probably agree that teaching our future adults to be law-abiding or helping to socialise them with ideas such as sharing and helping one another is a good idea. But perhaps it is also worth considering this from a different perspective.

A Marxist view would consider this the indoctrination of youth in order to keep social

hierarchies stable. Those already in power remain safe, and those without power are educated not to question or rebel and, instead, focus on adhering to the laws and moral codes of their communities.

Let us take, for example, the CBBC programme *Cop School*, where six children are shown what different parts of the police force do each week and face challenges in order 'to see if they can make it as top kid cops.'

On the one hand this approach encourages sympathy for the police and constructs respect for their skills and the difficult jobs they do. After seeing footage of the riots in London over the summer, and headlines such as 'A generation who don't respect their parents or police' we might conclude that the police could indeed do with some positive representation within the youth market.

On the other hand, such programming may mean that simple moral lessons are deliberately constructed for the audience that ignore many of the internal and external problems facing the police. Instead, good behaviour, such as adhering to the rules over uniform, are rewarded, reinforcing messages heard in schools by suggesting that this is also a part of adult life. Meanwhile, the criminals in the programme are actors and the situations are obviously highly constructed for the children involved. Thus a very undemanding and limited

representation of 'goodies versus baddies' is created that ignores the social reasons behind deviant behaviour as well as the possibility of police corruption.

However, it appears that using authority figures to create aspiration has proved to be a successful method of creating marketable programmes to children and teenagers.

Psychological Approaches: the Impact of Role Models

If we apply Maslow's ideas about 'self-actualisation' we can see that the use of role models enables children to see what they could become in the future. One way in which children learn socialisation and values is by looking up to older children and adults who model certain behaviours; another way is by 'imitating members of one's subculture'. This is why people are concerned when they see violence or sex in the media. As Albert Bandura and the infamous Bobo the Doll experiment demonstrated, this can lead to copycat behaviour in younger people. However, if the repetition of negative images can have an adverse effect, it seems that the BBC is also hoping that **modelling good behaviour** will generate positive feelings, for the children themselves and perhaps, more importantly, for the programme too.

We can see this effect in a recent study of CBBC programmes by the **Connect agency** where one of the requests from the group questioned was to:

*Produce children's equivalents of the adult programmes that they like most – for example a children's **EastEnders** or **Apprentice**.*

Thus we now have a number of programmes originally designed for adults that have filtered through onto children's TV with young people as the contestants and audience, for example, **Young Apprentice** and **Junior Masterchef**. This may be what children want, but, like chips every day, is it any good for them?

Teaching Teamwork...

If we look at **Junior Masterchef** in more detail we see that many of the elements of the adult programme remain, such as the **voiceover and iconography** so that the format remains safe and recognisable to those who are already familiar with the adult version. Similarly the programme is edited in the same manner, the focus being on the contestants, with action interspersed with soundbites. However, the comments that are chosen focus on **teamwork**: 'Good...you're helping each other' and 'I think me and George are going to work really well together', and on **collaborative** ways of working 'Try and keep it tidy as we go along' that establish and reinforce the values of **sharing rather than competition**.

Constructing Capitalists?

Nevertheless, **competition, and the importance of winning** is key to many children's reality TV programmes, as it is with adult ones: ultimately, the contestants want to win. **Young Apprentice** contestants, for example, are initially constructed with soundbites such as 'I will do anything to get money' and 'I don't have a heart when it comes to business'. On the face of it, such

comments make them seem like the epitome of capitalist ideology and rather cold-blooded.

More positively, perhaps, they are also people who have begun businesses and run them independently. As one reviewer noted 'Their confidence, and eloquence and maturity, is extraordinary' – a far cry from the usual negative representation we see in tabloid headlines about 'teen yobs and 'teen mums'. They may be consumerist, but they have also proved themselves to be **self-motivated and pro-active** in an increasingly competitive society.

Dr Morris Massey, an American sociologist, suggests that teenagers enjoy seeing themselves in the media. 'The Socialisation Period' sees us move away from copying our teachers and parents and becoming more influenced by our peer group. Thus, if programme makers wish to increase their influence over teens, they are better off making programmes for you, with people like you in them.

Adult Appeal

Appealing to teens is one issue, but appealing to adults continues to be a way to guarantee repeat commissions and financial backing.

Russell T Davies, the man who brought **Dr Who** back to television, recently told **The Observer** that he felt that children's programming was 'an endangered species' and that the writers of children's TV programmes should be:

ranked alongside acclaimed dramatists such as Tom Stoppard and Samuel Beckett.

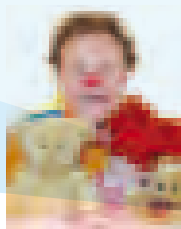
Yet, interestingly, his newest idea **Aliens vs Wizards** has a multi-million pound budget and will be used to supplement the CBBC's own budget – suggesting that certain programmes are supported very well. Similarly, the **Horrible Histories** franchise goes from strength to strength. It is currently in its fourth series and was the first children's programme to receive a British Comedy Award. It now even has a Sunday evening mainstream spin-off highlights programme fronted by **Stephen Fry**.

Children's television programmes, therefore, tend to mainly be **created and produced by adults, featuring adults and perpetuating the values and ideologies that they agree with**. Whereas, it could be argued that children would actually prefer to **see themselves or those that they aspire to be**, dealing with issues more relevant to them. With the increasing fragmentation of new media, it will be interesting to see whether institutions such as the BBC respond to this desire in the future or continue to run their institutions with the values they established in the 1950s.

Clare Gunns is Media Coordinator at The British School of Brussels.







You've come a long way- baby

The rise and rise of CBeebies

You know you're a parent when you end up watching children's television in a non-ironic way. Once ridiculed as the domain of university students who didn't have enough to do with their time, there are now two BBC-funded digital channels devoted to children's programming, and countless other commercial channels with the same goal. In particular, **CBeebies**, which has just celebrated its tenth anniversary, has over thirteen hours of programming a day that is tailored for the under-sixes. So what can we learn from the presentation of this channel, and how does it demonstrate the changing media landscape?

The last time I watched children's TV seriously was about 25 years ago. As I recall, it was a mix of American imported cartoons (*Dungeons and Dragons* being my personal favourite), British-made gameshows such as *Knightmare*, (which I was lucky enough to compete on, but that's another article!), *Crackerjack* and, of course, the ever-present and enduring *Blue Peter*. For younger children there was a lunchtime slot comprising such greats as *Rainbow*, *Camberwick Green* and *Trumpton*. However, all that changed recently with the birth of my daughter, and once again I find myself sitting in front of the television and contemplating the ways in which broadcasters try to engage the mass audience of children.

Changing Presentation

So what has changed? Well, the format, for one. In our media-savvy times, it's no longer enough just to have a single presenter in a Broom Cupboard (Philip Schofield, I'm looking at you). CBeebies is an operation that requires a whole team. The daytime anchoring line-up is a **mixed-sex, ethnically-diverse, disability-friendly group** that spans the hours of 6am-7pm with aplomb. The likes of **Sid Sloane**, CBeebies' longest standing team member, and the much-loved **Cerrie Burnell** ensure that those thirteen hours are packed with friendliness and more good chemistry than an apothecary's back room.



In particular, **Cerrie Burnell**, whose appointment to the CBeebies team raised eyebrows amongst a small minority of parents due to her disability (she was born with her lower right arm missing), is now a stalwart of the anchoring team. Fortunately, enough of the audience appreciated her ability to connect with their children that the storm in a child's tea set blew over. As the *Guardian* put it in an interview last year with Burnell:

it would be hard to find a children's TV presenter more perfect...she can sing and dance, she is beautiful, with a wide, open childlike face, and she radiates a rare goodness.

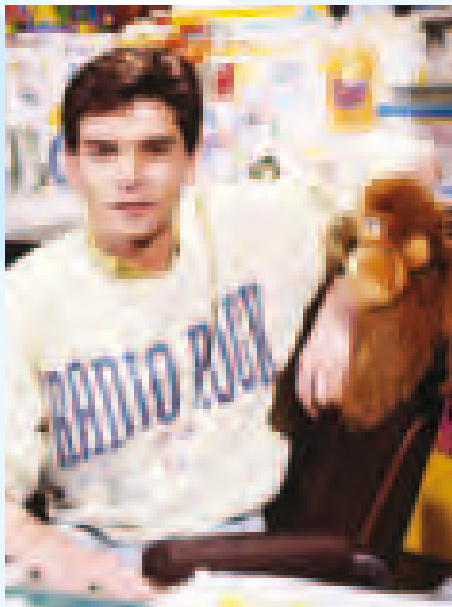
It is this warmth and humanity that gives her such an appeal to parents and children alike, and guarantees her place in the schedules for a long time to come.

This is before we even mention the powerhouse that is **Justin Fletcher**. Fletcher, who has attained rockstar status among the under-fives, and is often described as the hardest working man on television, not only fronts his own shows, but does voices for several others. Furthermore, he claims he was inspired by none

other than Gordon the Gopher's sidekick, **Philip Schofield**! Originally known best for *Something Special*, his show aimed at children with special educational needs, he is now responsible for several CBeebies shows, and provides voice talent for others. *Gigglebiz*, a kind of pre-school *Fast Show*, is yet another example of Fletcher's ability to entertain, as he plays nearly all of the characters himself.

Real People

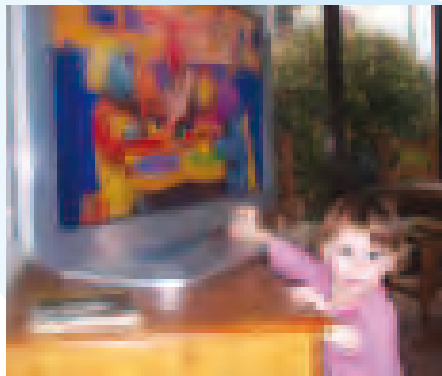
It could be suggested that one of the major factors in the success of CBeebies is the prevalence of people on the channel. While there are some animated programmes, and some that are costume and puppet-driven, the majority of programmes includes actual, real, human beings. This might sound like an odd observation, but where **language acquisition and communication skills** are concerned, television shows that feature people seem to be important. This would definitely fit the BBC's general remit of **'inform, educate and entertain'** somewhat better than hour after hour of animated fare. That's not to say animation doesn't have its place, but for the under-sixes, it's all about interaction.



Perhaps guilt-ridden, TV-anxious parents can rest more easily in the knowledge that programmes such as *I Can Cook* and *Balamory* are conveying clear and informative messages, as well as being jolly good fun.

No Ads!

Significantly, the lack of advertising on CBeebies also seems to play a role in parents' endorsement of the channel. The BBC's commitment to **public service broadcasting** seems deeply entrenched in CBeebies, where there is not a commercial label or endorsement in sight, even unwittingly. The products in Pocket and Sweet's shop in *Balamory* are refreshingly generic, and even the *I Can Cook* kitchen is advert free. Compare this to the commercially driven **Nickelodeon** channel and you begin to see the difference. Splitting a 10-minute cartoon in two just to cram in a few adverts for plastic toys seems cynical when compared to the public service driven alternative. Although, of course, the license fee does demand a certain amount of quality.



Online and Mobile

And it's no longer just a case of filling the hours on television. CBeebies also has an enviable web presence. This includes information pages on its popular shows as well as a support area for parents and an array of activities that can be played online or downloaded for later use. BBC iPlayer also has plenty of content, meaning that you can get your fix of *Fimbles* or dose of *Doodle Do* at pretty much any time of the day. Take, for instance, the 'Something Special' page of the website. It not only has plenty of activities featuring that most famous of Justin Fletcher's creations, Mr Tumble, but also includes information on the type of sign language used in the show, *Makaton*, and how it can be used with children of all abilities and ages. If you can't get enough of *Grandpa in my Pocket*, there's an iPhone app you can download to take him with you, and if you want radio or a podcast, well that's all part of the package. It seems only fitting that in this digital age, parents and children are able to access on demand extra content to support their viewing of the television channel, and, with iPhone and portable device options, take it with them.

So, how does a channel like CBeebies fulfil the remit of the BBC? In the Statement of Programme Policy, **Mark Thompson, Director General of the BBC** states:

Our commitment to outstanding children's content remains as strong as ever. Music will

sit at the heart of pre-school programming on CBeebies...stimulating children's creativity and inspiring their imagination.

As a parent of a two year old, I can confidently confirm that music is at the forefront of the CBeebies remit – to my amusement I regularly find myself singing theme tunes, jingles and songs from the programmes, mostly without even realising it!

Sometimes people of my age bemoan the style and substance of contemporary children's television, claiming that 'it isn't what it used to be' and that it's just 'a load of commercialised old rubbish.' While I might take issue with some of the more marketing-driven channels that are aimed at children, I can find very little to criticise on CBeebies. I, for one, am grateful for this quality of output, as it makes me rest a little easier as a parent, and I wish CBeebies a very happy tenth birthday, with many happy returns for years to come.

Faye Jessop is a Media teacher and the mother of Flora (aged 2).

Follow it up

A Meeting with Mr Tumble: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2011/feb/03/meeting-mr-tumble-justin-fletcher>

TV presenter Cerrie Burnell: 'I don't care if you are offended': <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2011/feb/21/tv-presenter-cerrie-burnell>

How do you explain a missing hand to a child?: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/7906507.stm>

Sid's Blog for Dad Week: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/cbeebiesgrownups/2012/02/sids-blog.shtml>



A closer look at *Community*, the ultimate postmodern sitcom

If you're having to get to grips with theories of postmodernism, look no further! Phil Dyas has found the perfect sitcom which embodies all the elements of postmodernity, provides references galore, and is available as a box set right now.

A fascinatingly complex yet accessibly mainstream show, adored by critics but yet to find a wider audience, *Community* is the poster child for **postmodern television**. A sitcom about sitcoms, *Community* deconstructs common narrative tropes, archetypes and representations and plays with the idea of **hyperreality**. Even the characters themselves sometimes appear to be aware of the show's existence, its reception in the media, and the extra-textual personae of the actors themselves.

Postmodernism is a remarkably complex idea, containing within itself a number of difficult concepts, and can be applied to many different texts. *The Mighty Boosh*, *The League of Gentleman*, *Extras* and *Curb Your Enthusiasm* are all examples of TV sitcoms constructed in a deliberately postmodern fashion.

Community is also a 'self-consciously' postmodern text. It is aimed at an exceptionally media-literate audience, and expects viewers to be able to ably deconstruct the complex web of **intertextuality, hyperreality and self-referential humour** through which the show and its narrative is constructed. This article will analyse *Community's* approach to postmodernism through reference to three significant Media Theorists and their ideas:

- **Jean Baudrillard** and the concept of **hyperreality**
- **Jean-Francois Lyotard** and ideas about **Grand Narratives**
- **Friedrich Jameson** and his work on **parody** and **pastiche**.

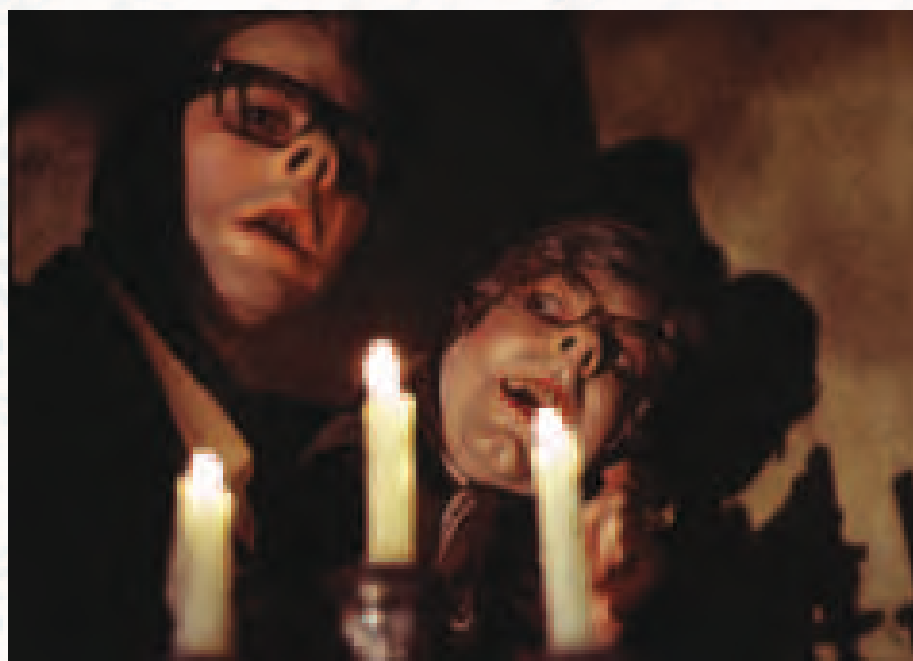
Sitcom: the Postmodern Genre

It could easily be argued that the sitcom as a TV genre is inherently postmodern; there are many common conventions which constantly remind the audience that what they are watching isn't 'real'.



There are the obvious cues to this in many 'normal' sitcom texts; **unrealistic sets**, 'canned' audience laughter and the use of **non-diegetic music** are only the most obvious breaks in 'reality'. *Friends* is not a documentary about life among white middle-class New Yorkers on the Upper East Side, but a **simulacrum** of that life, presented using the **codes and signifiers** which we as an audience have come to accept. *Community* does something similar with life at 'Greendale Community College', set in a typical Mid-American city.

This epitomises one of the key ideas defining postmodernism – that contemporary media texts are **no longer original, but simply 'copies'** of texts that came before them; many of which were copies of something else to begin with.



Original Copies

For example, *Community* apes the conventions, characterisation and narrative structures found in previous 'workplace' sitcoms like *Cheers* – itself a riff on conventions developed during the previous decade by *M.A.S.H.* and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. In fact this is true of almost all current sitcoms. Whereas sitcoms of the past concerned themselves with attempting to present their stories as 'real', *Community* engages directly with the fact that it is not; indeed, it has referenced both *Cheers* and *M.A.S.H.* themselves on several occasions to hammer this point home.

Self-awareness: This Text is Constructed!

Community is not the first US sitcom to explore the artifice within its own narrative. *30 Rock* uses postmodern techniques such as **direct**

address, **non-continuity editing systems** and **meta-textual referencing**, while *How I Met Your Mother* invites viewers to engage in different levels of interaction with the show's world by engaging with **paratexts** (websites, blogs, viral videos) originated within the diegesis. In this way, viewers of the show are encouraged both to 'interact' with the narrative and similarly to question the 'reality' of their own surroundings, and the extent to which their own consumption is of 'simulacra' rather than of reality.

However, *Community* is unique among its contemporaries in attempting to address this issue directly. One of its central characters Abed often operates as a proxy for the show's writers, commenting on the narratives that follow classic sitcom conventions.

The following scenes/sequences in *Community* show some of the ways in which the series refers directly to its' own fictional nature:

- Direct reference to terms used in TV criticism to describe the narrative structures used in the episode (look up the term **bottle episode** for an example).
- Characters apparently being aware of the extra-textual personae of the actors portraying them.
- References to the show's reception by critics and audiences, and the production circumstances of the show itself; cuts in the show's production budget were included as part of the storyline wherein the fictional 'Greendale College' within the narrative was similarly strapped for cash.
- Satirical references to the show's direct 'competitors', most notably *Glee*, including direct parody/pastiche of other texts.

However, the most complex and multi-layered narrative the show has constructed in this sense is the construction of a 'text within the text': an ongoing 'web series' called *The Community College Chronicles*.

The Text within the Text

The Community College Chronicles exists within the **diegesis**, shot and edited by one of the characters. Presenting a 'fictionalised' version of the show, each of the characters in the show is played by a different, minor character from within the world of Greendale. Furthermore, several scenes of the episode actually show the filming of scenes from the web series, direct reconstructions of scenes the audience have already seen. The series can also be watched **online** as part of 'Greendale's Official Website' – a **paratext** which also functions within the diegesis of the show.

The existence of these texts has a number of important effects:

- It creates an **audience hierarchy**, differentiating those who consume the paratexts from those who don't; and it encourages viewers to analyse the way characters on the show are presented (or



re-presented) as obvious archetypal sitcom characters.

- It allows the writers to **deconstruct their own narratives**, presenting their own criticism on their work and influencing its place in media culture.
- It encourages viewers to deconstruct the hyperreality of the show itself, since *The Community College Chronicles* is in reality no less real (and no less accurate a representation of reality) than *Community* itself.

The Role of Pastiche

Amongst the most common forms of postmodernism in contemporary media are **parody** and **pastiche** – using imitation of existing texts, a form of **intertextuality**, as a way of communicating ideas with audiences.

In its use of **pastiche** and **homage**, *Community* shares a fair amount of DNA with *Spaced*, a British sitcom broadcast around the start of the Noughties. The shows both use an abundance of pop-cultural referencing to suggest that their characters' (and by proxy their audience's) experience and view the world through a lens in which all events are presented as if they were in films and on television.

Community, however, has gone further with this than *Spaced*, in large part due to the higher production values of American television. Thus, when a paintball game taking place on campus spirals out of control, the **cinematography**, **editing patterns** and **mise-en-scène** (which have previously followed fairly standard sitcom conventions and language) simultaneously switch genres, incorporating the whip-pans, crane shots and dramatic slow-motion common in the action genre. Furthermore the episode contains many references to specific texts such as *The Terminator* and the films of John Woo.

Critical comment has suggested that the use of



intertextuality within the narrative of the show is an interesting commentary on the characters' inability to experience their world as 'real', instead seeing everything through the filter of popular cultural references.

There are countless other fascinating case studies within *Community*. A few examples:

- **Transmedia storytelling** on Twitter; #AnnieMove, a narrative from the show expanded, explored and interactive on Social Media.
- **Background/foreground narratives;** *Community* tells complex 'background' stories designed to be consumed separately from the original episode.
- **Inter-diegetic characters; characters** from *Community* have appeared as extras in other sitcoms, suggesting that two unrelated shows 'share' a fictional world.

These are but a few of the many ways *Community* engages with the sitcom genre conventions, commenting on the ways it both subverts and conforms to them. As such *Community* goes beyond postmodernism, dissecting the very ideas behind it. All this, and it's funny as well.

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Glossary

Simulacrum: a likeness, or similarity; an image which replaces the reality with its representation.

Diegesis: the fictional world within a Media text.

Hyperreality: the state of the world, according to Baudrillard, where nothing is real because everything we consume is filtered through the Media.

Baudrillard: the heavyweight of postmodern thought, wrote about simulacra, simulacrum and hyperreality.

Lyotard: media critic whose primary interest in the decline of grand narratives – i.e. Big Ideas like Christianity, Communism and Monarchy.

'Bottle episode': A sitcom episode in which the characters are trapped in a single location for the duration, and the narrative is focused around their interactions rather than any external influence. Usually produced to save money.

Paratexts: Additional texts surrounding a central text – trailers, reviews, posters, ads, credit sequences, texts within the text etc.



Californication

Parody, Profanity and Play in the American 'Dramedy'

He is a lewd, crude, drunken mess, yet the ladies of Los Angeles love him, so why is it that 'Hank is going to hell?' Will Rimmer looks at the playfulness of a very racy comedy drama.



In August 2007, the American comedy drama **Californication** premiered in the United States, and then followed swiftly for British terrestrial viewers on Channel Five. It now airs on the digital channel 5 *. Despite the fact that later series (there have been four to date, with series five coming up in 2012) have been banished to the digital Siberian wasteland that is 5 *, the show continues to garner high ratings on American television, and has acquired something of a cult following for British audiences, too.

Though polemically different in style, tone and mood to those American shows broadcast on terrestrial television which quickly gained

popularity – **Mad Men** being the obvious example – **Californication** is a quirky comedy with adult themes and storylines probably too outlandish for Britain's more conservative television broadcasters. As quality American drama has continued to improve over the last 10 years, with production values higher than ever (**Boardwalk Empire** and **Treme** spring to mind) the gap between U.S. and British output has undoubtedly widened. Not even the critical and commercial success that is **Downton Abbey** can change that.

Californication is broadcast on the cable network **Showtime** in America, and as anyone



who has seen the programme will recognise, this is its natural home, due to the racy storylines dreamt up by series creator **Tom Kapinos**, and of course the liberal use of profanities and exposure of (usually) female flesh in any given episode!

The tone of **Californication** closely matches another excellent comedy drama, or to use the hybrid term 'dramedy', **Nip/Tuck**, which ran from **2003-2010**. Dreamed up by **Glee** creator Ryan Murphy, **Nip/Tuck** chronicled the tangled work and love lives of two decadent, yet brilliant plastic surgeons Christian Troy and Sean McNamara. Also, the classy HBO series **Entourage** (**2004-2011**) mirrored the **Californication** style of lighthearted parody, and cynical self-reflexive observations which smartly tapped into the audiences' awareness of caustic film and media references. Postmodernism was evidently back in vogue on the small screen.

Entourage centred round the lifestyle of young film star Vincent Chase, as our fictional main protagonist interacted with real life film stars playing 'themselves' in the whirlwind of Hollywood filmmaking. The chase character was loosely based on actor Mark Wahlberg, who helped set the show up, and served as executive producer during its popular run. It ran in Britain first on ITV 2, then later on Sky Atlantic.

The star of **Californication** is **David Duchovny**, who older viewers will remember as conspiracy theorist F.B.I. Agent Fox Mulder from **The X Files** which ran throughout the 1990s, also gaining a cult audience along the way. However, the spin-off films which Duchovny starred in – **The X Files: Fight the Future** (1998) and **The X Files: I Want to Believe** (2008) were less than successful for backers Fox Studios. Over the last few years, renowned film actors have increasingly chosen to work in television over the last few years, as writing standards have gone up immeasurably. Examples include Kiefer Sutherland (**24**); Charlie Sheen/ Ashton Kutcher (**two and a half men**); Steve Carrell (**The Office**) and Alec Baldwin (**30 Rock**). More are sure to follow.

Duchovny starred in a range of films prior to returning to television – for example the sci-fi comedy **Evolution** (**2001**) – with a mixed bag



of success. Yet it is the character of alpha male protagonist Hank Moody, which has truly seen a return to form. Indeed, the two characters Mulder and Moody could not be more different. Where Mulder was obsessive, focused, and deadly serious, Moody is the F.B.I. man's polar opposite: lazy, a heavy drinker, smoker and sometime drug taker, he is an ambiguous male deviant with the social and sexual morals of an alley cat. Yet despite the numerous personal flaws which Moody is only too happy to recognise, and admit upfront to anyone who will listen, he perversely attracts a bevy of beautiful women in Los Angeles in virtually every episode. The fact Moody is a total mess both physically and emotionally, only works to make women find him even more attractive. Moody is a truth teller, who can't or won't lie about anything. This character trait gets Hank in all sorts of trouble, despite the best of intentions.

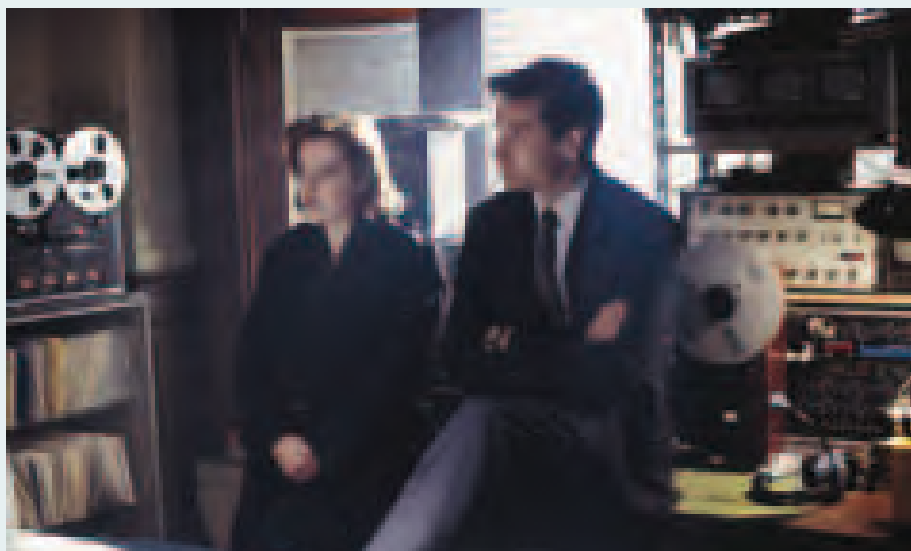
As a sporadically brilliant novelist/writer (or, as Moody regularly describes himself: 'The writer who doesn't write'), our main protagonist endures a love/hate relationship with both himself, and the city of angels. As an exiled émigré from New York, but now living in Los Angeles, the entire series has followed the travails of his on/off relationship with the love of his

life, the exasperated Karen, (who in series one memorably referred to Hank as 'a walking Id') and equally fractious relationship with their teenage daughter, Becca.

His precocious daughter regularly counsels Hank, as his hedonistic lifestyle frequently spirals out of control at an alarming pace. On the surface, Hank may be father to the daughter, but role reversals ensure Becca often plays 'mother to the son', such is Hanks' man-child mentality. Knowing who is parenting who can be a tricky dilemma in **Californication**.

Californication was created by **Tom Kapinos**, (previously a frustrated staff writer for four years on the 1990s teen drama **Dawson's Creek**). In addition to structuring key characters traits, and series storylines etc. he serves as executive producer and also writes a large majority of the episodes.

While many series creators chose not to write themselves, Kapinos himself came from a writing background in New York, but struggled for several years to break into the television industry. His writing style via the Moody character, which he says is based on himself, (but without the successes with women), is one of sharp satire, parodic postmodern references, rapid-fire dialogue, clever use of metaphors



and sexualised analogies which is both near the knuckle, yet superbly funny. Certainly, Kapinos sees Moody as his semi on-screen alter ego, a fantasy wish-fulfilment which the male viewers of *Californication* could, to some extent, hope to identify with.

A good example of how Hank Moody operates can be seen in **series 3, episode 2 'The Apartment'**. Hank has recently started working at The University of California, teaching a creative writing course. Yet within days, without any effort at all on his part, he is simultaneously sleeping with a student, Jackie, who moonlights as a stripper; his teaching assistant Jill, and most dangerously of all, Felicia, both the head of faculty, and wife to Dean of the University, Stacey. When Stacey finds out, he is not angry, simply perplexed at the Moody midas touch with women:

Stacey: I don't want to hit you Hank. I just want to understand how you do it.

Hank: Do what?

Stacey: Well, you obviously have this, this thing with women. Some very strong connection, that no matter how big of an ass you are, they seem to respond. You are a god damn girl whisperer!

By the end of the episode, Hank is confronted together by all three women, as well as Stacey, Karen and Becca at home in his apartment. Luckily for Hank, during his uncomfortable inquisition, a fire breaks out in the bathroom, and he is able to escape from his torturers. Events quickly descend into high farce.

It is ironic that as Moody sleeps his way through half of L.A. from one episode to the

next, Kapinos has stated that the overarching theme of *Californication* is about one loving, yet dysfunctional family, and Hank's failed attempts to re-unite the family, with him as the patriarchal figure in the centre. Interviewed for the series two DVD launch Kapinos said:

Beyond the sex, and the outlandish content, it's just about a guy who is flawed like everyone else, and is trying to get back to his family. I think underneath it all, there is this great beating heart that people respond to.

David Duchovny's assessment of Hank is equally sympathetic:

On paper, he seems to be this selfish, promiscuous person. What with all the sexual stuff, the drink and drugs. Yet emotionally, he has actually been pining for a monogamous relationship. He has been pining for this woman (Karen)... the mother of his child.

Of course for the audience, the comedic joy comes from seeing Hank continually fail to learn from his mistakes, fail to unite his fractured family, and fail in both his personal and professional life as a writer. When *Californication* first hit the screens, most television critics lined up to praise the character of Hank Moody as the 'anti-New Man'. In many ways, Moody simply lives his life on own terms – and be damned with the consequences!

The **series three finale, 'Mia Culpa'** is another example of how the show balances both comedy and drama in a nuanced way. In the original pilot episode, Hank meets the seductive Mia Lewis, who he gets chatting to in a bookstore, while she is sat reading Hank's own book, *The Devil Hates*

Us All. They later have sex, only to find out Mia is the daughter of Bill, Karen's new man, and soon to be new husband. The real problem for Hank disturbingly, is Mia is just 16 years of age. He has unwittingly had sex with an underage girl...

Mia, a budding writer herself, sees an opportunity to blackmail Hank, and steals the manuscript for his next novel. Knowing he will be prosecuted for statutory rape otherwise, Hank has to stay silent...

As Hank finally tells all to Karen, the audience cannot hear any of the dialogue, but her shocked reaction, and throwing of pots and pans around the kitchen, tells its own story. Elton John's 'Rocket Man' plays on the soundtrack, and the commotion quickly escalates out onto the street, with Karen hitting Hank. They argue, and Hank is arrested. The final sombre image is one of Hank, bloodied and tearful, being driven away in handcuffs. Hank Moody's past has finally caught up with him.

Series four continued troubled Hank's bizarre array of social and sexual escapades, but now a court trial hangs over him, and the potential for a prison sentence, even though Mia never pressed charges. Of course, Hank being Hank, he begins a relationship with Abby Rhodes, the sexy female lawyer given the task of defending him in court! Once more then, just as the original pilot episode tagline defiantly pronounced, 'Hank is going to Hell.'

Will Rimmer teaches Media and Film at Knowsley Community College.

Follow It Up

Californication box set series 1-3

www.sho.com

en.wikipedia.org

www.channel5.com



PLAYING WITH THE PAST



Post-feminism and the Media

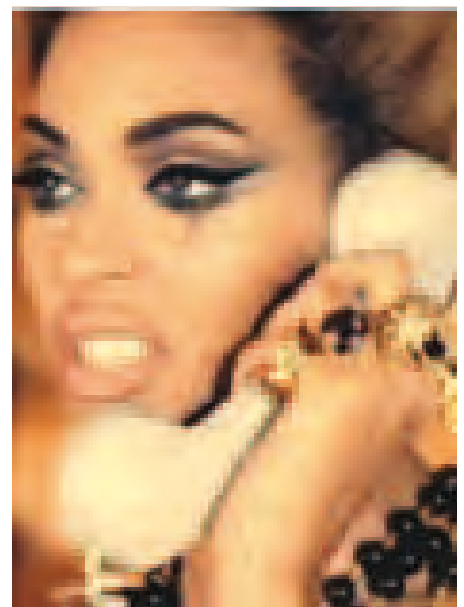
Here's a representational issue which has become particularly problematic in recent years – the representation of gender in a post-feminist world. Amy Charlewood considers two very playful texts which re-visit traditional stereotypes of the 1950s, and wonders how far women have really moved on, and whether, despite post-feminist assumptions, sexist stereotypes are still alive and well.

All the women who are independent throw your hands up at me

Destiny's Child, 'Independent Women'

It was the promo for the new series, *Pan Am*, aired on BBC 2 using *Destiny's Child's* iconic song 'Independent Women', that pushed me over the edge, forcing me to post about it on my Facebook wall (cue rolling of eyes from some of my friends – they love to poke fun at my feminist credentials) and made me decide to write this article. It felt like post-feminist culture's current obsession with re-visiting the past had finally reached its peak.

The term **post-feminism** has been ill defined in the past. Unlike feminism, post-feminism is not a 'movement' (and should not be confused with **third wave feminism** – see glossary) it is better described as the current 'set of assumptions' in contemporary society and culture. This set of assumptions is, of course, reflected and reinforced by media texts. Post-feminism can be defined as the current ideological belief in culture and society that we are somehow past needing feminism – that the attitudes and arguments of feminism are no longer needed; that those



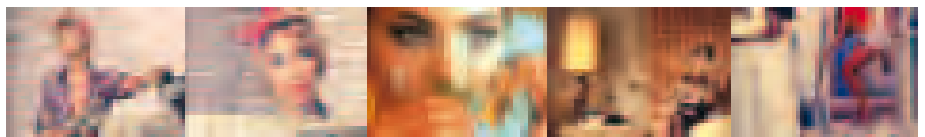
battles have long been won.

What I want to explore in this article is the recent proliferation of **post-feminist media texts** which utilise the past to reinforce dominant patriarchal ideologies. Recent examples of these include: the rom-com drama, *Down with Love* (2003), *Virgin Airlines sexist and retro Eighties adverts* featuring air hostesses, and hit HBO show *Mad Men*. They also include the two texts I want to analyse: *HBO's Pan Am* and *Beyoncé's music video for 'Why Don't You Love Me'*, both of which use the historical setting of the Fifties and early Sixties, a time before the Feminist movement, to reinforce post-feminist ideologies.

Pan Am

Pan Am, first broadcast on ABC in 2011, is a period drama set in the early Sixties focusing on the lives of pilots and stewardesses working for the Pan American World Airline. This was the dawn of the commercial jet age when flying was a luxury, and only the rich elite could afford it. This period of the twentieth century is frequently viewed through a nostalgic lens in media texts as a time when flying was all glamour and gloss, with the sophisticated stewardesses being an important part of this construction. *Pan Am* certainly relishes in the reconstruction of this fabulous time, savouring the period costumes and detail. It celebrates the exciting lives of the pilots and stewardesses, staying in some of the most expensive hotels around the world; and it is partly this aspirational and nostalgic aspect of *Pan Am* which creates its post-feminist credentials.

In the pilot episode of *Pan Am* we first meet the stars of the show – the stewardesses – through an image of Laura, one of the main characters, on the front of a magazine cover. It is interesting to note that this first image of the *Pan Am* stewardesses is one which is highly constructed and mediated, an image whose purpose is to be admired and aspired to by women, and visually enjoyed by men. The **preferred reading** of this could be that this is the public image of air stewardesses presented to the world, perhaps connoting that the rest of the episode and series will provide some kind of 'real' insight into the women's lives. What



this magazine's cover also serves to do is to acknowledge the image of the air stewardess as a **constructed version of femininity**, self-consciously acknowledging that this is simply a 'glossy' image, a fantasy not based on reality.

The construction of the perfect '*Pan Am* version of femininity' is one that is highly restricted. *Pan Am* air stewardesses are described in the airways magazine as 'all college-educated, they can fly until they are married or turn 32'. In the pilot episode we see Laura having her weight and appearance checked, and being subjected to a humiliating girdle check (a type of support underwear worn at that time to control the stomach and upper thighs).

However, it seems that at that time, being an air stewardess was not seen as a career for life; frequent references are made to finding a husband, one stewardess commenting on Laura's magazine front cover, that 'with a face like that you will find a husband in a couple of months'. Critical of these restrictions, like many post-feminist texts the show is aware of feminism, acknowledging the terrible sexism the women experience, and even punishing male characters who behave in a sexist way. Nevertheless, throughout the series the women use their appearance to empower themselves, frequently donning their uniforms to gain access to places they want to be, using their looks to their own advantage, and allowing us, the audience, to enjoy appreciating their bodies.

The last sequence in the pilot episode provides a complex and ambivalent double address, with all the restrictions, limitations and sexism experienced by the air stewardesses forgotten in a nostalgic aspirational sequence. The sequence opens with a mid-shot of the four identikit stewardesses' fragmented legs as they walk in unison through the airport, allowing the audience to relish in the rhythm of their walk and their bodies. As we cut to a long shot, slow motion provides even more visual pleasure as we can take in all the glorious period detail of

their uniforms and of course appreciate their perfectly coiffed hair and make up. They cause male characters in the airport to turn and stare; while the stewardesses don't acknowledge these looks, there is a knowing and empowered quality to their walk and facial expressions. One by one as they enter through the glass doors to board the plane the camera pans to a close up on a little girl's face as she gazes through the window in admiration. The camera cuts to the child's perspective, aligning the audience with her aspirational gaze; and as Laura turns to smile there is a post-feminist knowingness to her look.

Beyoncé

When students ask for a definition of post-feminism I tend to send them Beyoncé's way. Her star construction perfectly encapsulates the contradictions of post-feminist culture, simultaneously declaring herself as an independent woman, whilst objectifying herself for the camera and the 'male gaze'. Don't get me wrong – I love Beyoncé's music; however we should all be literate in the post-feminist ideologies she reinforces.

In her music video for the song 'Why Don't you Love Me' Beyoncé parodies the stereotype of the 1950s housewife, clearly intertextually referencing the iconic 1950s pin up girl Betty Paige by taking on the persona of B.B. Homemaker, a frustrated housewife. Just as in *Pan Am*, the video relishes in the period details and costumes of the 1950s, with over twelve costume changes, all exaggerated versions of the Fifties looks presenting a playful, nostalgic version of the time, and highlighting the performative nature of femininity. The dress codes are highly sexualised; the costumes include tight high-waisted knickers, a vintage style bra, Fifties pedal pushers with cats-eye-shaped glasses, suspenders and stockings which all allow the audiences to not only appreciate Beyoncé's 'credentials' but also the vintage fashion on offer. The make-up also utilises the classic 1950s

flick-eye look, again heavily exaggerated and extended, parodying this classic Fifties look.

The mise-en-scène again highlights the constructed and performative nature of femininity along with Beyoncé's exaggerated and over-the-top performance. Throughout the video she plays at being a 'housewife', humorously burning dinner, parodying mopping floors and dusting, all the while playfully gazing at the camera providing the audience with knowing winks in her 'sexy outfits'. This self-conscious address allows Beyoncé to be **objectified**, welcoming the **male gaze** but simultaneously also avoiding feminist criticism through this use of parody and humour.

When analysing the lyrics of 'Why Don't you Love Me' Beyoncé proves that she offers everything a man 'could want or need' in a woman, claiming:

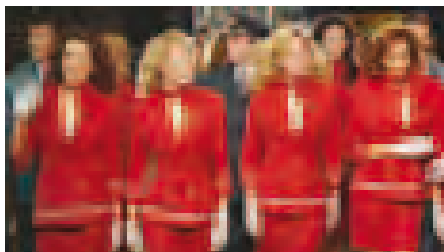
I got beauty, I got class, I got style an I got ass....I even put money in the bank account. Don't have to ask no one to help me out.

Whilst singing these lyrics Beyoncé reinforces her 'credentials' by openly rubbing her chest and body, whilst playfully looking down the camera, clearly submitting herself to sexual objectification and openly acknowledging **the 'male gaze'** (see glossary). A post-feminist reading of this might be that since Beyoncé is openly **allowing herself to be objectified**, indeed encouraging it by looking down the camera playfully and winking at the audience, she is **controlling 'the gaze'** and is thus empowered. However, like so many other post-feminist texts which openly acknowledge 'the gaze' in this playful postmodern 'knowing' way, we also see a simultaneous reassuring of patriarchal anxieties.

The video confirms conventional gender roles, firstly through the lyrics and the song's constant rhetorical questioning. The song has a direct mode of address, starting with the title of the song 'Why Don't You Love Me' – a rhetorical question Beyoncé repeats throughout the lyrics pleading to understand why her 'man' doesn't love her. She states that there is 'nothing not to love about me' and why, when she makes herself 'so damn easy to love' does he not love her? These are not the words of an empowered independent woman. They are passive and needy, and calming patriarchal concerns about independent women by reassuring them that even Beyoncé needs a man. Extreme close-ups on her tear-stained face as she pleads down the phone clutching a martini cocktail also connote her desperation and loss of control, again reinforcing her need for a man. Even Beyoncé with all her 'credentials' and 'brains' (which she also claims to have in the song) cannot hold onto a man, reinforcing the active male/passive female principle. The video proposes simultaneously that we are so beyond the Fifties, that women's rights have moved on so much – yet it still reinforces patriarchal ideologies and concerns.

Conclusion

There is something so playful, so knowing and fun about these texts, you may ask how I could criticise them. But they are problematic for that exact reason. Both texts suggest that we are now in a time beyond the need for feminism, that we



can now look back and laugh nostalgically at the way women were treated in those periods in our history. Whilst they both imply a criticism of the conventional media representations of women, they simultaneously still objectify them! I don't believe we live in a time where there is no need for feminism; and these ambivalent and confusing texts exemplify how important it is that we, as media students, learn to question, analyse and dissect them.

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Glossary

Feminism – A movement aimed at defining, establishing, and defending women's rights and equality to men.

Post-feminism – An ideology in culture and society that society is somehow past needing feminism and that the attitudes and arguments of feminism are no longer needed.

Third wave feminism – Was a movement that redefined and encouraged women to be dominant and sexually assertive.

Patriarchy – An ideology that places men in a dominant position over women.

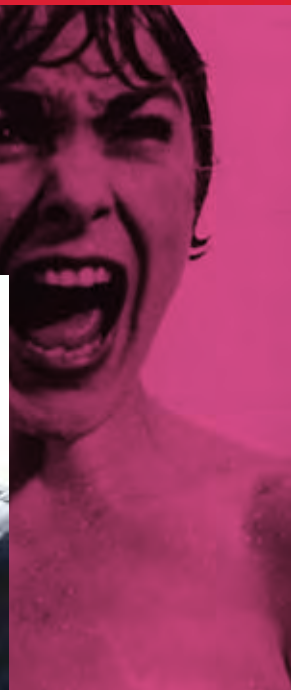
Nostalgia – A sentimental longing for the past, often only remembering the positives of the time.

Male Gaze – The gaze referring to Laura Mulvey's seminal article 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' which argues that main stream Hollywood films subject female characters to the 'male gaze' of the camera, fragmenting and objectifying their bodies.

References

Mulvey, Laura: *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975, 1992)





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