

DECEMBER 2011: THE POLITICS AND POWER ISSUE

MM edia Magazine

english and media centre issue 38 | december 2011



RIOTS
PHONE-HACKING
SITCOMS
CUBAN MEDIA
HEROES
HOLLYWOOD

MM

English & Media Centre



MediaMagazine is published by the English and Media Centre, a non-profit making organisation. The Centre publishes a wide range of classroom materials and runs courses for teachers. If you're studying English at A Level, look out for *emagazine*, also published by the Centre.

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Design: Sparkloop
Print: S&G Group

Cover: London Riots 2011

ISSN: 1478-8616



Seasons greetings from *MediaMagazine*.

The theme of this issue may actually feel a little unseasonal; why have we chosen a heavyweight topic like Politics and Power at a time of year usually associated with sweetness and light, food and drink, giving and receiving?

Well, look on this as our seasonal gift to you: a bumper bundle of issues, debates and current media affairs which you're bound to find helpful over the coming months. Media teachers often say there's not enough politics in Media Studies, because students find politics boring; we hope this issue will prove them wrong.

Two articles in this issue are particularly unmissable for A2 students: David Buckingham's masterly analysis of the issues arising out of this summer's civil disturbances (web-subscribers can actually see his superb keynote speech at the *MediaMag* Student Conference on the same topic); and Rona Murray's extensive summary of the implications of the phone-hacking scandal and its ramifications for the empire of Rupert Murdoch. If these don't crop up in some shape or form in the Summer exams, *MediaMag* will eat its hat.

Politics (with a small 'p') affects all media forms, platforms, genres and debates. We have articles on the politics of Hollywood cinema, US sitcoms, gender in slasher movies and the representation of heroes, war films, and the new American documentary movement. There's a fascinating piece on the politics behind the TV representation of political figures such as *The Kennedys*, and Julian McDougall visits Cuba to explore the complex interplay between politics, old and new media, and the Cuban people. And to add some humour, Pete Fraser has listed his links to his top 30 political YouTube clips, ranging from Alan Partridge to Four Lions, with lots of politically incorrect laughs thrown in.

So that's our present to you. But what about you giving *MediaMag* a present in return – in the form of an entry to our Production Competition? Entries are trickling in, but you only have until 1st February to send us your work, so get competing! You can start here:

<http://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/mm/MMprodcompentryform.pdf>

Meanwhile, a very Happy New Year to you all.

Jenny Grahame and Lucy Webster

In our *MediaMag* online supplement this issue

More Murdoch
Trust, power and paywalls
The Libyan revolution
The films of Adam Curtis
The politics of Fight Club
Representations of women in politics
Farewell to the *News of the World*, and more

New to *MediaMag* Clips

Exclusive clips from the *MediaMag* Student Conference, including David Buckingham on the riots, Christine Bell on *Dr Who*, Steph Hendry on *Being Human*, Pete Fraser on production work, Paul Lewis on reporting the riots, and a taster of Garth Jennings' inspiring presentation.

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

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

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Front Page News

The end of a musical era – goodbye EMI

EMI, arguably the most famous, and, after 114 years, the oldest name in British music history, has now been bought out by its two largest rivals – Universal Music and Sony – in a deal worth £2.5bn.

EMI was the label behind Coldplay, Tinie Tempah and most notably, The Beatles. But did you know its subsidiaries also recorded Elvis, Judy Garland, Nat King Cole, The Rolling Stones, The Beach Boys, Blur, The Smiths, Fatboy Slim, The White Stripes and Snoop Dogg, as well as countless other icons? For a full list of EMI artists, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_EMI_artists

EMI's recorded music division will now be a part of Universal Music, while their music publishing will be absorbed by Sony/ATV to create a new publishing powerhouse.

The famous Abbey Road Studios was the iconic symbol of the company where The Beatles recorded, among zillions of others. Even though the company will no longer exist, Universal has emphasised its commitment to EMI's musical heritage, with Lucian Grainge, the British Chief executive of Universal Music pledging to keep it: 'Abbey Road Studios are a symbol of EMI, a symbol of British culture, a symbol for the creative community of exactly what the company I and we are [now] part of.'

The deal to buy EMI signals the sad

demise of a stand-alone company – a very British music company that, at least from the 60s to the 90s, was the biggest in the world. In 1999, Napster the online music store was launched, marking a remarkable change in the music industry which proved unable to move quickly enough to adapt to the new pace and accessibility of music shaped by the internet and digital technologies. Thereafter, EMI really struggled, particularly in its publishing business. It was the biggest music publisher in the world until BMG Music Publishing merged with Universal Music Publishing in 2007. The public was no longer buying records, and the company had only broken a few acts globally – most notably Coldplay.

Sony and Universal now own EMI, which means that a single company controls just under half of the market. This marks a significant change for the whole music industry. However, EMI was the first company to sell flat discs – records as we know them – which are an essential part of music's history. It launched some of the biggest names in British music history – The Beatles and The Spice Girls – and so gone they may be, but EMI records will not be forgotten. Read more about it at:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-15697973>

Film releases

Winter has kicked in and Christmas is around the corner – what better time to go to the cinema? Here are some highlights of the holiday season.

December

9th: *New Years Eve*

From the people who brought us *Valentine's Day* comes a Romantic Comedy which follows the lives of several New York couples and singles over the course of New Year's Eve. Sarah Jessica Parker and Ashton Kutcher lead an all-star cast.

Puss in Boots

We loved Antonio Banderas as Puss in Boots in *Shrek 2*, and now our favourite feline stars in his own movie. In this prequel, we follow Puss's adventures with his gang of fairy-tale sidekicks before his first appearance in *Shrek 2* in 2004.

16th: *Dreams of a Life* interweaves imagined scenes and real interviews in the portrayal of the true story of Joyce whose body was found in her flat in 2003, three years after her death. Starring Zawe Ashton of Channel 4's *Fresh Meat*.

26th: *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*

A new adaptation of Stieg Larsson's bestselling novel. Directed by David Fincher (*The Social Network*) and starring Daniel Craig.

Mission Impossible: Ghost Protocol

The IMF is shut down when it's implicated in the bombing of the Kremlin, causing Ethan Hunt (Tom Cruise) and his new team to go rogue to clear their organisation's name.

January

20th: *Haywire*

Starring Ewan McGregor. Freelancing covert operative Mallory Kane is forced to protect her family and go after those who betrayed her on a mission in Barcelona in this action thriller. Directed by Steven Soderbergh (*Ocean's Eleven, Twelve* and *Thirteen*).

Underworld: Awakening

The second sequel in the *Underworld* series. When human forces discover the existence of the Vampire and Lycan clans, a war to eradicate both species commences. The vampire warriress Selene leads the battle against humankind. Starring Kate Beckinsale.

27th: *The Grey In Alaska*

An oil drilling team struggle to survive after a plane crash strands them in the wild. Hunting the humans is a pack of wolves who see them as intruders. Liam Neeson stars.

February

10th: *The Woman in Black*

Daniel Radcliffe has left *Harry Potter* behind, and now stars in this horror adaptation of Susan Hill's novel. Young lawyer Arthur Kipps travels to a remote village to organise a recently deceased client's papers, where he encounters the ghost of a scorned woman set on vengeance.

Saddam's loo becomes legendary!

The US military is vacating Saddam Hussein's ornate palaces as its war headquarters in Baghdad and will turn the property over to Iraq, but not without a souvenir... The stainless steel toilet and a reinforced steel door have been removed from the dictator's cell, and are destined for a military police museum in the US. Hussein spent two years in the cell before his execution in 2006, so let's hope that it's given a good scrub before it is exhibited!

Is Essex still the only way?

Like all reality TV, the main appeal of ITV2's series *The Only Way Is Essex* was its insight into the lives of real people who exist in everyday life. With the extreme popularity of the show and the mass of media hype, however, the characters in *TOWIE* are increasingly becoming celebrities in their own right, appearing in magazines and TV talk shows. Does this mean the audience have stopped caring about the show and the characters and, if so, why? What do you think?

Log on to MediaMag's facebook page to comment; and see <http://www.guardian.co.uk/tv-and-radio/tvandradioblog/2011/nov/08/has-towie-lost-sparkle>

Front Page News researched and written by Zelda McKay.

THEY'RE A RIOT GOING ON



In the first of a series of regular discussion features, David Buckingham from Loughborough University looks at the role of the media in this summer's riots. To help focus on his detailed analysis, we've included some bullet-point questions to think about and discuss during reading.

In August of this year, a wave of civil disturbances spread across Britain's inner cities. Following a peaceful demonstration against the death of a black man, Mark Duggan, at the hands of the police in Tottenham in North London, police officers beat a teenage protester on the street. The disorder that ensued subsequently spread to other areas of the capital and thence to several of England's major cities. Newspapers, TV screens and the internet were flooded with reports and images of crowds rampaging through the streets, setting buildings and vehicles alight, fighting with police and smashing and looting from shops.

How might media students make sense of this enormous outpouring of media coverage and commentary? What might an analysis of this material tell us about media representations, about media effects, and about the role of the media in public debate?

Representing young people: language, race, class and selection

A good starting point is to look at the language that was used to describe what took place. To talk about 'riots' rather than, for example, 'civil disturbances' or 'unrest' – or even 'uprisings' or 'protests' – immediately



defines the meaning of the events in particular ways. The word **riot** suggests something wild and unrestrained, something fundamentally irrational that cannot be explained. The riots, we were told, were simply an 'orgy of brutality', in which people appeared to lose all rational control.

In particular, it's interesting to look at how the participants were described. In most of the tabloid media coverage, the rioters were consistently and repeatedly identified as **young people**. These were the 'feral youth', the 'hoodies' and 'yobs' who apparently rampage uncontrolled in our cities, bent simply on destruction for its own sake.

This was reinforced by the selection of images – and perhaps especially by the iconic image of **one black, hooded young man** which

appeared on at least five front pages following the first day of the disturbances, and in many reports since then (see www.frontpagestoday.co.uk/2011/08/09/archive.cfm). The newspapers consistently featured large, dramatic images of what the *Daily Mirror* called 'young thugs with fire in their eyes and nothing but destruction on their mind', or the *Daily Express* called simply 'flaming morons'.

The spectre of the mob, of marauding gangs, of the violent underclass, has a long history; although in the Conservatives' account of the social collapse of 'Broken Britain', these fears have taken on a new urgency. These young people, we were told, had not been sufficiently **socialised**: they were led simply by a kind of '**childish destructiveness**'.

In fact, many of the people ultimately convicted for crimes during the rioting were by no means young. Youth offending, youth detention and reoffending have declined in recent years. Meanwhile, just a few weeks later, young people achieved record passes in their GCSE and A Level exams. Those involved in the disturbances were obviously a small minority. Yet in much of the media coverage, they came to stand for Young People – or particular categories of young people – in general.

There is obviously a **class dimension** to these representations. The 'feral youth' imagined by the politicians and the tabloid headline writers are implicitly working-class. In his recent book ***Chavs***, **Owen Jones** points to the emergence of a **new form of class contempt** in modern Britain. The working class, he argues, has become an object of fear and ridicule, not just in this kind of media coverage but also in popular figures such as *Little*



Britain's Vicky Pollard and Catherine Tate's 'Am I bovvered?' character.

Again, this is despite the fact that many of those ultimately convicted after the rioting were in respectable middle-class jobs, or from wealthy backgrounds. There were incredulous press reports of an estate agent, an Oxford graduate, a teachers' assistant, a ballerina and an army recruit – not to mention a doctor's daughter, an Olympic ambassador and a church minister's son – who all appeared in court. 'A star pupil from £1m home. How did she end up in the dock?' wondered the *Daily Mail*.

To some extent, **race** was also an issue – and it was certainly implicit in the media's selection of images. Clearly, there was a racial dimension to the events that initially sparked the disturbances; but while many of those involved were black, a great many were not. The question of whether these were 'race riots' was hotly debated in the black press, although the issue of race was ignored or disavowed in much of the mainstream coverage, as if it were somehow too awkward to discuss.

A tradition of fear

These kinds of images of young people are unfortunately typical of much news media coverage. A 2005 **IPSOS/MORI** survey found that **40% of newspaper articles featuring young people focused on violence, crime or anti-social behaviour**; and that **71% could be described as having a negative tone**. Research from **Brunel University during 2006** found that television news reports of young people focused overwhelmingly either on celebrities such as footballers or (most frequently) on violent crime;

while young people accounted for only 1% of the sources for interviews and opinions across the whole sample.

More recently, a study by the organisation **Women in Journalism** analysed 7,000+ stories involving teenage boys, published in online, national and regional newspapers during 2008. 72% were negative – more than twenty times the number of positive stories (3.4%). Over 75% were about crime, drugs, or police: the great majority of these were negative (81.5%) while only a handful were positive (0.3%). Even for the minority of stories on other topics such as education, sport and entertainment, there were many more negative than positive stories (42% versus 13%). Many of the stories about teenage boys described them using disparaging words such as **yobs, thugs, sick, feral, hoodies, louts, heartless, evil, frightening and scum**. A few stories described individual teenage boys in glowing terms – model student, angel, or 'every mother's perfect son' – but, without exception, these were all about boys who had met an untimely death.

A long history

There is a history to these representations too. In his classic study ***Folk Devils and Moral Panics***, first published in 1972, **Stan Cohen** analysed media coverage of an earlier generation of 'riots' – the pitched battles between gangs of mods and rockers (and the police) on beaches in the South of England in the mid-1960s. Cohen argues that the media talked up the disturbances into a bigger 'moral panic'. In a moral panic, he writes:

A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as

a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible.

Cohen also argues that the media play a role in '**deviance amplification**': in reporting the phenomenon, and in expressing the fear and outrage of 'respectable society', they make it more attractive to those who might not otherwise have thought about becoming involved.

None of this, of course, is to excuse the behaviour that took place this summer. Nor is it to suggest that it was harmless. The media did not simply *misrepresent* what happened, and 'moral panics' are not just irrational responses. Media stereotypes are never simply inaccurate: they always contain a 'grain of truth'. Yet in this case, the media coverage can be seen to reflect a much **more general fear of young people (and especially of working-class young people)** that is very common among many adults: the media speak to anxieties that many people already have.

This fear is not confined to adults, though. The Women in Journalism study also interviewed 1000 teenage boys, and found that 29% of them often or always felt wary when they saw other teenage boys they did not know. Media stories about teenagers were identified as the single biggest reason for this wariness (51%) although both personal experience (40%) and the experience of people the respondent knew (also



40%) were almost as important. 79% also felt that adults were slightly or much more wary of teenage boys than they had been a year earlier.

Discussion and research:

- Did the language of the reporting of events change over the period of the disturbances? At what point did 'disturbance' become described as 'rioting'?
- What differences, if any, were there in the language of the 'quality' press from that of the tabloids?
- Why were certain images and video clips recycled so frequently in the press and on TV news?
- Could it be argued that this article is 'talking up' the disturbances into a moral panic, along the lines of Stan Cohen's theory of deviance amplification?

The media in the riots

As I've implied, the role of the media here isn't straightforward. However, when we look at how media commentators themselves talked about this, we find a much simpler story. In the tabloid press, much of the initial blame for the violence was put on **popular culture**: it was rap music, violent computer games or reality TV that was somehow provoking young people to go out and start rioting.

The **Daily Mirror**, for example, blamed the **pernicious culture of hatred around rap music, which glorifies violence and loathing of authority (especially the police but including parents), exalts trashy materialism and raves about drugs**.

Others suggested that the looting of sportswear shops had been inflamed by

advertising – it was like *Supermarket Sweep*, said the *Daily Mail*; while images of looters posing for the cameras and displaying their pickings were seen as evidence of the narcissism and consumerism of the 'Big Brother and *X Factor* generation'.

Blaming the media is a common aspect of moral panics. In fact, there's a very long history of the media being blamed for young people's misbehaviour, which can be tracked back from current concerns about videogames or the internet to earlier fears about the influence of television and the cinema, to debates about music hall and popular literature in the nineteenth century. Perhaps the earliest example is the ancient Greek philosopher **Plato**, who proposed to exclude the dramatic poets from his ideal Republic on the grounds that they had a harmful influence on the young.

The role of technology: social networking

In this case, however, there was a new dimension in the form of **social networking**. Despite being depicted by tabloids as mindless thugs and morons, the rioters were also seen as somehow skilful enough to co-ordinate their actions by using Facebook, Blackberry and Twitter. **The Sun**, for example, reported that 'THUGS used social network Twitter to orchestrate the Tottenham violence and incite others to join in as they sent messages urging: 'Roll up and loot.'

According to **The Telegraph**: **technology fuelled Britain's first 21st century riot. The Tottenham riots were orchestrated by teenage gang members, who used the**

latest mobile phone technology to incite and film the looting and violence. Gang members used Blackberry smartphones designed as a communications tool for high-flying executives to organise the mayhem.

A very similar argument was used in media debates about the 'Arab spring' earlier this year: there was much discussion about the use of social networking in the revolutions that took place in countries such as Tunisia, Egypt and Syria – although in those instances, this was generally interpreted by the Western media as a positive thing.

These observations in turn caused some – such as Tottenham MP David Lammy – to call for companies like Blackberry to suspend their services. Some even argued – quite absurdly – that the police might be empowered to **'turn off the internet'** at the first sign of trouble.

Here again, the media were identified as a primary cause of what took place – as though riots and revolutions were simply created by the use of technology. But of course there have been riots and revolutions long before the electronic media came along.

Furthermore, as **Evgeny Morozov** argues in his recent book ***The Net Delusion***, media and technology can be used by authorities as means of **surveillance and control**. As in the demonstrations against education cuts earlier this year, the police used social networking sites to monitor the plans and movements of protestors. It's also worth noting here the use of **CCTV** (Britain has the highest penetration of CCTV cameras in the world), and indeed of 'rolling' 24-hour news channels, as means of surveillance. As many of the rioters subsequently



found out to their cost, their actions were carried out under the watching eye of a whole range of media.

The rise of the 'commentariat': framing the issues

Of course, there are many possible interpretations and explanations of these events; but there are some further questions to be asked about the media's role in promoting debate and circulating opinion.

Many media researchers have looked at how social issues are '**framed**'. By putting a frame around a particular issue, the media draw it to our attention; but while the frame *includes* some things, it *always excludes* others. In framing issues, the media define them in particular ways; and in the process, they may or may not help us to understand what is going on.

Often, as Stan Cohen implies in his definition of a moral panic, there is a **struggle for 'ownership'** of the issue. Different people – politicians, community leaders, media commentators, 'experts' – offer different accounts of what is happening; although they often receive most attention if they can come up with simple explanations, and propose simple solutions. Yet how they do this often reflects their own social or political interests: the issue becomes an opportunity for them to make broader points, and to promote their own views.

In the case of this summer's disturbances, there was a veritable tsunami of such commentary in the press, on the television and online. Perhaps understandably, politicians of all persuasions were keen to use the opportunity to promote their own agendas; but they were joined in this

by a large group of journalists and other pundits – what some now refer to as **the 'commentariat'**. Prominent among them are newspaper columnists, who are also frequently interviewed on radio and television and run their own blogs or websites.

Very few of these commentators have any direct experience of the events they are talking about, or of living in the kinds of areas concerned. Such 'experts' often have **very little relevant expertise, or any valid evidence** to back up their opinions. On the contrary, their main qualification appears to be their ability to spout strong opinions about anything and everything at a moment's notice. Most commentators are more than ready to rush to publication well before the facts have been established.

One such example came from the right-wing ex-teacher **Katharine Birbalsingh**, who is now making a successful career as a blogger, newspaper columnist, and pundit on mainstream TV news and current affairs programmes. In her *Daily Telegraph* column, Birbalsingh alleged that the Tottenham man Mark Duggan had fired at the police. The facts have subsequently proved otherwise, but there was no retraction.

In today's media, this kind of instant commentary has proliferated, and ordinary people can become involved far more easily than was the case before. While channels for public debate have long been available through radio phone-ins and the letters columns of newspapers, **new media have created many more opportunities for people to have their say**. In this case, the web forums (not least of newspapers and broadcasters) were overflowing with opinions, while an army of bloggers

and tweeters effectively created a running commentary on events as they unfolded.

Some media scholars like **Henry Jenkins** tend to celebrate these kinds of 'participatory' media; while some even see this as evidence of a wholesale **democratisation** of the communications system. They argue that the age of '**Big Media**' – of powerful, centralised **corporations controlling media** – is now finished: hierarchical, top-down communications have been replaced by a **more egalitarian approach**.

Yet others would argue that these new media are simply providing more opportunities for ignorant people to mouth off about whatever happens to have annoyed them that day. Certainly, comments on some of the online forums that followed the disturbances suggest that we are now living in a world of instant opinion – and indeed instant abuse and bigotry. In new as well as old media, the strength of one's opinions, and the speed of one's response to events, seems to count for everything. It's as though everyone from the Archbishop of Canterbury through to your local minicab driver is expected and required to wade in with an immediate response.

Discussion and research

- Check out some of the digests of comment and response via *The Guardian's* Reading The Riots coverage at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk-series/reading-the-riots>.
- What was your own personal experience of the role of social media during August this year?
- Are there particular features of social media which encourage extreme or inflammatory comment?



Instant explanations

In this case, we can identify two contrasting explanations, broadly speaking on different ends of the political spectrum. For those on the political right, the riots represented some kind of judgment about our civilisation as a whole. This is the story of 'Broken Britain' – the claim that we are living in a fractured society that is rapidly spiralling down into anarchy. According to such commentators, the riots reflected a collapse of moral values, a failure of discipline, and a sense that society has 'gone soft'.

The right-wing response: amoral youth

Probably the most astonishing example of this argument came in an article by **Max Hastings** of the *Daily Mail*, headed 'Years of liberal dogma have spawned a generation of amoral, uneducated, unparented, welfare dependent, brutalised youngsters'. As this suggests, Hastings' main target is 'liberal' (that is, left-wing) values, and particularly the idea of the welfare state: too much permissiveness, he argues, has bred a generation of young people with no respect for their elders and betters, and no 'moral compass'.

Such young people – by which Hastings primarily means working-class youth – apparently live lives of 'absolute futility':

They are essentially wild beasts. I use that phrase advisedly, because it seems appropriate to young people bereft of the discipline that might make them employable; of the conscience that distinguishes between right and wrong. They respond only to instinctive animal impulses — to eat and drink, have sex, seize or destroy the

accessible property of others...

The depressing truth is that at the bottom of our society is a layer of young people with no skills, education, values or aspirations. They do not have what most of us would call 'lives': they simply exist. They are products of a culture which gives them so much unconditionally that they are let off learning how to become human beings... My dogs are better behaved and subscribe to a higher code of values than the young rioters of Tottenham, Hackney, Clapham and Birmingham.

The loss of discipline – parents, schools and law and order

For some right-wing commentators, it is parents who are principally to blame for this situation; while others, such as Katharine Birbalsingh, blame schools for failing to instil discipline and respect for authority – especially, according to her, in black children. For some, this failure even extends to the police – as for one *Daily Telegraph* letter writer, who argued that the riots were 'a result of the police caring more for community relations than for the rule of law'.

Framing the issue in this way, as a **failure of discipline**, thus inevitably leads to a call for disciplinary responses. During the disturbances themselves, such commentators were calling for the use of water cannon and plastic bullets (or in some cases, real ones). Subsequently, there have been many calls for **punitive sentences**, some of which are still being fought through in the courts. These include the case of the person jailed for six months for stealing a bottle of water, or the two

jailed for four years for inciting a riot via Facebook – a riot which never actually took place.

More generally, there have been proposals for curfew zones specifically for teenagers; and in some instances whole families are to be deprived of benefit or evicted from their council homes. And, predictably, there have been calls for the reintroduction of compulsory national service in the army, and for troops to be brought in as teachers in schools.

If this way of framing the issue is favoured by the political right, those on the left tend to prefer **economic explanations**. From this point of view, the riots were primarily about **poverty and inequality**.

Left-wing responses: inequality and poverty

Such commentators point out that the UK has one of highest levels of inequality in the Western world. They argue that it was unsurprising that most of the disturbances erupted in areas with high levels of poverty and deprivation – and, they point out, it was tragic that these communities also bore the brunt of the damage.

More specifically, they point to the **cuts in youth services** (Haringey, the borough in which Tottenham is located, recently closed 8 of its 13 youth clubs), **rising youth unemployment** (which is now over 20% in the 18-25 age group) and **the removal of the Education Maintenance Allowance**. While these are valid arguments, they also appear to look only to **youth** as the cause.

The influence of capitalism

Much more generally, there are those who see capitalism itself as the problem. **Peter Oborne**



(writing, surprisingly enough, in the right-wing *Daily Telegraph*) was one of many to make the link between the rioters and the bankers and politicians. The rioting, he argued:

... cannot be dissociated from the moral disintegration in the highest ranks of modern British society... It has become acceptable for our politicians to lie and to cheat... the sad young men and women, without hope or aspiration, who have caused such mayhem and chaos over the past few days... have this defence: they are just following the example set by senior and respected figures in society.

Others, like **Dan Hind** on *Al Jazeera*, argued that the government's decision to bail out the banks was indicative of a social and political order that rewards vandalism and the looting of public property, so long as the perpetrators are sufficiently rich and powerful!

Political hypocrisy

In the same vein, some commentators have pointed to the vandalism carried out by politicians such as David Cameron and Boris Johnson as young members of the Bullingdon Club at Oxford University; while others have pointed to the fact that Nick Clegg was convicted of arson in his youth – bringing the accusation of hypocrisy rather closer to home.

As you can probably tell, I am much more sympathetic to this kind of explanation – although I very much doubt whether most of the people who were happily looting Foot Locker saw themselves as being engaged in some kind of political struggle, or even as responding to police harassment.

Discussion and research

- Visit some of the coverage offered by *The Guardian* Cribsheet links at the end of this article.
- Where would you place yourself on the spectrum of responses and explanations from right wing to left wing?
- Read the post on Pete's Media Blog for 2nd October 2011. How far do you agree with his analysis?

Whose voices?

The central issue for you as media students, it seems to me, is to do with **how far the media contribute to – or actually prevent – public understanding**. Do the ways in which the media frame and represent such issues really help us to make sense of what happened?

On all sides of the media debate, there was a rush to **instant judgment** – or at least instant opinion. Advocates of participatory media would see this as indicative of healthy public dialogue. Personally, I feel there is a risk that more considered and thoughtful responses will be marginalised.

However, thoughtful responses are not always to be found where we might expect them. For example, when the producers of BBC2's *Newsnight* invited the eminent **Tudor historian Professor David Starkey** to discuss the riots, they might have been hoping for a considered historical perspective. What they got was an astonishing diatribe about how 'the chavs, the whites are now black', and about gangsta rap – a topic on which he clearly knew nothing at all. Starkey also invoked the racist Tory politician

Enoch Powell's prediction that immigration would result in 'rivers of blood' in Britain's cities. (see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-14513517>)

Starkey's remarks were challenged by the other guests, and subsequently by a large number of other academics (as well as some skilful mash-up artists on YouTube). Of course, there are questions about whether such people should have the right to express such views: we could see this as a matter of **freedom of speech**, or the **incitement to racial hatred**.

But perhaps the more challenging question, and the one you should be asking as a media student, is **why the media see it as appropriate to give space to people who – whatever other expertise they may have – clearly have none whatsoever in the area they are supposed to be discussing**. The danger is that we end up simply shouting at each other, without ever stopping to listen.

Discussion and research

- How far were the responses of the 'rioters' themselves given space in the media?
- Given the general framing of young people as the key participants in the events, how much space was given to young people's voices – and what sorts of young people were given space to respond in the media debates?

Making sense of 'riots'

The death of Mark Duggan and the subsequent treatment of his family by the police clearly did spark the disturbances in Tottenham – especially coming on top of hundreds of earlier deaths in police custody (330 since 1998,



disproportionately of black people). But it doesn't explain what happened over the ensuing days in places much further afield – or indeed **why rioting did not happen in places where it might have been predicted.**

We need to explain why people suddenly seem to want to step beyond the boundaries of the law – why they choose to act in this way. Accusing them simply of 'brutality' or of being 'animals' or 'morons', does not help with this.

Social scientists who have looked at this area know that 'riots' – or civil disturbances – are unusual events, with complex causes. **What some call a riot, others call an uprising** – and often those who are involved have a wide range of different motivations. Riots are sometimes sparked by specific events, but in other cases they appear to be almost arbitrary and spontaneous.

Riots may well have **deep-seated social causes**; but there is often an **emotional element** – even a kind of adrenaline rush. There may be a **copycat effect** (which is similar to Cohen's idea of 'deviance amplification'): people may respond to rumours or media coverage of riots in other areas by seeking to 'make their mark' in the media. There may also be an element of **opportunism**, as people take the chance to indulge in behaviour that would normally be taboo.

History can also tell us much about the origins of riots. Much of the media coverage this summer looked back to the inner-city disturbances that took place in many of the same areas in **1981** – and which were clearly a response to police harassment. But there have also been riots more recently in the poor suburbs of French cities, in Los Angeles, in Denmark, and even on the beaches of Sydney, Australia. Each of these had

their own complicated history and causes, but each of them was about much more than 'feral youth'.

So 'riots' are complex events that vary across history and across different cultures. Yet in this case, amid all the coverage and commentary, the media gave us very little opportunity to think in any more considered way about why they were happening.

Above all, amid all the voices that were raised and all the instant opinions that were offered, we heard hardly anything from the people who were involved, or who were closest to what was happening – although of course there are some who would argue that these are precisely the people who have no right to speak in the first place.

David Buckingham is Professor of Education at Loughborough University.

MoreMediaMag

Go to the subscription section of the *MediaMag* website to see highlights from David Buckingham's keynote presentation on the riots at the *MediaMagazine* student Conference 2011.

Follow up

For further research on newspaper coverage, *The Guardian's 'Cribsheet'* is an excellent resource: www.guardian.co.uk/education/series/crib-sheet.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/aug/10/cribsheet-playing-the-blame-game>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/aug/12/blame-schools-parents-for-riots>

Stan Cohen's work on 'moral panics' can be found in *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*.

Owen Jones (2011): *Chavs*

Evgeny Morozov (2011): *The Net Delusion*

On the broader issue of representations of youth, see Bill Osgerby (2004): *Youth Media*

The Guardian: Reading the Riots

Pete's Media Blog 02.10.11

The issue of 'participatory media' will be the focus of the next issue of *MediaMagazine*.

Parties online




Neil Paddison compares the official websites of the UK's three leading political parties.

Hearing that *MediaMag* was compiling this special politics issue, it dawned on me that I had never visited our three main political parties' websites. As a jaded and cynical non-voter, could they persuade me to join their 'big fat society' or whatever they call it? Before I started my research, I noted down my expectations...

My Expectations

Appearance, Generally

- a website; easy to find via Google, fast-loading
- corporate colours used in an obvious way
- name of the party at the top of the page, with logo
- picture of party leader
- picture(s) of happy smiling people, representing ethnic diversity, people of all abilities and ages

Content, Generally

- links to Twitter and Facebook
- opportunities to sign up for membership and newsletters/updates
- your MP – info for your area
- conference news/events
- news of achievements/visits/speeches
- manifesto/policies/campaigns
- who's who in the party
- all about democracy, with citizenship resources/games
- questionnaires/surveys
- charity appeals
- text of speeches

Specifically CONSERVATIVES

- flags
- army/forces
- poppy
- pound sign
- tiny writing
- Times New Roman
- little mention of the Liberals
- really boring

LABOUR

- handshakes
- babies
- podium-based shouting
- Arial
- dreary/boring

LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

- toothless smiling
- ties
- some mention of Conservatives
- very boring

My view of politicians owes a fair amount to the way they have been represented in media products such as *Spitting Image*, *Have I Got News for You*, and the cartoons of Steve Bell.

But I grew up in the 1980s, when party political broadcasts were hard to avoid on terrestrial TV, and even harder to take seriously, so politicians themselves can take some of the credit. I expected the websites to be very similar to each other, and to bore me senseless. But how wrong was I?

The first challenge for the websites was this: **how easy is it to find them?** Well, even without using Google's predictive text offerings or the 'I'm Feeling Lucky' button, each site was quickly accessed and loaded in my browser within 20 seconds. A good start then.

My first impressions of the sites were similar. Each has the name of the party and a small logo in the top left hand corner of its home page. Each has a menu bar at the top of the page, with the Conservatives and Lib Dems adding a search bar in the top right corner. All three sites are quite formally designed; neatly arranged grids of menus and text, small icons used to illustrate options, straight lines dominating visually, and simple colour schemes used. None of the sites is what you might call 'exciting'. But was I judging them too soon?

www.conservatives.com

One point of difference between the Conservatives and the other two sites is in its **address**. The Conservatives have opted for the generic top-level domain of **.com** rather than the country-specific **.org.uk**. This choice can signify a commercial organisation, or at least one with firmly capitalist values, as well as presenting a site with a global audience. Perhaps as a counter-balance to this, the Union Jack has been superimposed over the party's scribbly 'tree' logo on the homepage. This suggests **national pride**, adds a further splash of colour to the page, and



draws the eye back to the name of the party.

The front page carries a large photo, overlaid by a white-text headline with a partly transparent grey highlight. The linked story is further highlighted in green as the top choice in a menu bar on the right. A callout bar below this presents a tweet, suggesting a live story for us to follow. The **purpose of the page** is therefore very clear, and the menu bar is intuitive with **links to 'policy' and 'people' given priority**.

The '**shop**' was naturally my first choice of places to visit on the site, to see if it lived up to its **.com** billing. There are some odd things for sale there, conveying quite a sense of humour; a babygro with the 'IT'S TIME FOR CHANGE' slogan proudly emblazoned across the front, and a novelty A5 notebook with a photo of the Labour leader on the front, bearing the title 'Ed Miliband's Policies for Britain'. Also available are rosettes, balloons, badges, posters, t-shirts, mugs, and more.

Beyond the gift shop, the Conservatives use their site to further **knock Labour**. Click on the 'donate' link and you are presented with a black and white horizontal banner photo of Miliband and Balls, with the slogan 'DON'T LET THEM DO IT AGAIN' overlaid. This is reminiscent of the bold style of '**knocking copy**' advertising the Saatchi brothers provided for the Conservatives in the 1980s and 1990s. And that's no coincidence as Saatchi advertising was used by the Tories in the run-up to the last election and it has no doubt informed the design of the current website.

The Conservatives' website really impresses when you click on '**policy**'. A colourful mosaic of iconic photos with text headings present us with links to different policy areas. The subtle title banner above makes iconic use of a portion of the Union Jack in closely matched shades of blue, tilted on one side to create a dynamic pair of arrows pointing to the selection below.

On the left, an indented text menu lists the same 24 categories headed by the phrase '**where we stand**', with a further title above linking to the '**manifesto**'. Clicking on '**manifesto**', you are

presented with a banner proclaiming INVITATION TO JOIN THE GOVERNMENT OF GREAT BRITAIN. Was this an invitation to the general public, to help to run their own country, or maybe the prize visualised by the Tories as they prepared for a general election? Either way, the manifesto itself is available in a range of formats, including a digital page-turning edition. PDF versions are available to download, in high and low resolution, and large print. There's even an audio option, with each section available in MP3 format.

It is well reported that the Conservative Party has invested heavily in the use of the internet for some years now. But whilst I remember news reports covering the arrival of **webcameron** back in 2006, and have seen some of the spoof ads and mash-ups associated with the last general election, the way the Conservatives' website functions is still quite impressive. There are press photos, video links, webcasts, downloads, and links to a mobile site. The Tories also make clever use of **Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)**: writing for **Silicon.com** in April last year, Nick Heath suggests that 'Conservative content is more visible online than that produced by their political rivals'.

www.libdems.org.uk

The Lib Dems' site uses yellow, its main campaigning colour, as an accent colour on its website, with a cool turquoise being the dominant colour. This is perhaps surprising, but yellow offers too little contrast with white text, and heavy use of black text can seem oppressive on sites that already have to work hard to engage our interest. The turquoise also gives a professional, almost hygienic feel to the site. For me this suggests **healthcare and academia**, rather than the **passion** sometimes associated



with politics. But then, this is the Lib Dems. They are perceived as the moderate, middle-of-the-road alternative to Labour and the Conservatives, right?

At the top of the homepage, a slideshow cycles between five rather similar images; two close-up shots of Nick Clegg making a speech, two other pictures of speakers, and one of the ICC in Birmingham. The menu at the top of the page is functional and clear, but having visited the Conservatives' site, I was disappointed not to find a shop. The best I could manage was to download a free poster.

The menu system made use of easily interpreted visual icons, in a range of colours making each one distinct. Clicking on '**What**



'we stand for' brings us to a list of policy areas, but it is headed by '**The Coalition Agreement**'. Another digital edition, this document bears the signatures of both Cameron and Clegg. It's given a prominent place on the Lib Dem's site, but I struggled to find it on the Conservatives' website.



The sitemap for the Lib Dems' site is clear and functional, but I was deeply underwhelmed by this website. The content and style of the site is worthy, but dull. Even the attempt at a friendly picture on the 'transport' page left me feeling a bit uneasy. Four middle-aged men struggling to smile whilst gripping bug-eyed red dollys who themselves appear to be surrendering to some unseen gun-toting transport police? Scary.

Overall, on this website, one gets a sense of **serious politics, with an almost academic approach**. Politics with the best arguments, but in a style with narrow appeal. There are countless text-heavy pages and most of the pictures focus on Nick Clegg. Whilst we can applaud the Lib Dems' efforts to engineer an Obama-style campaign of **personality-focused politics** in the run-up to an election, after the fact it seems the site needs a revamp. Evidence that this process may have already begun came as I clicked on 'our campaigns', only to be met with the message 'Under maintenance... Please check back soon.'

www.labour.org.uk

The Labour site has the simplest colour scheme of the three sites, with red predictably being the colour to dominate. Black, white and grey make up the main elements of the rest of the page. Surprisingly, there were no pictures visible on the homepage until I scrolled further down. A headline section on the left hand side of the page is further identified by a menu on the right, rather like the Conservatives' site. On my first visit,



on 30 June 2011, the headline featured was '**Ed Miliband – New politics. Fresh ideas**', with a link to a different website. Perhaps coincidentally, I remembered hearing a discussion earlier the same day, on Radio 4's *Today* programme, discussing Labour's concerns over people not knowing who their leader was. Perhaps a photo would have helped then.

I visited the site again during August, and this time the headline read '**The future of family life in Britain – Take action now!**' Clicking on this, I was presented with a form to fill in, for an online petition. It seemed presumptuous not to offer any explanation or reasoning for this before presenting the form, so I declined.

I tried in vain to find a copy of the manifesto or detail on policies. Even when I clicked on 'Why I'm Labour', I was presented with another form to fill in, asking me to come up with my own reasons. Okay, further down the page were other selected responses, but the first impression was one of **a party desperate to know what voters want them to say**.



The shopping experience was also disappointing (but not as bad as the Lib Dems). Following a link to www.labourcampaignshop.org.uk, I found some tickets to The Labour Party Annual Conference Dinner, though the 'premium table' at £12,500 seemed a bit pricey. Elsewhere, the 'gifts' section of the shop sells red 'Labour' mugs for £6.00. The Conservatives sell their mugs for £5.00, making me wonder whether the Tories had deliberately undercut the prices of their competitors to make a thinly-veiled political point.

Having spent some time navigating the headache-inducingly dull website, I found it hard to understand what the Labour Party stands for. It seems that the more interesting things are happening at www.campaignengineroom.org.uk, where members can launch their own petitions and campaigns, but this site too seemed cluttered and unwelcoming to non-members.

Overall

Looking back at my original expectations, all three sites matched up quite well. The style of the sites was unsurprising, with the exception of the Conservatives, but overall there were **fewer images** used than I expected, making it harder for me to be cynical about their use! The kinds of information I expected to find about the parties themselves was mostly there, although Labour had a distinct lack of obvious policies and ideas on offer. However, my research was done in the run up to the conference season, so we might let Labour off the hook here.

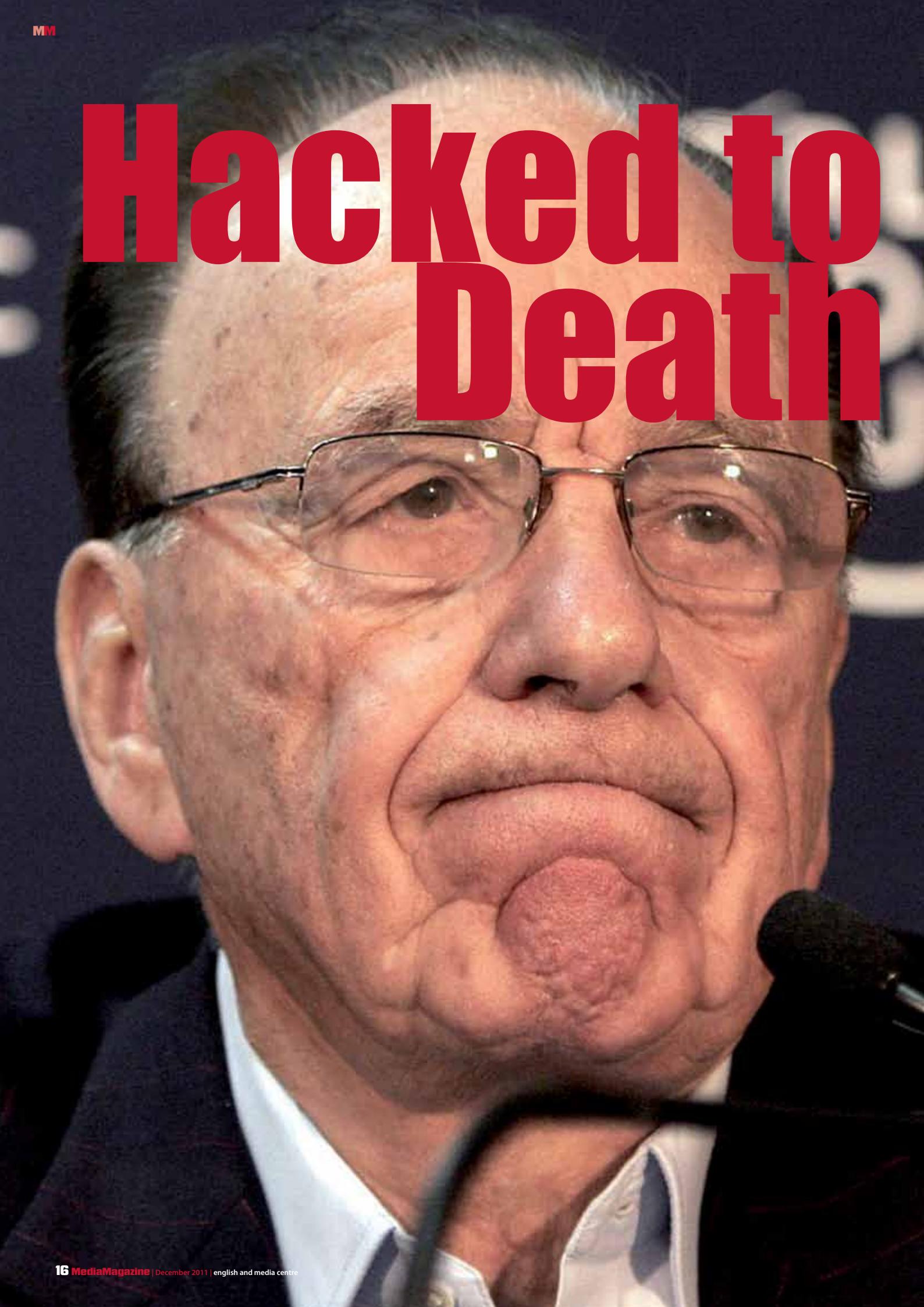
I didn't see any surveys, questionnaires, charity appeals (aside from donations to the parties) or more general info about democracy and citizenship. And there were no games, suggesting perhaps that **the target audience for each site is older than first-time voting age**? Whilst I'm not suggesting that all older teenagers expect games on websites, most websites aimed at their age group do look quite different from the three sites studied here.

As older voters make up a significant majority of those who actually vote during elections, it's perhaps not that surprising. However, I think our main political parties are missing a trick here. As one of the 34% of 35-44 year olds who didn't vote in 2010, I didn't personally feel moved to support the Conservatives, Labour or Lib Dems based on my visits to their websites, but who knows? Maybe I could have been won over with a House of Commons version of Pac-Man.

Neil Paddison is a Media Studies teacher and freelance cartoonist and writer.



Hacked to Death



How Humble Pie Arrived on Murdoch's Menu

The events of the summer surrounding the *News of the World*, *The Sun* and *The Times* dominated the UK news agenda for several weeks, but what did it all mean? The impact of the revelations concerning phone-hacking at a time when News Corporation (the parent organisation) was bidding to acquire the rest of BSkyB led to an explosive public debate about the nature of the relationships between the media, the police and government itself. The long-term effects of these events on the Murdoch empire still rumble on. Here Rona Murray summarises the key issues as they stood at the end of September.

The first important point to note is that **phone-hacking** – or knowledge of it in the public domain – is not recent. Allegations regarding the activities of *News of the World* journalists first came to light in 2002 as part of *The Guardian's* long-standing investigations, led by one particular investigative reporter, **Nick Davies**. By 2006 it was clear that illegal activities were taking place when **Clive Goodman**, the *News of the World's* royal reporter and **Glen Mulcaire**, a private investigator were tried and convicted of illegal phone-hacking in relation to Princes William and Harry. This was represented by a News International senior executive at the time as an isolated set of circumstances and the responsibility of 'one rogue reporter' who had engaged Mulcaire to hack the personal details of the royal family to generate stories. However,



The Guardian reports started to uncover evidence that, in fact, the activities had spread far wider at the paper. By the summer of 2011, there was evidence that some **4,000 phone accounts had been hacked** but, apparently, only those belonging to celebrities and politicians.

The turning point in the public visibility of the story came when **Milly Dowler**, the schoolgirl murdered in 2002, emerged as one of the hacking victims. Not only had reporters apparently listened to her messages, but they had also deleted messages out of the inbox to allow further messages to be left, thus cruelly allowing her family and friends to hope that perhaps Milly was still alive. The public revulsion at this generated a response even from newspapers who had hitherto given the story relatively little coverage, and it became front page news. From this point on, with further revelations regarding victims of the July 7th bombings in London, and fallen armed service personnel and their families, the story about the media dominated the media agenda. A media event in itself – the scandal had pace and drama with revelations breaking daily across old and new media, generating public involvement on a large scale.

The story raises some important media questions:

- **What is the relationship of governments to media owners and why is it important?**
- **What makes good media policy to encourage the businesses whilst safeguarding press freedoms?**
- **How should the press be regulated to allow proper investigative reporting but protect individual privacy?**

Governing the Media

Let's start with what the story means in relation to **media policy**.

Governments create media policy to guide the development of media businesses in this country – dictating **who** is allowed to own, **what** they can own and **how much**, and **how it is to be regulated**. Politicians have simultaneously sought a relationship with media as a powerful means of influencing opinion in their country in their favour – a vital part of their negotiation with the public to choose their policies and ideologies over those of rival political parties. Therefore they sit in a difficult position between controlling





these organisations and trying to be on good terms with them. In addition, any government balances the idea of **liberalising the media commercially** (and thus allowing a vibrant sector of the U.K. economy to thrive) against **maintaining the proper controls** to prevent one particular owner having too much influence on the media content available to the public. This is a question of maintaining a **plurality of voices** (politically and culturally), especially where news is concerned. If one person's view is represented through many different outlets, then the risk is that they may become too influential, able to direct where public debates go.

The Power of News Corporation

News International owned and operated the biggest selling daily and weekly, as of June 2011 (*The Sun* – circulation 2.807 million) and weekly (*News of the World* – circulation 2.667 million in June 2011) in Britain. It is part of **News Corporation**, the media conglomerate ultimately owned by Rupert Murdoch which manages publishing, film, television and new media interests across the globe. In addition the company also owns *The Times* and *Sunday Times*, the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York*

Post in America; Fox television and Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation and Star TV in China (an important territory for expansion). The main board members also include **Murdoch's son, James**, who is the executive for News International, which directly owns the UK papers.

In the U.K., therefore, Rupert Murdoch has long been considered a pivotal player in the political landscape because his papers reached so many and could influence their attitudes. The scandal revealed **the extent of contact he had with government and the Prime Minister** and the difficulty that officials felt about the closeness of that relationship – Murdoch indicated that he visited both Gordon Brown and David Cameron at Number 10 (but **always by the back door**).

Why Does it Matter?

The political importance of this relationship is in the effect it can have on government policy, including media policy, which should set the rules, fairly, for everyone. How far was media policy skewed in favour of the people they needed most, for example in allowing business expansions for powerful media owners?

The worst hacking revelations came to light just as the government was assessing a bid by News Corporation to acquire the remaining

61% of **BSkyB** (which owns and operates Sky television in the U.K.). Up until then the bid had seemed assured; News Corporation had agreed to hive off its interest in Sky News, thus preventing 100% cross-media ownership of news (i.e. TV channel and newspapers). This had ostensibly reassured the government that media plurality would be preserved and the bid could go ahead. However, post-scandal, questions were raised about News Corporation's suitability to increase its media ownership in this country, particularly against increasing protests from the public. In fact, the question became **whether News Corporation was a 'fit and proper person' to be a media owner in this country at all?** Should they hold onto the 39% they already owned, given the alleged criminal activity that had gone on unchecked at one of their companies for many years, let alone acquire even more shares in another company? In the end, News Corporation pre-empted a cross-party parliamentary vote against the bid by withdrawing it.

Currently, MPs see their previous relationships with media owners as misjudged, and are keen to move to greater separation – time will tell how far this can be done. The investigations by two government Select Committees into phone hacking are an important step in showing parliament's independence.

The Public Policy Timeline

News International's attempted bid for the remaining shares in BSkyB emerges out of decades of media policy, under both Conservative and Labour governments. This background is important because it influences both what the media businesses can do (legally and ethically) and ultimately the media culture existing in this country. The summary below aims to introduce you to those important changes in legislation, with a brief analysis of the impact this has had on ownership patterns.

1990 Broadcasting Act

Deregulation of media ownership. Overseas ownership now allowed. Regulatory bodies introduced. This act liberalised media ownership in Britain, allowing cross-media holdings i.e. one business could own interests in newspapers, television and film, for example. News International, therefore, was able to acquire interests in broadcast news programmes other than Sky whilst maintaining its ownership of newspapers.

1996 Broadcasting Act

Specifically relating to licensing for digital TV and radio stations. Less restrictions on cross-media ownership.

2002 Communications Act

Ofcom created. Single company ownership of ITV allowed. Relaxation of cross-media ownership (allowing for acquisition of Channel 5). Amended (in Lords) to demand a plurality test for large mergers and a ban on newspaper owners (with more than 20% of market) buying Channel 5.

Legislation implies a desire to open up media companies to investment to help them grow commercially but also the need to control this liberalisation. For example, how might UK citizens

feel if most of our television channels were owned by foreign companies or conglomerates who would effectively decide what to broadcast in Britain? The Acts also focus on the changes brought by **digital technology**. Satellites can now broadcast from one country into another, and so protecting country borders became impossible; and digital allows for the number of stations to increase, encouraging the move from **broadcasting** to the pattern of **narrowcasting** we have now.

Media policy directly affects our media culture – in other words the kind of media organisations we have, and the kind of content they provide. Opening up to investment makes this culture more '**corporate**' i.e. filled with **companies making a product to make a profit**. In the wake of phone hacking, certain commentators have criticised the drive to make money, suggesting that the pressure to sell newspapers made aggressive or illegal practices simply part of the culture of creating news.

You might want to think about **the importance of the BBC** in the light of these fears. It's argued that having an impartial, state-funded broadcaster provides a check and balance on the media culture in Britain. Commercial organisations may resent its size and funding but



would a media only populated by profit-seeking businesses be a better one?

Regulating the Media

The activities uncovered at the *News of the World* highlight the importance of **regulating the press**. This means deciding what they can and cannot do, *and* deciding the style of enforcing those rules. Should the press be allowed to regulate themselves, using a semi-independent body like the existing **Press Complaints Commission**, or should there be entirely separate laws governing their practice?

Regulation: Public Interest vs. Interesting to the Public?

This phrase, used by many of the commentators on this saga, is a useful one to summarise what we might feel is acceptable or not acceptable press behaviour. Journalists who have defended the actions of the newspapers involved (notably **Paul McMullan**) have pointed to the importance of a free press – one which is not hampered by regulation about what it can and cannot delve into – in uncovering corruption and protecting freedoms for all British citizens.

However, is the extra-marital activity of, say, Ryan Giggs, really a serious matter needing



exposure, **in the public interest**? Or is it merely gossip tittle-tattle that we just love to read about – **interesting to the public**, but not of public interest? Reading about stars' lives and closet activities might be very enjoyable, but does it really merit criminal intrusion into people's private lives, given that phone hacking may well turn out to be only *one* of these kinds of activities undertaken? The final edition of the *News of the World* (10th July 2011) offers a perfect insight into the contrast of these two 'interest' groups with its display of famous front covers from its 168 year-old history (see our online supplement); one cover features corruption in the Pakistan cricket team, revealed by the paper's notorious reporter **Mahzer Mahmood**, the 'fake sheikh' whose methods often stray beyond the legal. Another includes a photograph of Liz Hurley 'cheating' on her marriage with cricketer Shane Warne (she subsequently revealed her marriage was already over). The ends may justify the means in the first story; but do you agree that *all* forms of journalism need to be protected as being firmly in the public interest?

Regulation: The Press Complaints Commission

The opportunity for these practices to continue at News International and allegedly elsewhere in newspapers has thrown a spotlight on the work of the **Press Complaints Commission (PCC)**. Part of OFCOM, the regulatory body for media interests in the U.K., the PCC is intended to oversee **self-regulation of the press**. The fact that the newspapers control their own discipline system has for a long time been a divisive issue – and has now become an urgent concern. In 1991, David Mellor, then culture secretary, famously told journalists that they were drinking at the 'last chance saloon' as far as self-regulation was concerned. The PCC was set up, with representatives from the national newspapers and an independent chairperson, and the system appeared to function acceptably. Several times since then, most notably the death of Princess Diana (albeit in Paris and therefore under a different country's press system), the issue of press control and freedom versus privacy has been raised, but has always died down.

The failure of the PCC to investigate effectively (see Hacking Scandal Timeline on page 21) means that this self-regulation is likely to give way to stronger control; a strong contender is currently an independent body, which represents an erosion of the idea of a free press. Before we rush to agree with this, it's worth remembering that the scandal of newspaper institutions, *News of the World*, was revealed by the work of another, *The Guardian*.

The Leveson Inquiry into the Culture, Practice and Ethics of the Press which is opening as we go to press, will be an essential extension of the story with far-reaching implications.

The Hacking Scandal – as a Media Event

As a news event, one of the phenomena of the hacking scandal has been the **speed** at which it has moved, and the **personalities** that have been featured. It is also a perfect new media story



because the speed of the latter has been able to match the speed of the events themselves (Galtung and Ruge's concept of 'frequency' is relevant here). Therefore, anyone following the event on Twitter has been able to watch as the 'Twittersphere' exploded with immediate responses and commentary.

In the wake of the role of social media in the so-called 'Arab Spring' revolutions, there might be a tendency to over-emphasise the role of social media, as some have already suggested; but it is certainly true that the availability of new media – from email to Twitter and Facebook – provide opportunities for people to express their support more accessibly and easily. The speed of new media means that it also had a potential role in **shaping the news agenda** – by providing instant feedback of public opinion, as well as publicising responses. And whilst the aspects of media policy and governmental control are very important to us as citizens, the news story has provided many dramatic highlights that are straight out of reality TV.

To how it functions as a dramatic story, it's useful first to consider the players:



Rupert Murdoch – Owner of News Corporation

James Murdoch – Chief Executive at News International (Rupert's son)

Wendi Deng – Rupert Murdoch's wife

Rebekah Brooks – ex-editor of *The Sun*, ex-chief executive at News International (resigned)

Andy Coulson – ex-editor of *The Sun* and ex-media advisor to David Cameron

Paul McMullan – ex-journalist at *News of the World* who revealed culture of phone-hacking

Hugh Grant – celebrity spokesperson for Hacked Off, the organisation seeking public enquiry into phone hacking (now set up)

David Cameron – Prime Minister

Sir Paul Stephenson – ex-Police Commissioner for London Metropolitan force (resigned)

John Yates – ex-Assistant Police Commissioner for Metropolitan force (resigned)

Tom Watson – member of government select committee investigating phone hacking

The Hacking Scandal as Drama

Missing from this analysis of events is the **human drama** that makes it a compelling event, leading commentators to liken it to a **classic conspiracy thriller**, where the intrigue spreads from one organisation (the media) to others – the government and the police – making it read like a film script. Its heroes are **Nick Davies** (*The Guardian* reporter) and **Tom Watson**, the committee MP, both of whom have doggedly pursued this question since 2006 despite opposition and, allegedly, underhand threats from interested parties.

The corruption uncovered has **threatened the position of the Prime Minister** due to his employment of Andy Coulson and questions as to his judgement therein; and has resulted in **the resignation of two senior police officers**. It has provided some dramatic set pieces.

There has been a **courtroom drama** in the form of the Murdochs' evidence to the parliamentary committee, including the foam pie attack and Wendi Deng's counter-attack to protect her husband. **Rupert Murdoch's relationship to Rebekah Brooks** has generated much coverage – how he has protected her even despite her apparent closeness to the scandal – as have **the relationships within the Murdoch family** between sons, daughter, Rupert and Wendi. It is a drama about people's desire for **power, family and corruption**, with Murdoch's faltering delivery at the committee hearing feeding succession speculation. HBO, with *The Sopranos*, could not have thought up a better drama!

The scandal has also drawn **celebrity spokespeople** – notably **Hugh Grant** who has acted for **Hacked Off** which campaigned for a public enquiry into the press. The presence of Grant and other entertainment celebrities certainly 'sexes up' the content of the story as they repay years of press intrusion into their private lives by tilting at the Murdoch empire. Grant has appeared on *Question Time*, **Steve Coogan** has appeared on *Newsnight* and **Jude Law** is currently one of the legal test cases being brought against News International through the courts. Their presence arguably helps keep the story newsworthy because of their celebrity status – not least, and ironically, for the tabloid press.

Conclusion

At the time of writing, the **Leveson Inquiry** into the Culture, Practice and Ethics of the Press is about to launch. The questions remaining are whether this scandal will have a lasting impact on one of the world's most powerful media conglomerates, and whether the Murdoch family will retain their hold on the business. Will the revelations about press practices lead to a cleaner style of journalism, or will the cut-throat nature of business mean a return to illegal or unethical behaviour? Will relationships between government and media organisations change so that policy will be formulated in a more impartial atmosphere? Like *The Sopranos*, this is not a one-season saga – but its impact will depend on how much interest the public continues to take, and whether they feel it's worth watching.

Rona Murray is a freelance lecturer and writer for Film and Media Studies who is also currently conducting research into women in the film industry.

Hacking Scandal Timeline

Here is summary of the events – note how the dates accelerate as the crisis deepens.

2003

Suspected unlawful access to royal family phone due to *NoW* article re Prince William. Police called in.

2006

Mulcaire (private investigator) and **Goodman** (*NoW* showbiz reporter) arrested re phone hacking (convicted 2007). **Nick Davis** begins to investigate – following News International's branding of it the action of 'one rogue reporter'.

2007

Andy Coulson leaves *NoW* (Resigns as editor to become media adviser to David Cameron, leader of opposition). Commons Culture Select Committee investigates whether there is any evidence that phone hacking was more widespread. Assurances are given by News International CEO (**Les Hinton**) that an internal investigation has taken place and there is no evidence.

2009

The Guardian reveals that **Gordon Taylor**, chief-executive of the Footballers' Association, had sued News International in 2007 and won damages re phone hacking, on the undertaking that all details of the case would be kept secret. No evidence found by NI, PCC or police (Assistant Commissioner John Yates) to merit further investigation.

2010

February

Department of Culture Media & Sport (DCMS) Select Committee Report finds it impossible that wider practice was *not* taking place. Further claims emerge through *New York Times* investigation. Police reopen investigation. Assistant editor **Ian Edmundson** suspended over allegations. Evidence found that chief reporter **Neville Thurlbeck** may have commissioned hacking. (Both subsequently arrested in 2011.)

September

DCMS Select Committee reconvenes. Home Affairs Select Committee launches investigation into police response to evidence of phone hacking.

2011

January

Police launch Operation Weeting to investigate claims of widespread hacking at *NoW*. Operation Elveden subsequently launched to investigate evidence of inappropriate payments to police. Andy Coulson resigns from Downing Street.

March

Agreement (by NI) that Sky News will be split away from BSkyB to allow the takeover purchase of remaining shares by News International.

May

Judicial review allowed into police inquiry into phone hacking (on application from Chris Bryant, John Prescott, Brian Paddick and Brendan Montague).

July

4th-5th *The Guardian* reveals that Milly Dowler's phone hacked.

6th Allegations that serving personnel and 7/7 victims phones hacked.

7th Announcement from James Murdoch that 168 year-old *NoW* will close

9th Police (John Yates) accepts responsibility for failure to reopen investigation in 2009

10th Opposition party calls for BSkyB bid to be suspended

12th All parties agree to back (opposition) motion to veto bid

15th In advance of vote, News Corporation withdraws bid. Rebekah Brooks and Les Hinton resign

19th James Murdoch, Rupert Murdoch and Rebekah Brooks questioned by CM&S committee

19th Home Affairs Select Committee Report: finds serious inadequacies in the police investigation and clear attempts by News International to block the inquiry

28th Fresh allegations that Sara Payne, the campaigner against paedophilia, who has worked closely with *News of the World*, was a victim of phone hacking.

Essential coverage from *The Guardian* at www.guardian.co.uk/media/phone-hacking with a superb prezi on guardian/news/datablog/interactive/2011/july21

Key Terms

Conglomerate – a business organisation made up of several companies, often spread across related sectors, ultimately owned by one holding company.

Cross-media Ownership – the ownership of media companies across diverse fields i.e. newspapers, TV, radio, internet communications.

Fleet Street – a generic name for the British press, referring back to when their London bases were located on that street.

Free Press – the idea of a print media that is not restricted or subject to any outside control or censorship e.g. by a nation's government.

Plurality – the concept of many (plural) voices and opinions in the public space, to represent the many, different points of view (politically and socially) that exist in the public itself.

Public service broadcasting – regulated broadcasting in the U.K. which is controlled in its content and patterns of broadcasting to ensure that there is a service for the whole community addressing plurality and non-commercial styles of programming.

Further research

Tuesday, 5th July – the story featured on *The Daily Mail*, *The Times* and *The Guardian* front pages; the following day, it was covered on all front pages.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/table/2011/jul/15/abcs-national-newspapers>

Professor Natalie Fenton: 'News of the World. We need more than a public enquiry' at *red pepper*: <http://www.redpepper.org.uk/notw-more/>

James Murdoch's MacTaggart lecture at the Edinburgh International Television Festival: 28 August 2009.

For the impact of 'Clictivism' as part of the hacking scandal, see 'The Voice of Protest' in *The Guardian*, 21st July 2011, G2, pp. 5-7.

Home Affairs Committee timeline:

http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/home-affairs/unauthorised_tapping_or_hacking_mobile.communications_report.pdf and BBC News: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-14124020>

The Leveson Inquiry: Culture, Practice and Ethics of the Press
www.levensoninquiry.org.uk

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See also Emma Calway's article on *News of the World* and Jonathan Nunns on Murdoch in the Politics online supplement.



Your top 30 YouTube political clips – as chosen by Pete Fraser

'30 YouTube videos with a political theme, chosen entirely because I think they are worth seeing – for all kinds of reasons! All the clips, in this order, appear ready for you to watch in a playlist on YouTube at <http://www.YouTube.com/user/petefraser1?feature=mhee>'

Elections in the background

To start, some films and TV programmes which feature elections as the backdrop for part of their stories.



1. The Killing

If you didn't see this 20-part crime thriller from Denmark the first time on BBC Four, and missed it when it was repeated recently, you'll just have to buy the DVD box set. Series 2 has already started. Fantastic, gripping TV – you stop noticing the sub-titles early on. The killing of a 19-year old girl, Nanna Birk Larsson leads to a whole trail of suspects, including politicians battling in an election to be Mayor of Copenhagen. This is a UK trailer.



2. The Wire

Haven't seen *The Wire*? Go get the five box sets...probably the greatest TV series ever made, a sprawling tale of life in Baltimore, ranging across drug dealers, the local newspaper, the education system, the police force and again the election of a mayor in a corrupt political system. *The Wire* is an epic tale. This clip shows Mayor Carcetti, making a classic politician's empty speech.



3. In the Line of Fire

Clint Eastwood plays an ageing secret service agent, Frank Horrigan, assigned with the task of protecting the president during an election campaign, but haunted by memories of his failure to protect JFK, and up against a villainous master of disguise, John Malkovich. An excellent action thriller with some great set piece scenes. This trailer should whet your appetite to pick it up for a few quid online.



4. The 39 Steps

Classic Hitchcock suspense thriller from the 1930s with some great comic scenes. This clip includes a sequence where our hero, the accused man, Richard Hannay, on the run from the police and the bad guys in Scotland, is mistaken for the candidate in an election and has to make a speech without knowing anything about the policies for which he is supposed to be standing. Hmm – sounds familiar!

Comedies

Then come a whole lot of comedies. Satirical digs at politics, politicians and at the media treatment of politics...



5. The Day Today – War!

This spoof series, presented by Chris Morris, featuring sports reporter Alan Partridge and produced by Armando Iannucci (all of whom more later) was a parody of television news coverage, pompous and overblown. It uncannily predicted the style of a lot of real TV News to come – particular Fox News in the USA. In this episode, Morris manipulates his interviewees into a declaration of war, which sees the studio transformed into an appropriate style for the occasion.



6. Ali G interviews Pat Buchanan

A Republican presidential candidate, with very right-wing views. **Sacha Baron-Cohen**, in the guise of a whole load of characters, is famous for these spoof interviews; this was one of his earlier ones. Later, *Ali G in da House* sees our hero become a politician himself...



7. The Thick of it

Later transformed to the big screen as *In the Loop*, another **Iannucci** creation, with the brilliant **Peter Capaldi** as the Prime Minister's thuggish spin doctor, Malcolm Tucker, based loosely on Alastair Campbell, here letting rip at cabinet members (warning – lots of swearing that rhymes with Tucker).



8. The New Statesman

Rik Mayall as a right-wing Tory MP, Alan B'Stard, a spoof of the Thatcher years, making a speech to the party conference, with the great slogan 'Clinging to power' behind him.



9. Cassetteboy vs. Nick Griffin

Within hours of Griffin's controversial appearance on *Question Time*, cassetteboy had put out this mashup which remorselessly parodies the BNP leader's contribution to the programme. Have a look at his other mashups too – his Alan Sugar 'the Bloody Apprentice' is brilliant.



10. Dr Strangelove

Stanley Kubrick's film made at the height of the Cold War, sends up the idea of an atomic war. **Peter Sellers** plays several roles, including that of the US President, trying to explain the situation to his Soviet counterpart.



11. Spitting Image

This final scene from the **1987 election night** special attacks the Tory government by linking them with the Nazis in their pastiche of a song from the film *Cabaret*. For several years, *Spitting Image* was probably the most powerful political satire on TV, with politicians turned into grotesque puppets.



12. Election Night Armistice

A gentler lampoon, from the **election night of 1997**, where their regular humpty-dumpty puppet named after the (about-to-be) Prime Minister was one of several regular features on this **Armando Iannucci** creation.



13. Alan Partridge

Given his own TV show, '**Knowing me, Knowing You**', Alan regularly made a mess of things – few worse than hosting an election debate in this episode, which inevitably ends in violence.



14. Mr Khan, Community Leader

A series of web shorts appeared on the BBC site and on BBC3, featuring this British Pakistani character, played by **Adil Ray**. He is a keen cricket fan and a shopkeeper in Leicester who should soon have his own TV sitcom. He was particularly active during the last election, encouraging people to vote and offering his views on UK politicians.



15. Yes, Minister

Seen by many as an uncannily accurate portrayal of what happens when parties get into power and find they have no power at all in the face of Civil Servants and bureaucracy. This ran for many years on the BBC, with **Paul Eddington** as the hapless minister, Jim Hacker.



16. Monty Python – Election Night Special

A more surreal take on election coverage, which probably led to the founding of the **Monster Raving Loony Party**.



17. Bush/Blair mashup – My Endless Love

This was one of a whole set of mashups that emerged during the 'special relationship' between the pair, which tended to suggest that it was more than just a war that bound them together. Original duet by **Lionel Ritchie and Diana Ross**.

Songs and Arguments...



18. Billy Bragg

Bragg has never been afraid to speak his mind and sing about the things he thinks are important politically in a career spanning thirty years; this year **he wrote a new song inspired by the News of the World revelations** and I believe this was the debut performance. He refers back to the Hillsborough disaster of 1989, where 96 Liverpool supporters died, where *The Sun* famously lied about the supporters' behaviour, covering up the failings of the police. As a result, a boycott of the paper began on Merseyside, which continues for many people to this day. **News International** avoided a much bigger potential boycott of the **News of the World** this summer by closing down the paper.



19. Steve Coogan on Newsnight

Covering the same story, the man behind **Alan Partridge** with a passionate attack on the misbehaviour of tabloid journalists. A gripping watch!



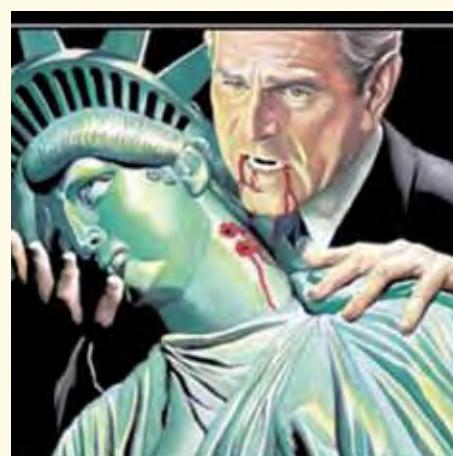
20. Four Lions

A controversial film by **Chris Morris**, imagining a bunch of incompetent jihadis in the UK. This is the trailer for a very funny but politically hard-hitting film.



21. The Specials – Ghost Town

This summer saw the 30th anniversary of this single, which hit no.1 at the height of the 1981 riots, a time of political and social unrest in the early days of the Thatcher government, which saw strange echoes this year.



22. Armando Iannucci

Bush and Republicans mashup, this time showing the absurdity of just how much US politicians keep drawing on the same words to get across their message.



23. Mark Thomas v The Daily Mail

Mark is always worth a watch with his hard-hitting critique of politics and the media.



24. Charlie Brooker

The world's most generic news report; *Newswipe* and *The Guardian* columnist's take on news conventions and the meaninglessness of it all. Not strictly politics, but apply it every time you watch the news and you'll see how bland the coverage ends up being.



27. Tom Watson v the Murdochs

More gripping stuff, where the tenacious Labour MP and videogames player, **Tom Watson**, questions Rupert Murdoch at the Commons Select Committee in July. At last, a politician who really wants to get to the truth.



30. Brasseye – Cake

Back again to **Morris** and **Iannucci**; a whole episode of this spoof documentary series was devoted to the topic of drugs, full of made-up drugs. (Un)fortunately, celebrities and some MPs (such as Tory David Amess, who appears near the end) were so keen to jump on a simplistic populist anti-drugs message that they didn't question this nonsense about the 'made-up drug' 'Cake'.

Watch these clips and hopefully it will tempt you to delve a bit further. There's plenty more to see!

Pete is a former Head of Media Studies who is Senior Examiner for a major Awarding Body. He is a regular contributor to *MediaMagazine*, and the author of *Pete's Media Blog*. You can follow him on Twitter @petesmediablog for useful A Level tips.



25. Randy Newman's Political Science

If his voice sounds familiar, that's because he did the music for the *Toy Story* films (and many others), but he's been doing hard-hitting songs about the absurdity of politics for many years. This song dates from the 70s and is from the point of view of a small-minded American.



28. Donald Rumsfeld

The American Secretary of State, parodied with the clever addition of an extra pair of hands.



26. Bill Hicks

You may not have heard of him, but he was a stand-up comedian who really attacked those in power and who died in 1994 aged only 33. No-one can be comfortable hearing his routines; there are a lot more on YouTube – check them out.



29. Homer Simpson tries to vote for Obama

They had to be in this playlist somewhere, so this is the one...



ATTACKING AMERICA

A Decade of Documentary Dissent

After people all around the world witnessed the shocking attacks of 9/11, they looked at America with a collective sense of sympathy. But with retribution and war quick to rear their ugly heads, the goodwill failed to last. Pete Turner discusses documentary makers' decade-long assault on all things Americana.

Over the past decade, America, arguably the world's only remaining superpower, has taken a beating. **September 11th 2001** brought an unprecedented attack on home soil with economic, political and military targets leading to over 3000 deaths. Less than a month later, **America went to war with Afghanistan** and their forces are still there a decade later. Less forgivably, President Bush and his neo-

conservative cronies then set their sights on **Iraq** in the continuing campaign known as **The War on Terror**. Starting an illegal war to find Weapons of Mass Destruction that never materialised, American soldiers found themselves dying for a cause that the folks back home soon stopped supporting. **Hurricane Katrina** hit the coast in 2005 and was the costliest natural disaster in the history of the USA. Two wars costing billions of dollars a year, increasing frequency and costs of natural disasters and a deregulated financial industry ended up feeding into a **huge economic crisis** that caused a global recession, bank bailouts, a huge rise in unemployment and over a million people losing their houses since 2008. Documentary makers of the world with their tiny budgets began flinging anything they could at the bullying, greedy and corrupt Goliath that America had become.

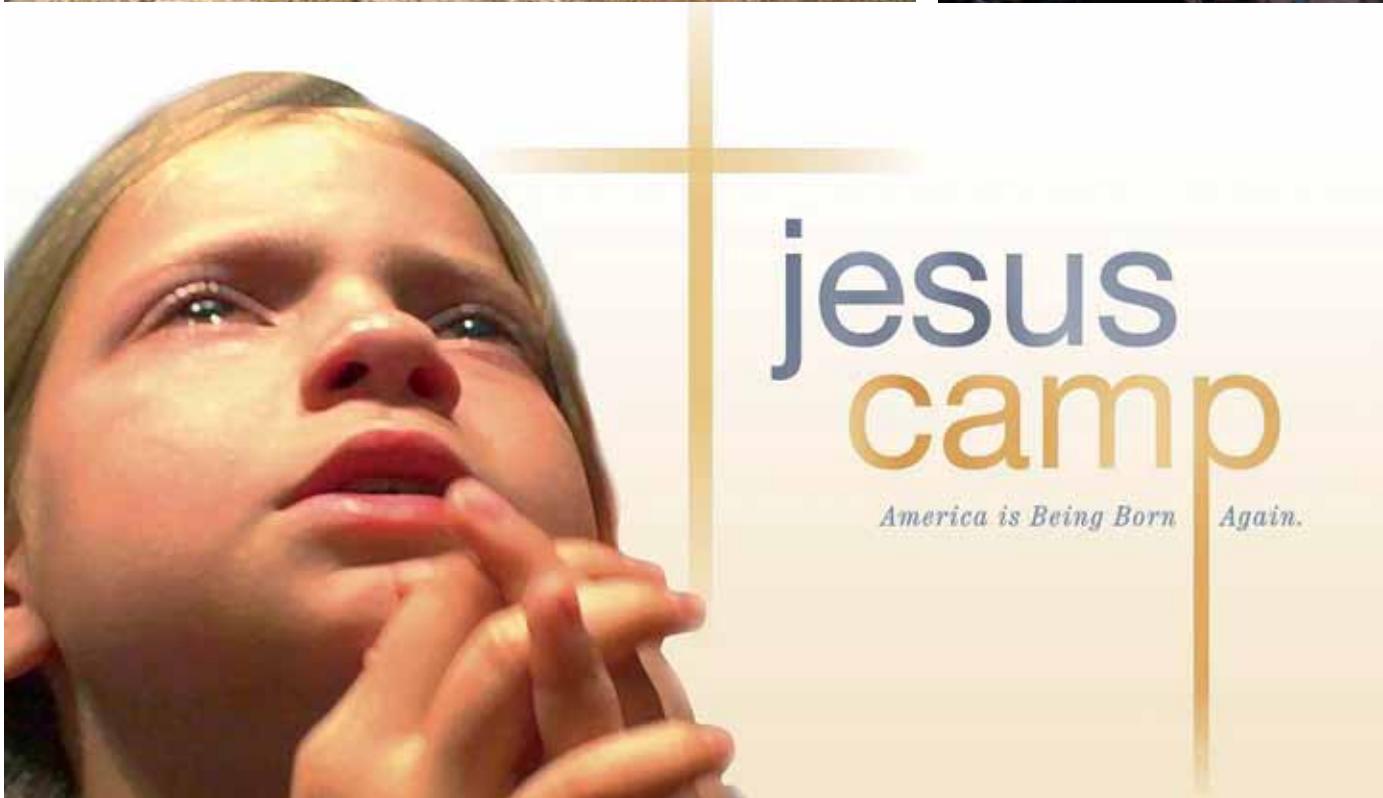
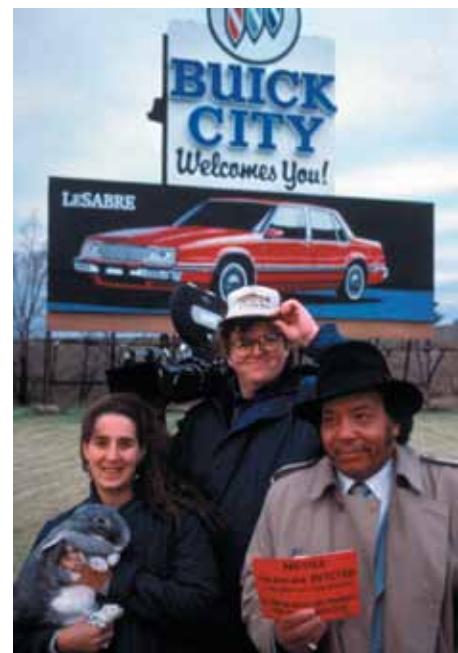
'American' Issues?

No doubt many of these filmmakers were inspired by the huge box office success and Oscar glory of iconic muckraker **Michael Moore's Bowling for Columbine** (2002). Released just over a year after 9/11, the film explores and critiques gun culture in America, daring to suggest that



the ownership and availability of guns, the deep-seated racism and foreign policy of America are actually more to blame for school shootings than rock music, films and videogames. Other documentary makers followed Moore's success by attacking America on a range of issues from the environment to Christian fundamentalism to the official investigation of 9/11.

Robert Greenwald, a political activist and filmmaker, directed **Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalism** (2004) which painstakingly deconstructs how the Fox News channel has become a '24/7 commercial for the conservatives and the Republican Party'. The documentary



targets Fox News specifically but implicitly argues that too many Americans have become unquestioning drones that support this media empire in dominating the airwaves and spewing constant right-wing propaganda in the place of real 'fair and balanced' journalism.

The politics of climate change

Director Davis Guggenheim teamed up with **Al Gore**, the man who controversially 'lost' the presidency to Bush in the 2000 election, to film the surprisingly popular PowerPoint lecture/documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006). The film has been accused of using climate change as another issue that proves 'Western man and more specifically, American society – is evil and is the cause of most of the world's ills.' (Hyman, 2011) In the film Gore explicitly states of his fellow Americans 'We are still, by far, the worst contributor to the problem.'

In the wake of the deaths and destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina, controversial feature filmmaker **Spike Lee** made a four part mini-series for HBO, *When The Levees Broke: A Requiem In Four Acts* (2006), on the aftermath and response to the devastation.

As Lee conducts his hundreds of interviews, a terrible conspiracy begins to emerge, one in which the various authorities knew what was going to happen, did sod all about it, and then proceeded to wash their hands of the whole sorry mess.

<http://www.empireonline.com/reviews/reviewcomplete.asp?FID=135126>

The film and the people in it are angry, not at the storm, but at the state of their country, Bush's America.

Oscar nominee, *Jesus Camp* (Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady, 2006), may have inconveniently lost to Al Gore's truth at the Academy Awards but

it still stirred heated debates with its unflattering depiction of evangelical Christian kids' camps hell-bent on indoctrinating America's youth to become part of God's army against Islam and 'pro-choicers'. Worryingly suggesting that these children could be the future of the US, the documentary fortunately had such an impact that the Jesus Camp depicted in the film had to close.

Moore returned in 2007 with his plea for healthcare reform in America. *Sicko* (Michael Moore, 2007) compared America with other countries in terms of the healthcare of its citizens and looked at the way people are treated by their medical insurance companies. Moore even took 9/11 rescue workers to Cuba and Guantanamo Bay to highlight the treatment of ordinary Americans by a system that treats them worse than poorer countries and prisoners.

Perhaps most controversially is a series



of internet and eventually DVD-released documentaries culminating in what appears to be the final version known as **Loose Change 9/11: An American Coup** (Dylan Avery, 2009). This film is part of the growing **9/11 Truth Movement** and details the conspiracy theories that have sprung up to suggest the official story of 9/11 is far from the truth. Arguing that the towers were brought down by controlled demolition explosives, that United 93 did not crash in a field and that the Pentagon was also not hit by a hijacked airliner are just some of the claims found in this film. Most notably, the latest release of the film puts 9/11 into context with an early montage that shows how a national disaster catapulted Hitler into power, the Vietnam War was started by a lying government, and the neo-conservatives that run America hoped for 'a new Pearl Harbor' (see *Rebuilding America's Defences* written by **The Project for a New American Century**) to help start wars all around the globe in the 21st century.

Capitalism

A significant number of non-fiction filmmakers has targeted America with less precision. Attacking capitalism in the last decade of growing financial uncertainty and finally a huge recession makes America a sitting duck. **Michael Moore's** work always implicitly condemned capitalism for many of society's problems but then in 2009 he made **Capitalism: A Love Story** that argued for a more humanised economic system. The documentary does not fully advocate socialism but argues that in a religious nation, would the people of America not accept that Jesus would have balked at the greed, selfishness and unforgiving nature of capitalist ideology?

Similarly, Robert Greenwald followed

Outfoxed with **Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price** (2005), an attack on one of the biggest multinational corporations in the world. Using interviews to criticise the American company's practices in terms of worker rights, relations with unions, environmental protection and damaging local business and competition, the film is a damning indictment of a corporation out of control. It ends with a call to action to stop Wal-Mart shops from being constructed in every community.

In 2003, filmmakers **Mark Achbar and Jennifer Abbott** were already looking at the phenomenon of corporate greed and power, arguing in **The Corporation** that these institutions behave like psychopaths towards the rest of society. Among some of the other symptoms, the pair diagnose corporations as psychotic due to their 'callous unconcern for the feelings of others', 'reckless disregard for the safety of others', and 'incapacity to experience guilt'.

Morgan Spurlock took a slightly more fun and less scathing look at one particular corporation in **Supersize Me** (2004). Like Michael Moore, he positioned himself front and centre of his documentary, pulling a feature length stunt to expose the greed and lack of concern for the public that some fast food restaurants have with their 'supersize' policy. Attempting to eat nothing but McDonald's for 30 days and accepting the challenge to go 'supersize' on his meal every time a member of staff makes the offer, leads Spurlock to increased cholesterol, weight gain and a range of other health problems. Tackling obesity in America and fast-food culture, the film had a huge impact on nutrition and particularly the welfare of children and their school dinners.

Another specific company deserving of a good

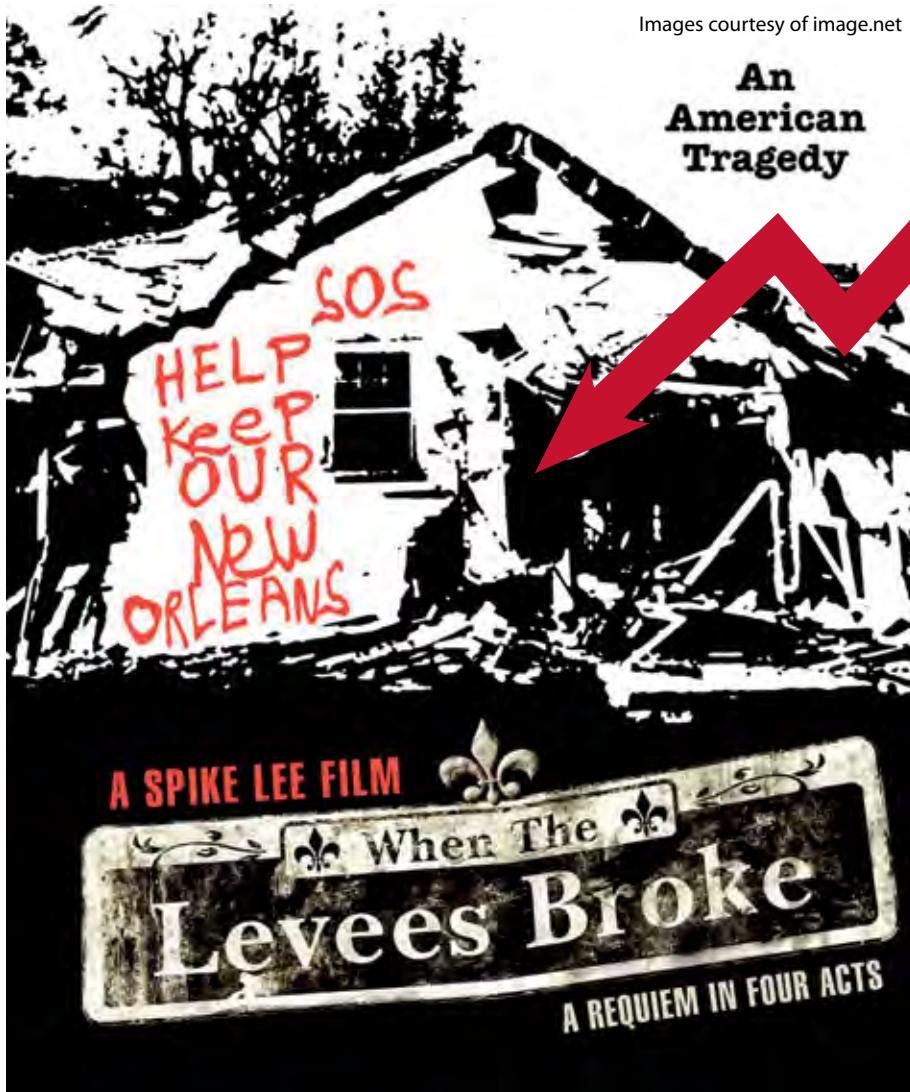
kicking was the Enron Corporation. **Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room** (Alex Gibney, 2005) explored the huge scandal that resulted from the collapse of the company in 2001. With criminal trials of company executives, the death of the founder before he could go to trial for fraud, and traders involved in ensuring California would have shortages of electricity and therefore have to pay more for their energy, the documentary is yet another hideous portrayal of American corporate greed and the powerful screwing the ordinary people at every opportunity.

Narrated by Matt Damon, the scope of **Charles Ferguson's Inside Job** (2010) is far greater than Gibney's documentary. Expanding outwards from **Enron**, Ferguson's film looks at the entirety of the economic crisis, from opening section 'How we got there' to fifth and final part 'Where we are now'. Most depressingly the film concludes that inequality in the U.S. is up, education is increasingly out of reach for young people, tax breaks favour the wealthy and many financial advisors of the Bush years and even before are still circling President Obama's ears. Not only this, but most sickening of all, no prosecutions have been brought for individuals or firms involved in causing all this pain, and bankers bonuses are even higher in 2010!

War

In addition to these attackers, the most outspoken and outraged documentary makers have been enraged by America's continuing arrogance in its foreign policy. From Michael Moore, Charles Ferguson and Alex Gibney to the likes of **Michael Winterbottom** and **Errol Morris**, the wars in Afghanistan and particularly Iraq have been a constant source of muck to sling at the Bush administration in the last

Images courtesy of image.net



spawned in roughly equal parts by Michael Moore's finger-wagging docs, the Bush years and the advent of digital video. With so much to be angry about and not much to lose because of cheap filmmaking practices, it is no wonder that this body of films has so effectively grabbed people's attention by condemning 'just about everything it could come up with to condemn.'

Bloomer, 2009

Pete Turner teaches at Bracknell and Wokingham College, is undertaking a PhD at Oxford Brookes University and writes a film blog at <http://pturner1010filmblog.blogspot.com/>

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<http://www.empireonline.com/reviews/reviewcomplete.asp?FID=135126>

MoreMediaMag

Read Stephen Connolly's article on *Outfoxed* in *MediaMagazine* 11.



decade. Moore made *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) specifically to persuade the American public not to re-elect Bush and to get the American troops home. Gibney and Morris took very different stylistic and contextual approaches to the torture, abuse, humiliation and murder of American-held prisoners in *Taxi to the Dark Side* (Alex Gibney, 2007) and *Standard Operating Procedure* (Errol Morris, 2008). *Why We Fight* (Eugene Jarecki, 2005) explores the continuing need for America to go to war every decade in order to maintain the war and military industry and therefore the America's dominance in the world. *Mat Whitecross and Michael Winterbottom* created docudrama *The Road to Guantanamo* (2006) featuring the true story of three British men detained at Guantanamo after visits to Pakistan and Afghanistan shortly after 9/11. *Iraq in Fragments* (James Longley, 2006) takes an intimate look at the lives of three groups of people in post-invasion Iraq and how their

lives have been affected. Finally, before Charles Ferguson made *Inside Job*, his directorial debut was *No End in Sight* (2007) which used many interviews with, among others, people formerly loyal to Bush, to criticise the planning and carrying out of the invasion of Iraq. Poor planning and failure to listen to experienced experts are blamed for many of the continuing problems that blight the occupation of the country.

Hard times for the US; good times for documentary

In conclusion, the Noughties have been a tough time for America, beginning with a horrendous terrorist attack and ending with economic crisis and two wars still being fought for dubious reasons in Middle Eastern countries. On the other hand

the Noughties were an excellent decade for documentaries, with the six all-time highest-grossing docs – and nine of the top 10-hitting theaters during this time period.

McNally, 2009

Non-fiction filmmakers have questioned, criticised and confronted the powerful. Audiences have turned up to see documentaries more than ever. Perhaps with so much right-wing propaganda on TV, American audiences have craved the other side of the story. Bloomer (2009) argues in his article on left-wing documentaries that they are



THE SOLDIERS' STORY

the Power of Digital Documentary

Sean Richardson analyses *Armadillo* and *Restrepo*, to explore how documentary films construct and subvert our ideas about 'War'.

Powerful documentaries can reveal the truth behind the headlines and show the reality of political spin. *Armadillo* (2010) and *Restrepo*, (2010) are two superb documentaries that are a must-see for any serious film or media student. *Armadillo* is a Danish documentary that takes viewers directly into combat in Afghanistan, as it follows a Danish platoon of soldiers on a tough six-month tour of duty. *Restrepo* is a

similar documentary, but follows U.S. soldiers, directed by American journalist **Sebastian Junger** and British/American photojournalist **Tim Hetherington**. What makes *Restrepo* so poignant is that the filmmaker, **Tim Hetherington**, was killed recently while photographing the front lines in the besieged city of Misrata, Libya, during the 2011 Libyan Civil War.

War is hell as the saying goes, and these two



FROM AWARD-WINNING PHOTOGRAPHER TIM HETHERINGTON AND
SEBASTIAN JUNGER, AUTHOR OF *WAR*



"An often **ELECTRIFYING**
vérité trip into combat and the hearts of men."
—Variety

"A **RIVETING** journey into combat."
—New York Magazine

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ONE PLATOON, ONE VALLEY, ONE YEAR

IN THEATERS SUMMER 2010

documentaries reveal the terror and trauma of being a soldier in Afghanistan. The violence and danger is palpable and constant, but by focusing on the soldiers' stories, we get a sense of the real politics of war and involvement in Afghanistan. There are no interviews with generals or diplomats. The only goal is to make viewers feel as if they have just been through a 90-minute deployment. This is war, revealed.

The Directors made a statement on their aims:

The war in Afghanistan has become highly politicized, but soldiers rarely take part in that discussion. Our intention was to capture the experience of combat, boredom and fear through the eyes of the soldiers themselves. Their lives were our lives: we did not sit down with their families, we did not interview Afghans, we did not explore geopolitical debates. Soldiers are living and fighting and dying at remote outposts in Afghanistan in conditions that few Americans back home can imagine. Their experiences are important to understand, regardless of one's political beliefs. Beliefs are a way to avoid looking at reality. This is reality.

Tim Hetherington and Sebastian Junger:

www.restrepothemovie.com

Restrepo

Restrepo documents the deployment of a platoon of U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan's Korengal Valley. The film focuses on a remote 15-man outpost, Restrepo, named after platoon medic Restrepo who was killed in action. The Korengal Valley is considered one of the most dangerous postings in the U.S. military. As the style is cinema vérité documentary, the power of unguarded moments of soldiers' thoughts and feelings reveals what it is actually like to be implementing a 'policy'. CNN described the Korengal Valley, Afghanistan, as 'the most dangerous place in the world'. The intertextual

references are unavoidable as you view the film, where you remember a thousand other filmic references to war. The platoon 'Battle Company' is led by Captain Dan Kearney, whose plan is to establish an outpost at a key point on Taliban battle routes. He is in the mould of Tom Hanks' Captain John H. Miller from *Saving Private Ryan*, with a beleaguered, all-American heroic presence. The successful maintenance of Outpost Restrepo, named after their dead comrade, turns the tide of war in the hostile valley and seems to frighten the Taliban.

But the key scenes when this documentary is at its most subversive, are those showing the soldiers in down time, coming back down to earth after being on patrol. There is a very revealing sequence where Capt. Dan Kearney meets local Afghan elders. One elder complains he has lost a cow. It's explained that the cow became tangled in razor wire and had to be put out of its misery. He is offered compensation: the cow's weight in rice, beans and sugar. This is not the image we see in conventional media of Afghans, or their interaction with soldiers. The exhaustion and despair of both soldier and Afghan elders is visible. The Americans can give cash compensation, as part of their campaign to win hearts and minds against the Taliban. The significance of the scene is clear – the money is useless as a political tool, but the Afghans take it nevertheless. The location footage is intercut with debriefings of the survivors conducted soon after they've been flown out to Italy. This is extremely dramatic, as the horror of death and loss starts to hit home for these young soldiers. The directors film them with a simple black backdrop and the lighting reveals their faces in close-up detail, crumpling with their memories.

Armadillo

Armadillo, 2010, is even more subversive, in that the unguarded moments of the Danish



soldiers it reveals are more explosive, and less politically correct. The film, which follows a platoon on a six-month tour of duty, took the top prize at Critics' Week at Cannes, 2011. The soldiers are posted for a six-month tour at Armadillo, a military base in Helmand province, Afghanistan, where some 270 Danish and British soldiers are based.

The poster artwork for the film is significant as it shows a human heart in close-up, with a war torn Afghanistan in the background. But the most extreme aspect is that the heart is morphing into a grenade with a pin attached, the armadillo-like grenade casing encroaching on the flesh of the heart. The signification is not subtle. The armadillo, a creature with a leathery armoured shell, is what human soldiers have to mimic in the horrific theatre of modern warfare. To suffer the emotional trauma that the film chronicles, the implication is that the men have to become almost machine-like in their outlook, armoured against the horrors of war.

The politically incorrect and less guarded moments reveal this very humanity that beats underneath the armour, however. A large portion of the documentary reveals them dividing their leisure time between maintaining their equipment, working out, playing violent First Person Shooter Computer Games, and generally objectifying women.

This is clearly not *Call of Duty*, however, and there is a marked disconnect between the game-playing and the reality. It is fascinating to see soldiers participating in the *simulacra* of the violent *Call of Duty* type game and then the

next day facing the real bullets in real time. In a shot that raises questions about media effects, the director cuts from a *Call of Duty*-style virtual grenade throw to the real life trajectory of a live grenade thrown by the soldiers!

At one point a soldier reveals in interview, **Personally, I didn't go for political reasons. It's the experience and the adventure...**

Troops are depicted as adrenalin-addicted, sensation-seeking young males looking for the next battle to give them their next fix. This seems so revealing and true, yet is so far from the sanitised representations we are drip fed from the British media outlets. Armed Forces media communication teams control much of what we see and hear, so the documentary seems to jar with the hegemonic view. BBC representations of Afghanistan, Iraq and Wootton Bassett often feature the reverent tones of Defence Correspondent Caroline Wyatt, with a clear **preferred reading**. The valiance and duty aspects of modern warfare are often represented in media broadcasts, but the thrill-seeking or enjoyment of danger is often sanitised out of the picture. *Armadillo* gives a more representative picture, with the three dimensional personalities of the soldiers really coming through. This means that the visceral effect is intensified and it is possibly the best 'war film' you will ever see.

The controversial aspects of the film tie into this. The main narrative 'event' of the documentary comes as the soldiers face the terror of roadside bomb death. After a night patrol, the unit comes under fire and a soldier is hit. In the ensuing chaos it seems that the Taliban position is directly in front of the patrol in a ditch only 3 metres away. A hand grenade is tossed

into the ditch followed by the order to 'neutralise them' and subsequent assault rifle fire is heard. Five Taliban are killed and there are ultra-graphic scenes of their bodies being pulled from the ditch and forensically checked.

Back at base the patrol debrief and talk about how the Taliban were neutralised but a young Dane telephones back home and gives the impression that there was laughter at what had happened. The Danish High Command get involved and there is talk of an enquiry, but this is overshadowed as the soldiers get medals awarded instead. The final, very cinematic shot is of the traumatised leader of the group taking a shower.

This cinematic quality has caused great controversy in terms of documentary power, realism and 'truth'. *Armadillo* has been accused of being an *Apocalypse Now*-type cinematic celebration of war and bravado. The editing tricks and tools of the cinema trade are used to create a very powerful look to the film with filters, colour corrections and clever editing and sound creating a cinematic tour de force. There is an argument that documentary should be as pure as possible, without any such artificial intrusions.

In my view, this argument does not affect the power of either *Restrepo* or *Armadillo*. The true voices and representations of the soldiers on the frontline of the political process in Afghanistan are powerful and seem to have an air of truth or 'reality' that we have not seen. The filmmakers have not attempted to sanitise the brutality, violence and thrill of modern warfare. In a subversive and daring way, they present a shocking and heartfelt picture of soldiers looking after their squads. They are fighting for each

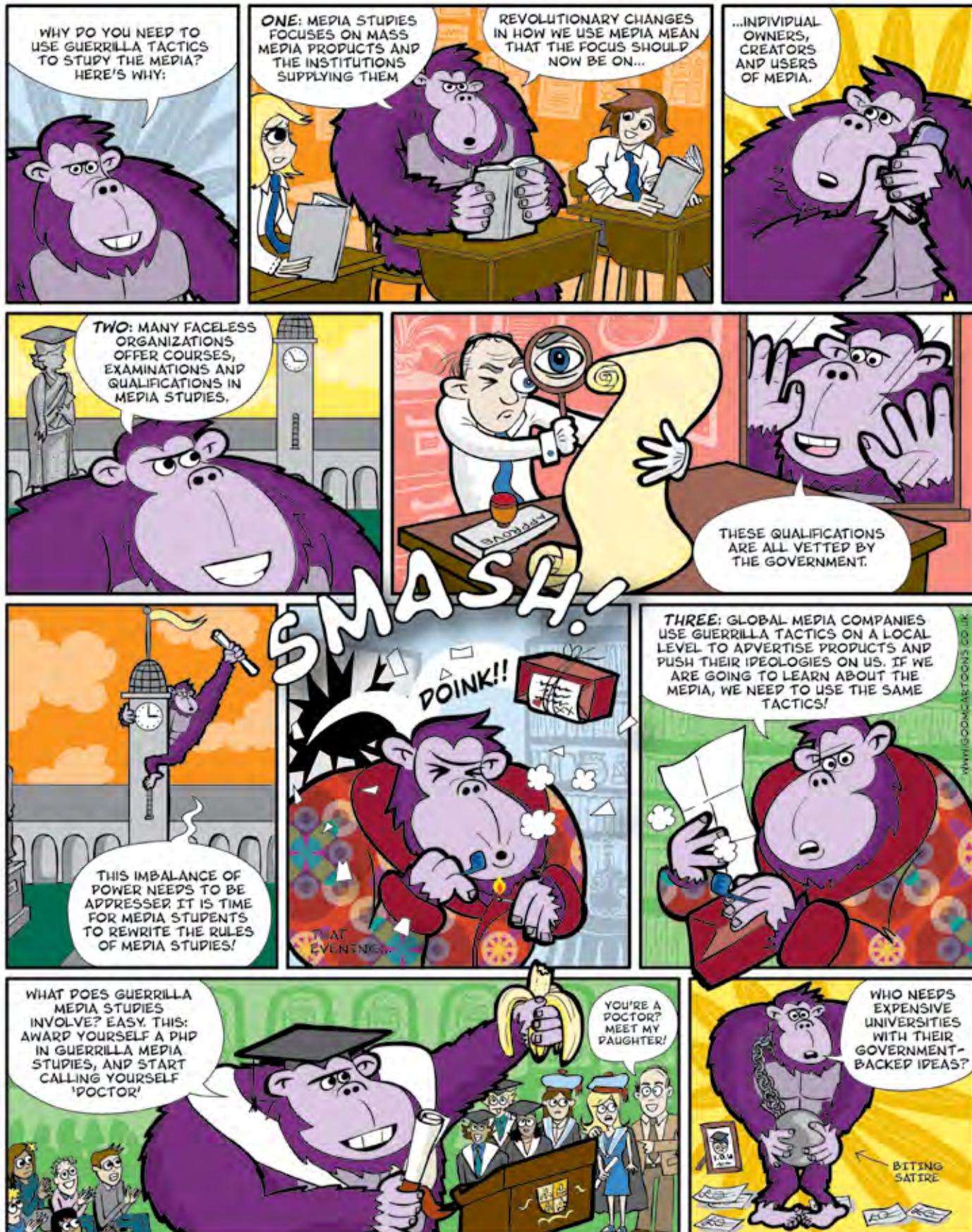
other more than for ideology. In *Restrepo*, there is a sequence where a nearby company has taken heavy losses. The leader, Captain Kearney, doesn't wrap himself in the American flag but swears and shouts and ramps up the need for revenge for the lost comrades. This is modern warfare. Real, gutsy, revenge-fuelled, with powerful ego and emotions exploding, a million miles away from the politics that put them there.

Sean Richardson is Head of Media at Penistone Grammar School near Sheffield.

Images courtesy of image.net



YOUR TEAR-AND-STEAL GUIDE TO GUERRILLA MEDIA STUDIES





STUDENTS STAGED A PRESS CONFERENCE ON FLEET STREET, TO HIGHLIGHT 'THE PLIGHT OF UNREPORTED NEWS'

STUDENTS WROTE TO EVERY ELECTED GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL ASKING THEM TO 'VOTE FOR ME INSTEAD OF ME VOTING FOR YOU'

STUDENTS WORE 'BILLBOARD-BLINKERS' WHILST CARRYING THEIR OWN PLACARDS AROUND TIMES SQUARE WITH THE MESSAGE, 'YOUR ADVERT HERE'





Image courtesy of image.net

The politics of the slasher movie

What can slasher movies tell us about gender politics? Our regular horror expert **James Rose** explores the power of the Final Girl.

Women have often been represented within the Horror film as weak characters whose purpose is to be menaced by the monstrous threat, only to be saved by the masculine hero. While such **gender stereotyping** was rife within the genre, in the late 1970's American horror cinema underwent a profound change as directors such as **George A. Romero**, **Wes Craven**, **Tobe Hooper** and **John Carpenter** all responded to the politics of the time – the Vietnam War, race riots, civil unrest and the growing Feminist movement – and incorporated them into their horror films. **Night of the Living Dead** (1968), **The Last House on the Left** (1972), **The Texas Chain Saw Massacre** (1974) and **Halloween** (1974) were all preoccupied with '**the horrors at home**' and slowly begin to reposition the female within the genre: **no longer weak and unable to defend themselves, these 'new women' of horror would not only protect themselves but actively seek out the threat and destroy it.**

Stalk and Slash

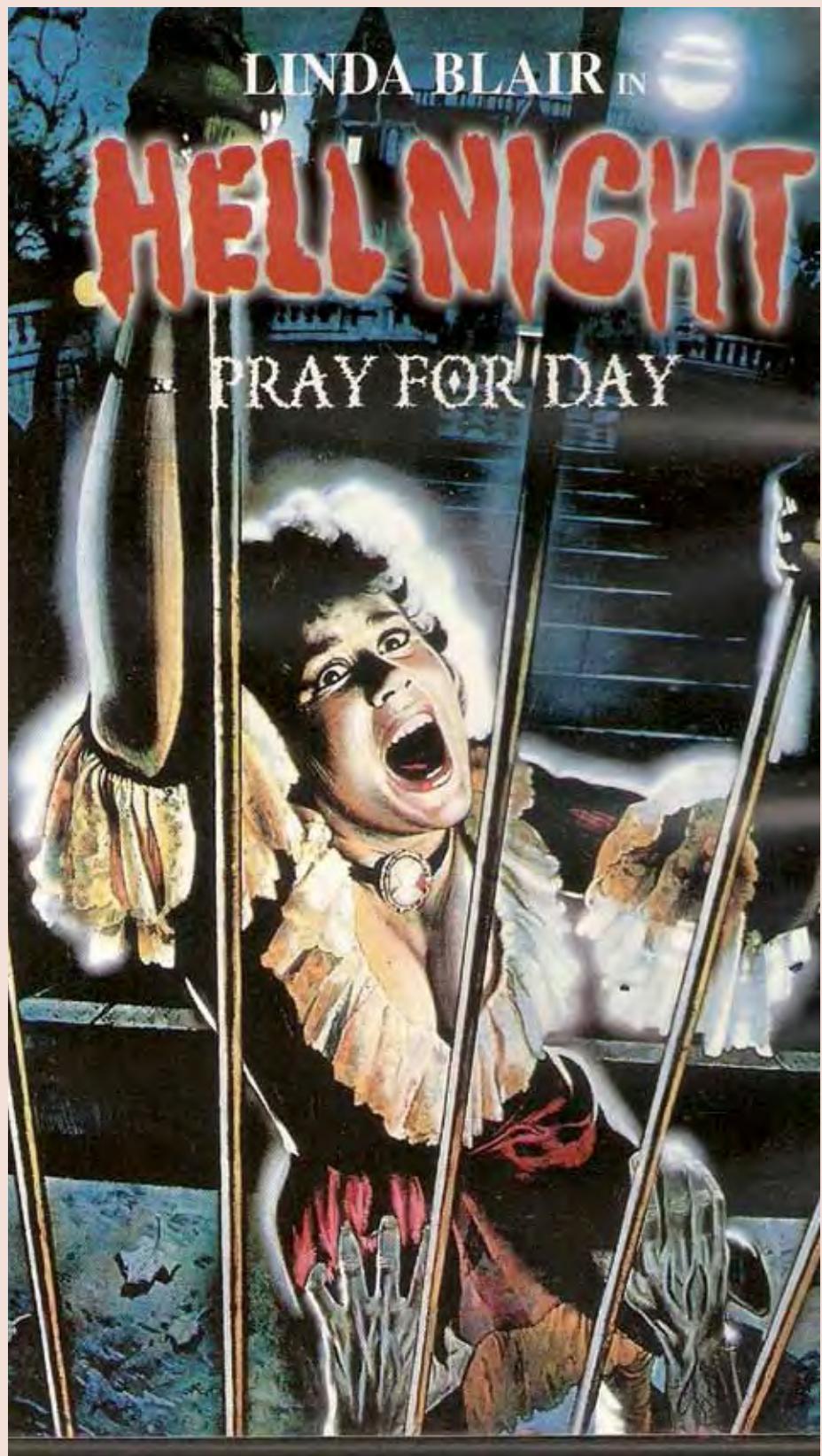
In his book **Slasher Films**, **Mark Whitehead** describes the **Stalk and Slash** subgenre as one that is inherently an American product and one that is intensely formulaic. Virtually all films of this type are American studio productions, all of which follow the same basic plot: a mixed-sex group of teenagers travel to a remote location and almost immediately indulge in drink, drugs and sex. Once these acts have taken place, those involved are steadily murdered, one by one, by an unknown and often masked killer. As the

film comes to its end there is usually only one member of the group left who, in order to survive the ordeal, must confront the murderer alone and vanquish them. Once they have been killed, their identity and rationale for their murder spree is revealed.

Audience research into the Slasher film indicated that the core audience were **teenage boys and young men**. Their popularity with this demographic no doubt lay in two key visual elements of the films – **sustained scenes of female nudity** and **the graphic depiction of assault and murder**. So popular was the subgenre and so dominant was the desire to see explicit violence, Slasher films had to find new and increasingly gory means by which to kill their cast of teenagers – arrows were pushed through throats; heads were either squeezed until the eyes popped out of their sockets, or chopped off; one even featured a character trapped inside a sleeping bag and beaten to a bloody pulp against a tree. As a consequence, the promise of increased violence not only sustained audience interest but also made celebrities (if not horror icons) out of their special make-up effects technicians.

Such a description of Slasher films would indicate that these films are nothing more than puerile entertainment and, as such, are without morals and lack any merit in terms of film study. On the contrary, I would argue that there is considerable significance to these films. On a superficial level the Slasher subgenre created two of contemporary horror cinema's most enduring icons – the seemingly indestructible **Jason**





Voorhees from the *Friday the 13th* series and Freddy Krueger from *The Nightmare on Elm Street* series – and, as a consequence, gave birth to the notion of a sustained narrative (and income revenue) through popular horror film franchises. While both these qualities certainly have financial properties, the films themselves, despite their graphic content, were, at their most basic, deeply moral tales. As Whitehead states: **the killer is punishing the group either for trespassing upon its territory or is avenging an earlier wrong perpetrated by that group or a group that they symbolically represent.**

Whitehead links this sense of trespass to America's puritan past which is associated with 'the sanctity of home and family and the taming of the wilderness'. At its core then, the murders are (albeit extreme) **punishments for transgressing social norms** – free from the strict and watchful gaze of their parents, the teenagers' actions are immoral and violate the moral codes of their parents. They are murdered then not just for their actions but also for their desire to be free from the constraints of the normal, moral and protective adult community of their narratives.

In terms of the **power relationships**

within these films then, it is clear that the unknown killer is all-powerful. Young and inexperienced, punished for their transgressions, all the teenagers can do is huddle together as a frightened group and try to defend themselves. Yet, regardless of their attempts, they are unable to overcome the threat. But by the end of each narrative the threat itself is killed and herein lies the final formulaic element of the Slasher film: The Final Girl.

The Final Girl

The concept of **The Final Girl** was constructed by **Carol J. Clover** and presented in her seminal essay '**Her Body, Himself**' (1987), in which she coined the term 'The Final Girl' and used it to describe the sole female survivor of numerous Slasher films. For Clover, **The Final Girl repeatedly embodied a set of parameters** that marked a female character out as 'different' from her peers: The Final Girl is:

- smarter and more conscientious than her friends; Clover describes her as 'intelligent, watchful, level-headed'
- morally pure and therefore does not participate in drinking, drug-taking or sexual liaison
- the first to recognise both the lack of morals in her peer group and the inherent threat of danger.

With such qualities, The Final Girl is often visualised, at the start of the film, as a character who is slightly distanced from her peer group exactly because of these qualities. By rejecting the drinking, drug use and sexually active behaviour, The Final Girl is subtly pictured as a repressed teenager, a potentially weak, virginal young girl who is frightened by the 'adult' nature of her friends' activities. In effect, she is visualised as 'powerless' while her friends 'empower' themselves through the 'adult' acts of getting drunk and high and engaging in sexual intercourse. Yet, when the killer begins his acts of murderous violence, it is this girl who steadily emerges as the one who is able to overcome the threat. As her friends are murdered all around her, **the 'powerlessness' of The Final Girl gives way to 'powerful'** as she uses her intellect and cunning both to outwit the killer and then to trap and/or challenge him. Once she has trapped him and is confronting him, her repression is vented through the extreme act of murder as she herself kills – often in a bloody and intimate manner – the killer of her friends. While this may seem the logical consequence of the narrative – The Final Girl is the sole survivor and therefore she must, one way or another, kill the threat in order for the narrative's desire for normality/equilibrium to be returned – Clover interprets these events in a different way. For Clover, the shift from 'powerless' to 'powerful' in The Final Girl is a **shift from weak, passive female to strong/aggressive male**: in virtually all Slasher films, The Final Girl becomes increasingly masculine as the film moves towards its climactic confrontation. To visualise this, The Final Girl will defend (and murder) with a **phallic object** – an axe, machete, chain saw or shotgun. By taking up this weapon, The Final Girl becomes 'masculine' and is therefore empowered to become proactive in her survival and as equally aggressive as the killer. Clover notes that, from



the very start of the film, The Final Girl is already represented as 'masculine':

The Final Girl is boyish ... Her smartness, gravity, competence in mechanical and other practical matters, and sexual reluctance set her apart from the other girls and ally her, ironically, with the very boys she fears or rejects, not to speak of the killer himself.

To compound this 'masculinity', Clover points out that (in some Slasher films) **The Final Girl is often given an androgynous name** – for example, Jess (*Black Christmas*, Bob Clark, 1974), Alana (*Terror Train*, Roger Spottiswoode, 1980), Marti (*Hell Night*, Tom De Simone, 1981) and Sidney (*Scream*, Wes Craven, 1996).

Violent Endings

With all of her friends dead, The Final Girl is left alone to defend herself and reap revenge for those deaths. In the majority of Stalk and Slash films, **The Final Girl will perform both of these acts with a combination of skill and violence: In *Slumber Party Massacre* (Amy Holden Jones, 1982)**, Final Girl Valerie arms herself with a

machete and attacks the killer, first cutting off his hand and then impaling him. Alice, in ***Friday the 13th* (Sean S. Cunningham, 1980)**, also takes up a machete and decapitates the killer while in ***Hell Night* (Tom DeSimone, 1981)** Final Girl Marti takes a set of keys from the fingers of a corpse in order to free herself from imprisonment. Once free she tries to escape in a car but it will not start so she hot-wires it. Assuming she is free she drives forward, only for the killer to leap onto the car and smash through the windscreen. Dodging his attacks, Marti crashes the car into a gate to buckle it, reverses and then drives forward again and impales her assailant upon it.

As can be seen from this selection of endings, The Final Girl uses her weapon to cut off body parts and/or impale the male killer. Given the nature of the sexualised murders throughout the film and the weapons used by The Final Girl, it can be suggest that **the climatic death of the killer is a symbolic castration** – The Final Girl not only kills the killer but also 'removes' their masculinity before doing so by either disarming them or cutting off their limbs or

heads. Because of this, it can be argued that the repressed virginal Final Girl is freed at the narrative's conclusion because she has given vent to her (sexual) repressions and emerges from the narrative having killed the symbol of male dominance and sexual threat. Consequently, she becomes her adult herself – capable, in charge and powerful, both feminine and masculine, entering into the adult world on her terms, making her choices and succumbing to no one.

James Rose is a freelance writer who specialises in horror and science fiction film and television.

Worth a Trip to the Library

Carol J. Clover (1993): *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*

Mark Whitehead (2001): *Slasher Films*

Power, Politics and THE KENNEDYS

Brenda Hamlet considers a recent mini-series on America's most powerful and mythologised of political dynasties.



Images courtesy of image.net



Based on the private lives of America's most famous presidential family, *The Kennedy* miniseries was broadcast in July and August 2011 over six weekly installments on BBC2. Timed to coincide with the 50th anniversary of John Fitzgerald Kennedy's inauguration, the miniseries attracted a star-studded cast including **Katie Holmes** (Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy), **Greg Kinnear** (John F Kennedy) and **Tom Wilkinson** (Joe Kennedy).

The narrative charts the history of the family from JFK's inauguration in 1960 through to Bobby's death in 1968. Flashbacks provide the back-story of Jack's rapid rise from war hero to the 35th President of the United States. Describing itself as **a personal view of history**, the narrative weaves scenes of political tension (Cuban Missile Crisis, Bay of Pigs and civil rights clashes) with the 'bedroom-to-boardroom' scenes typical of the American dramas such as *Mad Men*. The main difference and point of contestation is the **central protagonist**. Don Draper is an advertising executive in a fictional narrative; John F Kennedy is arguably one of America's most highly regarded presidents.

Questions surrounding the screen representation of JFK and his family drew parallels with its famous subject, complete with conspiracy theories, cover-ups and political conflict. The ensuing battle waged between two rival sectors of the American media (media advocates vs. commercial producers of popular programming) raises important issues of **power and politics shaping representation in contemporary television drama**.

Institution and Media Determinants

At the centre of the war is **The History Channel**, part of a large media conglomerate run by American Entertainment Network Television (A&E) and co-owned by NBC Universal, the Walt Disney/ABC Company and Hearst Communications. **History**, a cable television network, is well-known for its high quality documentary and docu-dramas. In a groundbreaking departure from their brand, A&E initiated development for a **dramatic miniseries** about the Kennedy family. The move from fact-based content aimed at a niche audience to entertainment programming may have been prompted by **History's** need to attract new audiences. Television dramas aimed at the primetime market attract lucrative sponsorship and top ratings. Marketing may provide another motive as Caroline Kennedy (JFK's daughter) had recently signed a book deal with Disney's Hyperion Division. So the potential tie-in deal, appearances on ABC News and press coverage would have boosted pre-broadcast publicity for the miniseries and helped book sales at the same time.

Typically the **saturation technique** (book to film deals, tie-in merchandising, release dates timed for holidays or special events and massive media coverage) is an effective marketing strategy employed by most large commercial media companies to promote their products. Unfortunately in the case of **The Kennedys**, the complex network of partnerships proved to be more misery than miniseries for **History**.

Power and Politics

History, like many other television networks, no longer produces its own programmes in-house. Instead it acts as **publishing broadcasters**, commissioning independent companies to produce creative content. So when **Joel Surnow**, a Hollywood producer whose credits include creator of **24**, heard about the project from a friend at **History**, he quickly put together a pitch. Surnow's proposal, which included a step outline, a package of creative personnel from **24** and part-financing of the project from international sales (to the BBC and others) was approved. **History** agreed to pay Surnow's company Muse Entertainment \$30 million to **produce** (script, cast, direct and film) the eight-part episodic miniseries. **History** for its part was to be responsible for the **financing, marketing and legal vetting of content**.

Enter the Opposition

Surnow is a conservative and supporter of the Republican Party, and is well-known for his **right-wing political views**. Among his credits is the **1/2 Hour News Hour**, a political comedy show broadcast by **Fox News** in 2007. Fox Television is, of course, a subsidiary of News International and owned by Rupert Murdoch. The crime drama series **24**, starring Keifer Sutherland as a counter terrorism agent, is also a Fox production (2001-2010). The series has been the subject of much debate between liberal Democrats, who object to torture as a means of dealing with terrorism and right-wing Republicans, who favour its hard line approach.

In the meantime on the other side of the country, **Robert Greenwald** heard that Joel Surnow was producing **The Kennedys**, and

became concerned. Greenwald is a left-wing Massachusetts Democrat and media advocate, whose credits include the documentaries *Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalists* and *Iraq For Sale: The War Profiteers* (<http://bravenewfilms.org/videos/>).

Like Michael Moore (*Bowling for Columbine*, *Sicko*, *Fahrenheit 9/11*) Greenwald makes films to promote media advocacy: contesting the dominant conservative ideologies shaping American politics and media. Greenwald's film *Outfoxed* took on Murdoch's Fox Network for its lack of balanced news coverage post 9/11 (see **MM 11** for a detailed analysis). The film investigates many examples where Fox News prevents an alternative or even Democratic viewpoint from being heard. *The Brave New Films* YouTube Channel provides current examples of bias in Fox News' daily coverage of Barak Obama's presidency. In the instance of *The Kennedys* miniseries, Greenwald was able to obtain draft scripts submitted to the channel by Muse. Reading through the scripts Greenwald became convinced that Surnow was using his position as producer to **demean Kennedy for political gain**. To prove his point and

mobilise public support against the production, Greenwald mounted an internet campaign StopKennedySmear.com.

Challenging the Representation

Declaring the script to be 'sexist titillation and pandering' and 'a cheap soap opera of the worst kind', Greenwald produced a 13 minute video posted on Brave New Films YouTube titled **Stop Kennedy Smears**. To discredit Surnow, he uses title cards displaying press statements issued by Muse Entertainment:

Unlike 24 every scene [of *The Kennedys*] will be as historically accurately as possible and not feature gimmickry.

Using on-camera interviews with Kennedy historians, Greenwald shows the opposite to be true. Each of the sources listed by scriptwriter Kronish denies any responsibility or involvement with the miniseries. In one interview, Ted Sorenson, JFK's closest aide, asserts:

Every single conversation with the president in the Oval Office or elsewhere in which I, according to the script, participated, never happened.

Selection and (Re)construction

David Nasaw, Professor of American History at Columbia University provides additional examples of **historical inaccuracies** such as a conversation between Bobby and the President which implies that the Berlin Wall was not only his idea, but that the brothers shared a joke



about it. Another scene which portrays Jack forbidding Jackie to take the children on holiday during the Cuban Missile crisis is, according to Nasaw, contradicted by historic record.

In the video Greenwald and his team of historians agree that the issue is not the **dramatic license** employed in the script, but with the **selection and construction of the representations**. Notably absent from the script and series are scenes demonstrating what JFK did accomplish in only 1,036 days in office. **The war against poverty, food stamps, housing and community projects, the establishment of the Peace Corps and NASA Space Programme, abolition of the death penalty in Washington D.C., partial nuclear test ban treaty, military and legal support of civil rights activists** are represented as the backdrop to the real action: sex, scandal and corruption. In foregrounding the negative (actual, rumoured and made-up), the viewer is positioned to read the text as anti-Kennedy.

In Greenwald's words:

the script does everything in its power to demean and make them quite disgusting figures.

This point is particularly apparent in the re-enacted draft script extracts. To make transparent anti-Kennedy bias, Greenwald uses stand-ins to read the lines against a blank backdrop. Performed without the benefit of generic conventions or formalised styles of production and performance, the connotations and cultural meanings of the words are clear. The character is intended to be seen as sexist, distasteful and uncaring as his dialogue. The closing caption of the video urges the public to

Tell the History Channel I refuse to watch right-wing character assassination masquerading as 'history.'

Mediation and Recuperation

History abruptly dumped the miniseries, issuing a short press release which stated 'the series was not fit for brand.' Surnow responded to Greenwald's conspiracy theory with his own cover-up story, telling *The Hollywood Reporter* (**THR**):

It happened at the board level. I don't want to mention anyone by name. It's very simple to say that certain board members are friends with the Kennedys.

Later Director Jon Cassar told *Entertainment TV Magazine*:

The Kennedys are a family who don't want stories told about them.

Subsequent rumours printed in **THR** did use names, citing Maria Shriver and Caroline Kennedy as the family members who had used their influence with Disney executive Anne Sweeney to pressure **History** into dropping the miniseries. Other sources reported that Caroline Kennedy refused to go ahead with a planned book promotion on the **ABC Good Morning America** programme unless the miniseries was shelved.

A front page article in the **New York Times** and the growing media coverage meant **History** struggled to sell the programme. Neither **HBO (John Adams)** nor **AMC (Mad Men)** wanted to buy the series. Even **Showtime, Starz** and **TNT**





Drawing Conclusions

To understand a media text fully you should consider how it has been produced, to whom it is targeted and the audience will respond to it.

Colin Dear: Exploring The Media

The mass media effects model developed nearly a hundred years ago by **Adorno and Horkheimer** argued that popular culture would render audiences incapable of judging the merits of a text or its ideological meanings. Since then, theories of active audiences have challenged this notion. **Stuart Hall's** model of audience/users suggests three different ways in which audiences might respond to a text: **preferred, negotiated and oppositional**. The extent to which Surnow's political views can be read into his media texts is therefore dependent on the demographic profile of the individual viewer.

Greenwald's argument that Joel Surnow deliberately set out to destroy JFK's legacy because 'The Kennedys represent hope' is a reading shared by the Kennedy family and their supporters. In Surnow's most recent statements to the press, he acknowledges the family's objections to the miniseries, though he does not think **History** was entirely justified in dumping the project. So it is conceivable that the preferred meaning of the miniseries was pure entertainment. In the **Stop Kennedy Smear** video, historian **Nigel Hamilton** offers what may be a **negotiated reading**. Hamilton makes clear he is not personally a fan of JFK, though he found the 'mixing of serious history with non-serious content' misleading for the viewer. Hamilton is particularly concerned that audience members with limited knowledge of the people and events depicted may be unable to distinguish fact from fiction.

So go on, do a Robert Greenwald. Ask yourself the following questions when viewing your favourite docudrama programme. Who knows, you may move on to media advocacy or successful miniseries production.

Key Questions of Representation

- Who or what is represented?
- Is the representation positive, negative or a stereotype?
- Who's in control of the representation?
- To what extent does the representation support the values and ideologies of the producer?
- In what ways might audiences interpret the representation?
- Why is audience reading important to the values and ideologies portrayed?

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declined. Eventually, **ReelzChannel**, a small independent cable company in New Mexico, paid \$7 million for rights to air the miniseries in America, and a further \$10 million to market the show – approximately half the original production price.

The truth of Surnow's allegations of a Kennedyesque 'cover-up' or Greenwald's claims of a right-wing conspiracy is yet to be determined. However, it is clear that **media advocacy does work**. Greenwald's campaign forced **History** to withdraw from the series, and Muse Entertainment re-worked the scripts editing out much of the offensive dialogue. However the miniseries also went on to pull **a record 1.9 million total viewers for Reelzchannel, and won ten Emmy nominations**. In the UK, response to the BBC2 broadcast was generally positive with over 2 million watching the first three instalments. Additionally Reelzchannel is said to have gained more subscribers as result of the miniseries and will screen the series again this autumn. So what lessons are there to be learned for **History**, who lost millions in an unsuccessful bid to reinvent itself and adapt to new genres?

Genre and Audience

In his book *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism and British Culture*, **John Caughey** describes one of the major problems facing television drama as its **institutionalism** as a popular genre. Caughey explains that because television drama serves a mass popular audience,

it needs to be **inclusive, less demanding and more entertaining** than other specialist formats such as the documentary styles employed. The use of high production values and technical effects (such as lavish sets, key lighting, extensive wardrobe, make-up, props and pop soundtrack), now the accepted formula for popular television, emphasises technical flair over naturalism and authenticity. This leads to what Caughey calls the **'jazzed up' version of reality** guaranteeing large audiences.

History's initial press release describing **The Kennedys** as a ground-breaking venture was therefore both exaggerated and premature. Surnow and his creative crew from **24** employed the same formula which had brought them success on **24**. Plot synopses published on **imdb.com** construct audience expectations of a suspenseful crime drama, comparing **The Kennedys** to **The Godfather** movie. Bobby and JFK are described 'as dancing to the tune of their ambitious father'. Even before viewing, the audience is positioned to read the characters' motives and personality traits according to familiar stereotypes of gangsters, rather than presidential leaders. Reading **The Kennedys** in this way, the representations are demeaning and negative; Joe Kennedy appears more mafia boss than diplomat. **Binary oppositions** are constructed according to the narrative rules of the crime drama: good vs. evil, male vs. female, ambition vs. religion, loyalty vs. betrayal and so forth. The representations of sex which offended the **Stop Kennedy Smear** campaign make more sense when viewed within the context of the genre. Mistresses, illicit sex, swearing and violence are expected codes, conventions and stereotypes. In fact, the audience's pleasure in popular genres is the recognition of familiar scenes and representations. Kronish also followed standard narrative formulae of tension and relief, whereby board scenes are followed by bedroom scenes. Kronish justified his choices in an interview with the *New York Times*.

This is not a documentary. It is a dramatization, it was my job to take these people off the dusty pages of history and make them come alive.

A Serious Business

the politics of two US sitcoms



Philip Dyas explores politics and ideology in the contemporary US sitcom; *30 Rock* and *How I Met Your Mother*.

The TV sitcom, in particular the US variety, has always been an important reflection of the political and social context of the period in which it was produced. This is, of course, true of television in general; but what is significant about the sitcom is that these reflections, and in many cases the polemical sub-texts and messages of the shows themselves, can sometimes go unnoticed by audiences in texts generally regarded as less 'serious' than their more heavyweight big brothers, one-hour or feature-length TV dramas. Surely the sitcom can have little of significance to say about the way society works?

Active and critical viewers, however, will always be able to detect the 'messages' subsumed within such texts. While sitcoms of previous decades have rarely been explicitly 'political' (with notable British exceptions such as *Yes Prime Minister*, *Citizen Smith*, or *New Statesman*), they often reflected the social concerns of the period – and generally had a clear ideology in their

interpretation of these ideas. For example, *Rising Damp* in the UK took a generally progressive view of racial politics in its fractured relationship between a somewhat idiotic middle-aged white man and his far more sophisticated and intellectual black neighbour. Conversely, it's been argued that the notorious 60s racism of Alf Garnett in *'Til Death Do Us Part* was 'celebrated' as an example of the characters' plain-spoken wit (although some critics viewed the show as politically subversive).

It's important at this juncture to address a key issue of terminology; '**Politics**' (with a capital letter) is generally taken to refer to the practical constitutional process of running the country – elections, Political Parties, Parliament, et cetera. Conversely, '**politics**', a term often interchangeable with '**ideology**', can refer more generally to ideas and values of many kinds, most easily (and often) distinguished by left-wing/liberal and right-wing/conservative positions. It is **the small 'p' politics** we'll be mainly using in this analysis.

This article will look at two current and extremely popular American sitcoms – *30 Rock* (NBC) and *How I Met Your Mother* (CBS). The former is an idiosyncratically-constructed critical darling with a slew of awards; the latter is a more 'traditional' set-up featuring a 'group of

twentysomethings', often referred to as **a post-millennial Friends**. Both of these shows have a clear sense of ideology, and address politics frequently, both explicitly and implicitly.

The Sitcoms and their Contexts

First, some brief background on the shows themselves. *30 Rock* is the brainchild of showrunner **Tina Fey**, an increasingly significant figure in the American media, probably best known in England for her impersonation of Sarah Palin during the last US Election (more on this later). Fey is something of a **multi-hyphenate** (or specialist in a number of different production roles), both the lead actor and the central creative voice ('showrunner') for the show. She was also a central figure on *Saturday Night Live* (a long-running comedy sketch show now considered to be an American institution), and was notable for being its first female Head Writer. By contrast, the creators of *How I Met Your Mother*, **Carter Bays and Craig Thomas**, had worked on other TV shows, but have no other credits with anything like the cultural weight of *Saturday Night Live*, and nothing like Fey's profile.

At this juncture distinctions can also be drawn between the shows over their visual styles. *How I Met Your Mother* is shot using a traditional

'multi-camera' set-up, whereas *30 Rock* is shot in the more filmic 'single-camera' mode, which has become increasingly popular following the critical and commercial success of sitcoms such as *The Office* and *Curb Your Enthusiasm*.

30 Rock will air its sixth season next year, and is broadcast on NBC, one of the 'big three' American networks, considered more prestigious, and more a part of American culture, than other newer channels. *How I Met Your Mother* is similarly 'mainstream' in its institutional background, being broadcast on CBS, another of the 'big three' (along with ABC, which is owned by Disney).

Ideology

Each show's ideology is comprised of a number of elements; for the sake of space I will be focusing on only four.

– in traditional sitcoms, women of her age would almost certainly be restricted to 'maternal' roles. *30 Rock*'s ability to play with these conventions could be attributed, at least in part, to the gender of the creative personnel behind the show, and perhaps to Fey's own experiences within the world of television.

Similarly Bays and Thomas' masculinity is undoubtedly central to the way gender is constructed on *How I Met Your Mother*, in which the audience is quite clearly positioned in a 'male' role. The central conceit of the show is that the narrative is part of an elaborate story told by Ted, the main character, to his children about, oddly enough, how he met their mother. As such, the events of each episode are seen from Ted's perspective, even when he isn't present. The masculine viewpoint presents itself in a number of ways. Women are often objectified on the show, with a rotating, and often nameless, guest cast of attractive women flitting in and out of the

contribute to society, although the character is used primarily to mock the reaction of male characters to her, rather than focus on the character herself.

■ Corporate America and the evils of capitalism

Both *30 Rock* and *How I Met Your Mother* address corporate America and the ethics and values of 'Big Business' frequently, both within the narrative of their episodes, and through the construction of the 'personalities' of the corporations featured in the shows.

30 Rock is perhaps the more overtly left-wing of the two on this issue, taking frequent shots not just at corporate America in general but specifically at NBC and media conglomerate ownership. Whereas most TV shows rarely (if ever) reference their own fictionality and production circumstances, *30 Rock* goes as far as to dramatise its own network. Fey references an elaborate web of conglomerate media



■ Gender roles and the politics of sexuality

In comparing the construction of gender between the respective shows, the most obvious distinction to make is in that of the creative personnel involved. Whilst UK sitcoms have in recent decades established a highly successful tradition of female writer/actors, ranging from French and Saunders and Victoria Wood through to Caroline Aherne, this has been less notable in the US. However *30 Rock* is especially notable for being one of the few truly 'female-led' American sitcoms of the modern era, in contrast with other so-called 'women's' shows that target a female audience through their female leads, yet have no women in prominent creative or editorial positions.

Most shows aimed at women tend to focus on conventionally 'female' concerns such as relationships, fashion and family, and often star 'idealised' female characters. *30 Rock* rejects almost all of these assumptions. The central character of Liz Lemon is instead defined specifically by her lack of interest in fashion, hopelessness with relationships and her tendency to prioritise her career. It is also worth noting that the age of the primary female characters is considerably higher here than most other sitcoms

show's diegesis with no narrative agency, and little function save to flirt, date, or simply sleep with the male characters.

The central characters within the show do play with traditional stereotypes to an extent. Ted, the nominal protagonist, is a hopeless romantic focused on finding a relationship, whereas his friend Robin is career-driven and commitment-phobic. Criticism of the sexist or even misogynistic overtones of the show is primarily directed at the third main character, Barney, an obsessive womaniser and exponent of 'Bro' culture – the show's conception of a certain kind of male friendship centred largely around an almost combative relationship with women. However, the character of Barney could himself be easily described as a parody of similar 'womanising' sitcom characters – for example Joey from *Friends*. It is worth noting that Barney is played by Neil Patrick Harris, who, in direct contrast to his fictional persona, is openly gay and an active campaigner for gay rights.

Both shows show considerable awareness of the nature of representation, and will deliberately subvert these conventions on occasion. *30 Rock* addresses female objectification itself through the character of Ceri, an attractive woman the show actively acknowledges has little to

companies for NBC, much of which relates to real-life circumstances. For example, the character of Jack Donaghy (**Alec Baldwin**), Liz Lemon's 'boss' – the 'Vice President in charge of West Coast and Microwave Oven Programming' – repeatedly discusses the machinations of General Electric, the company which actually owns NBC in real life. Corporations in the world of *30 Rock* are run by cartoonish, often idiotic people, and the dominance of white men from privileged backgrounds is referenced constantly.

Corporate greed is also a common feature of the show; Jack cuts his underpaid staff's wages while simultaneously paying himself a huge bonus, and goes on holiday to a 'secret country only rich people know about'.

Though the outrageous excesses of the rich and the powerful are a common theme in *30 Rock*, it is worth noting that the Left are not spared either. Just as Jack is a parody of the Rich Conservative, Liz Lemon is a parody of the reactionary Liberal, finding evidence of sexism or racism in benign sources, attempting to turn every practical decision into a political debate, and showing little attachment to reality in the formulation of her own ideology. Furthermore, she appears quite willing to abandon her values in the face of difficulty.

How I Met Your Mother dramatises corporate culture much as it does sexual politics; through the character of Barney, and his work at the cartoonish **Goliath National Bank** (or **GNB**), an archetypal 'Evil' corporation. Rather than directly addressing the structure of corporations, **How I Met Your Mother** positions itself as mocking the culture therein. Barney famously has no apparent job title, and never appears actually to do anything at the company, despite his apparently infinite wealth.

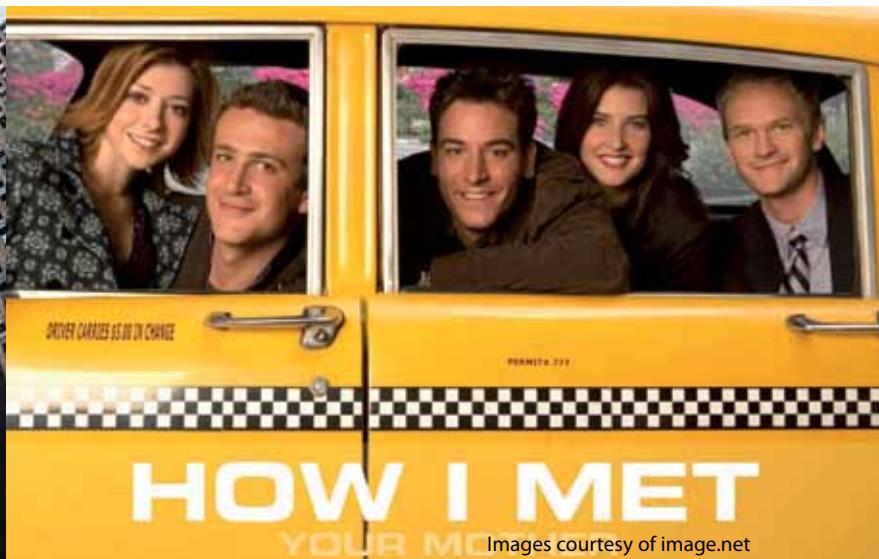
■ Traditional morality v progressive liberalism

The most obviously left-wing aspect of **How I Met Your Mother**'s ideological stance is on morality. The show revels in the trappings of modern, liberal ethics on issues such as sex, drinking and perhaps most notably, drugs. Whereas its most obvious inspiration, **Friends**, featured numerous references to promiscuity, primarily through the character of Joey, **How**

children, so many of the overt references to drugs are deliberately, if obviously, 'coded'. This leads to the creation of the first of the many **visual euphemisms** the show has developed, wherein smoking marijuana is referred to as 'eating a sandwich'. This code is visually reinforced early on, and henceforth has been referenced often throughout the show's run. The show portrays the drug as harmless, and no negative stories surround its portrayal. This is surprisingly liberal in a country where smoking dope is a felony in several states.

■ Family values

The representation is all the more significant when it is considered that the characters in the show are not portrayed in any way as 'deviant'. All are university-educated, career-driven, respectable members of society, and in the narration (and occasional 'flash-forward' glimpses of the future) it is clear that Ted is a dedicated family man, and a good father. In fact, it is only



Images courtesy of image.net

I Met Your Mother addresses this much more directly, and draws much of its humour from the 'schemes' hatched by Barney to seduce women. It should be noted that while the show on occasion appears to frown on Barney's actions, for the most part his portrayal is positive, and the characters – including the women – almost praise him for his efforts. Significantly this representation has become more marked as the show has progressed, largely due to the popularity of the character as played by Neil Patrick Harris.

The characters spend the vast majority of their social time drinking in a bar, as contrasted to the more 'family-oriented' Central Perk Coffee House setting of **Friends**. Perhaps the most challenging aspect of **How I Met Your Mother**'s Liberal values, however, is its position on drugs, specifically marijuana. Though legal in California, use of this drug is still against the law in the rest of America, though penalties vary from state to state. Furthermore, the representation of drug use is banned by American television's 'Standards and Practices' Agreement, and direct reference to it in anything but a clearly negative light is not allowed. **How I Met Your Mother** addresses this in two ways. Firstly, the central conceit of the show is that Ted is narrating the story to his two young

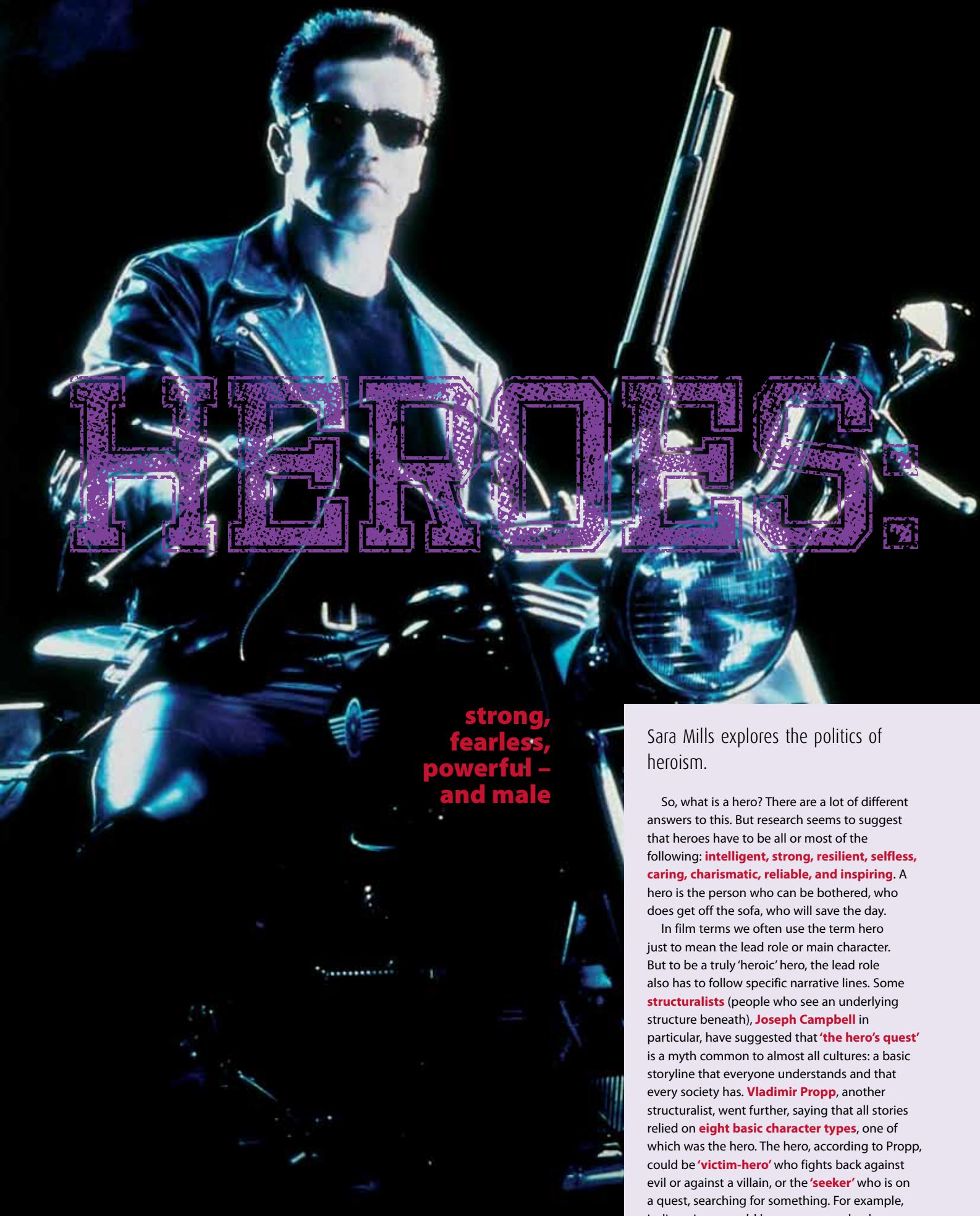
Barney, the only obviously 'immoral' character, who is never shown with the drug.

The representation of family is also significant in the show. The 'future' voice of Ted is played by **Bob Saget**, a significant figure in American culture. He is best known for being part of an unconventional family unit in the hugely popular **Full House**, (1987-1995) in which he played a widowed father-of-three assisted in raising his daughters by his best friend and brother-in-law. Again, the unconventional and 'progressive' family unit was portrayed in the show in an extremely positive light, thus linking old and newer representations of liberal family life.

Both **30 Rock** and **How I Met Your Mother** may appear lightweight and apolitical; yet, like all texts, both are **ideologically loaded**. The representations and narrative constructions discussed above are merely the tip of the iceberg, an introduction to two deeply politically engaged sitcoms. And the discussion here does not even consider their representations of homosexuality, government, police and the law... They serve as a reminder that every media text you consume is loaded with political meanings – even, and especially, those that appear light-hearted and comedic. As a Media student, you must always be engaged with this idea, and ready to question the texts you consume.

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Sara Mills explores the politics of heroism.

So, what is a hero? There are a lot of different answers to this. But research seems to suggest that heroes have to be all or most of the following: **intelligent, strong, resilient, selfless, caring, charismatic, reliable, and inspiring**. A hero is the person who can be bothered, who does get off the sofa, who will save the day.

In film terms we often use the term hero just to mean the lead role or main character. But to be a truly 'heroic' hero, the lead role also has to follow specific narrative lines. Some **structuralists** (people who see an underlying structure beneath), **Joseph Campbell** in particular, have suggested that '**the hero's quest**' is a myth common to almost all cultures: a basic storyline that everyone understands and that every society has. **Vladimir Propp**, another structuralist, went further, saying that all stories relied on **eight basic character types**, one of which was the hero. The hero, according to Propp, could be '**victim-hero**' who fights back against evil or against a villain, or the '**seeker**' who is on a quest, searching for something. For example, Indiana Jones could be seen as a seeker hero as



he is usually on a quest, searching for something, while Harry Potter is a victim-hero trying to fight against evil and villainy.

Identifying with archetypes

So if heroes are so commonly recognised across all cultures, they are a very easy character type or **archetype** for filmmakers to work with. As an audience, we all recognise them, we all get what a hero is and know what a hero will do. In the two hours of a film, there may be no time for complex or ambiguous characters to develop or

change, and a hero can be a simple **stereotype**, a symbol, for all that is worthy and admirable, like Batman vs. the Joker. In the Hero, we can see ourselves. As **Blumler and Katz** showed us with their **Uses and Gratifications theory**, being able to relate to a character is one of the main gratifications, or pleasures of the media, and we can all spend a happy hour or two imagining ourselves in the hero's role.

So, for filmmakers, heroes are easy: easy to use, easy to fit into storylines, easy to sell to audiences. But are heroes quite so good for the rest of us?

Unpicking the hero, we find first of all that he usually is a he! Perhaps as audiences, we find it easier to match characteristics like strength, bravery, charisma, leadership, individuality and so on with men rather than women, with Tom Cruise rather than Jennifer Aniston, with Thor rather than Hanna. Where girls like Hanna are the action heroes, we often need a complex story to explain this: a father who rears his daughter as a killer; or like Alice in **Resident Evil**, a character who is genetically altered by the T-virus.

Why are heroes male?

So why do we tend to associate men with the role of hero? Is it because representations are reflective: they reflect what is actually true and real in society? Are men *actually* braver, stronger, more resilient, better leaders and more charismatic than women? Or is it more complicated than this? **Stuart Hall**, in his 1981 book on representations of race suggested that **representations are always constructed**, never natural, always put together in certain specific ways. Seeing the typical male hero as

a **constructed representation** means it takes some truth from the way things really are, and then adds a lot of ideas about the way some people think things ought to be. This construction is then reflected back to us so often that we start to believe it that it is the way it should be, this is what is **natural and normal**, even that it is the *only* way it can be. We start to believe that constructed representations are in fact reflective representations. Films make it seem normal for men to be heroic, brave, strong, individualistic and so on, and not quite so normal for women to be like this. Then we, the audience, gradually take these ideas on board, and in real life men try to be strong and brave to be 'proper' men, while women may try to hide their strength and bravery so they aren't seen as too 'masculine' or as 'unfeminine'.

Hegemony

In fact, this describes **the process of hegemony**, that tricky concept, where cultural norms are presented as just that: as normal. Anyone who steps outside of them is seen as abnormal, and therefore wrong or bad in some way. And we don't even know we're doing it. Stuart Hall discussed this in an interview, saying:

When people say to you, 'Of course that's so, isn't it?' that 'of course' is the most ideological moment, because that's the moment at which you're least aware that you are using a particular framework, and that if you used another framework the things that you are talking about would have a different meaning.

Stuart Hall in interview with John O'Hara for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation 1983



Our cultural norms suggest that 'of course' most heroes are men and that 'of course' being a hero is good thing. After all, the hero always wins out, gets the girl, gets the narrative reward.

It's not just in representations that we see this process. The memorably named **Thomas Shatz** suggested that **genre** also contributes to hegemonic views. He said that many films can be divided into two broad categories, which he called **genres of order** and **genres of integration**.

Genres of order include films like gangster movies, westerns, action-adventure and spy films. Men fight over 'contested spaces', often leaving the safe zones to go into dangerous places (the Wild West, the rough side of town, boldly going where no man has been before). They fight individualistic battles over pride, honour and territory, solving problems with action and often violence, where there can only be one winner.

Genres of integration include comedies, domestic dramas, family dramas and musicals. Films in this category focus on emotional truths, on families and communities, on drawing society together, on solving problems by compromise and discussion. Genres of order are films where traditional male qualities are idolised, whereas genres of integration are films which support typically female characteristics. In this reading, it is not just the representations, but also **the genre, the narratives and the media language of films** that contribute to these 'normalised' versions of male and female behaviour.

Who benefits?

The big question is **why**? Who benefits from these normalised versions of gender? Stuart Hall suggests that it always those in power who benefit, at the expense of those with less power. Heroes glamorise the **individualistic action that is at the heart of a capitalist society**. Almost by definition, the hero is alone and fights against the odds to succeed. Films normalise this version of masculinity, even associating extreme individualism and extreme wilfulness with the moral high ground of the hero. **Individualism** encourages the hero to act alone, ignoring the interests of his family, of his society or of the government. The hero is The Lone Ranger, the maverick, the rebel, Samuel L. Jackson shooting out the windows on the plane so all the snakes get sucked out, Jake Sully standing up against Colonel Quaritch in *Avatar*. And such representations also make sure there are plenty of people staying home, looking after the domestic, family and social spaces. As Carl Rogers said:

We can't all be heroes because someone has to sit on the curb and clap as they go by.

If you see the idea of the hero offered up enough times as glamorous, exciting and ultimately rewarded, you just might be tempted to believe it. Remember **John Darwin**, the canoe man who faked his own death and hid for many years to maximise his life insurance? I'm sure, as he set off in his canoe, he pictured himself as the hero with a bold plan, a fair maiden waiting for him, and a big reward for his daring and bravery ahead. Instead, what he got was five years hiding in his own house, followed by six years in prison. How many others are fuelled by these ideas that who dares wins?

Mary Ann Sieghart, writing in *The Independent* asks a similar question about politicians, saying:

Everyone loves an Icarus. The way he dares and soars, grasps the chance, swooping aloft on an updraft of courage and exhilaration. Think how dull the young Greek would have been if he had said: 'No, Father, I don't think I'll risk it. It looks far too dangerous. You go without me.'

In the end, though, he plummeted and drowned. Like Dominique Strauss-Kahn. Like Arnold Schwarzenegger. Like Sir Fred Goodwin. Like – perhaps – Ken Clarke, Liam Fox and Chris Huhne. It's been the week of the crash-and-burn man, and it should make us stop and think. Isn't it time we reassessed our predilection for the type of leader who's addicted to risk, who flies with wings of wax, and who's convinced that his ego will see him through.

The Independent 23/5/11

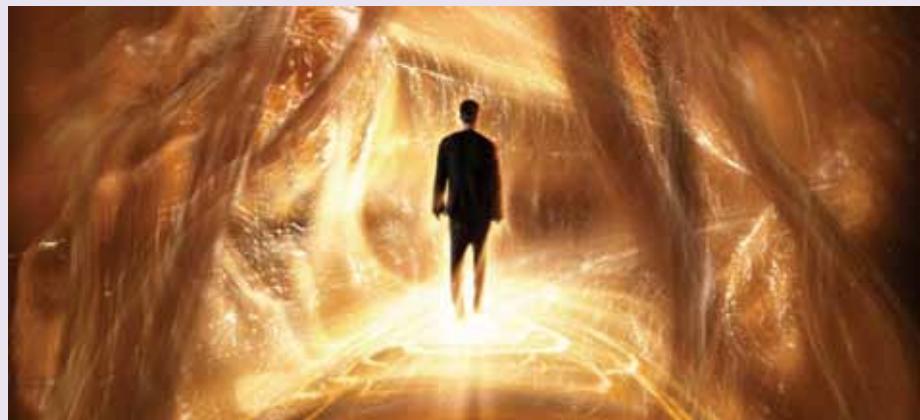
The downside of heroism

In business the hero-type can be just as negative. It may be too much of a stretch to suggest that the current economic crisis has been caused by the normalising of over-masculinised behaviour, but I'm going to do it anyway!

If you want to know who to blame for the economic crisis, for rising university tuition fees and the cut in EMA and other grants, look to the **overly individualistic men in the stock exchange**. A recent study by Cambridge doctors Coates and Hibbert showed that testosterone, the 'male hormone' could cause 'the winners' effect'. As the trader makes a successful deal, his **testosterone** rises, giving him a feeling of power and invincibility, the feeling that he can take more and more risks and still keep winning. The testosterone gets so high that the man can't think clearly, can't assess risks properly and can't take sensible decisions. This feeling of **overconfidence and invulnerability** is similar to the hero who leaps off a building or goes into fight against the odds. The '**winners' effect**' can lead to poor trading decisions, causing the whole economy to go from boom to bust. In fact it is now recommended that trading floors have a higher number of women and older men as traders, to combat this 'winners' effect'.

On a smaller scale, the hero in any organisation can be **bad for the team**. The hero shines at the expense of the team. The hero succeeds because they hoard information, not letting any one else have the resources to solve the problem. A hero encourages dependency, making the team vulnerable. **A hero, by definition, is not a team player.**

And this is what the movies tell us is heroic. **Shoot your enemy** because otherwise he'll shoot you – after all everyone's out to get you (but what if he's innocent, or just a bystander? He's still dead and you're heading to prison); **fight for what you believe in** even if no one else believes in it (this could make you the one brave soul who refused



to follow the Nazi leader's orders, or it could make you the idiot who thinks they've been abducted by aliens); **sacrifice everything** for the cause (but what about your children, or someone else's children, or the sweet old lady next door who never hurt anybody....); **never look back** at the trail of destruction behind you (someone else will clear that up, perhaps someone who isn't quite so busy being a hero...), **and never, ever give up**. In real life, being a hero makes you a selfish, obsessive, paranoid, aggressive nutcase who ruins businesses, damages the economy and has a short-lived political career. Continually telling about half the population that this is what they should aspire to be seems something of a mistake to me. But then I am a woman. I should probably stick to musicals.



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BANG B'ANG

Bang Bang: photography, politics and the power of old and new media

Maggie Miranda investigates a powerful film about the experience of frontline photo journalists capturing the final bloody days of Apartheid in South Africa.

The Bang Bang Club (Steven Silver, 2010) is set in the Apartheid years of South Africa from 1990 to 1994, after Nelson Mandela's release but before the first proper elections. It focuses on the life and work of four photographers **Greg Marinovich, Joao Silva, Kevin Carter, and Ken Oosterbroek**, four friends who worked together to photograph and expose the truth about South Africa during Apartheid. They risked their lives to inform the world about the violence and brutality associated with the first free elections in post-Apartheid South Africa.

The men photographed people in the poor townships. These people did not have access to any media at the time; the Bang Bang Club photographers were their link to the outside world. They made the rest of the world aware of their protests through these photographs. The

film shows the violent clashes between the so called 'Inkatha warriors' and the ANC supporters – a convenient diversion from the oppressive Apartheid regime at the time.

The film is directed by South African documentary filmmaker **Steven Silver**. He began his career working in the South African film industry and went on to write and co-produce **Gerrie & Louise**, an International Emmy award-winning documentary for CBC in 1997. The violence throughout the film is often quite harrowing to watch but it is never sensationalised, nor should it be. This really happened; this is the bloody history of South Africa. There is no need for blockbuster-style, choreographed violence.

The political power of photography

The film starts with Kevin Carter in a radio studio interview. He is asked 'what makes a photograph great'. The film cuts to the violent clashes in the townships between Inkatha and ANC supporters, a by-product of Apartheid. The photographers turn up to document the violence. Greg Marinovich is the new photographer in the group. He photographs a man being butchered by a panga (a big machete-type blade). It is a graphic and very shocking scene. He asks a small boy who witnessed the killing why it happened. The boy simply answers:

he doesn't need a reason, we are ANC.

The film shows the photographers at the centre of more township violence. Greg

Marinovich witnesses a man being set on fire. It is so shocking to watch even now in this time of extreme violence in film, where the audience's appetite for graphic and often choreographed violence has only increased over time. Greg Marinovich photographs the man's gruesome death. The image appears on screen and then the still images are shown as they were the next day on the front page of the newspaper. The executioner explains the killing:

he is Xhosa like Mandela. He deserves to die.

Greg Marinovich shows the photographs to his photo editor who tells him that she cannot use the images in the newspaper because they are 'too graphic'. This was typical of the heavily censored media in South Africa at the time. The shots are exactly what we would expect from hard-hitting and investigative photo journalism. But fortunately the international press did not want to sanitise the truth. Greg Marinovich's images reached France, UK and USA. He was awarded the Pulitzer prize for his work. His images played a vital role in informing the world of what was really going on in South Africa. They played their part in putting pressure on South Africa via sanctions. It was these sanctions and lots of international lobbying which lead towards the eventual abolition of Apartheid.

With a heavily censored media, a carefully constructed version of what was happening was being exported to the rest of the world. It leaves us questioning how many events were unreported? How many deaths were not even documented?



Unbearable truths

After the township clashes the camera pans slowly over what looks at first like a field of rubbish. It is only when the camera zooms in that the heinous reality is revealed. It is not rubbish but many dead bodies, which lie on the ground. People are left like garbage to rot. These lives were cheap to the government at the time. Throughout the film we are invited to look down the lens with these four photographers via some accomplished cinematography. They give us a close-up view of the horrors of the Apartheid years. Their photos reveal the atrocities of a government which de-humanised so many because of the colour of their skin. These photographers exposed a reality which the government largely glossed over. Out of the four men Kevin Carter, played by **Taylor Kitsch**, is the one who seems to be the most ordinary. He is the one who is visibly affected by what he sees in the townships. Like Greg Marinovich, he achieves a Pulitzer prize too for his now infamous shot of the starving child and the vulture in Southern Sudan. (See **MM** archive for close analysis of this image.) In the film Kevin Carter is depicted as not interested in the accolade of the award. He was deeply disturbed, tortured by what he had seen and by what his photos had revealed. This eventually led to his suicide.

Later in the film Greg Marinovich is alerted to more township violence in Soweto. We

watch as he approaches the township at night and visits



the home of a grieving family. He photographs the body of a young boy, another unnecessary death. It is really upsetting to watch. What did this small child have to do with politics? The photo editor cries and she leaves the room.

The Bang Bang Club photographers always went into situations to expose the truth and they put themselves in very dangerous situations to get the perfect shot. They were nicknamed The Bang Bang Club by the press because of this. They put themselves in to the centre of the action to document the truth, the bloody and brutal violence associated with the regime of Apartheid, the stench of so many unnecessary deaths. The photographers show a real commitment to photo-journalism, to always getting the perfect shot. One of the photographers, Ken Oosterbroek, is shot at one of the townships clashes in his quest to photograph the truth, and dies from the gun-shot wound. Marinovich is also shot but he survives.

The film ends on a positive note, with **Freedom Day on April 27th** when black South Africans were finally afforded the vote to which they were entitled. But it raises many uncomfortable questions. Why did so many people have to die unnecessary deaths during Apartheid? Why did it take so long for the truth to be revealed to the rest of the world? If Apartheid was happening now would it take as long for people to know the truth?

Telling the truth through technology

The film made me think about what might have been. It begs the question what would have happened if people had had access to modern

technology then? Would it have taken as long to tell their truth with the use of social networking? How much quicker would people have told their story if they had had modern technology to do so? With mobile phones and digital cameras people would be able to make sure that the truth got out there as breaking news. **Could Apartheid have been abolished years or maybe even decades earlier if only the truth had been communicated more rapidly?**

Now with modern technology even people in rural communities have access to mobile phones and internet. A small internet café might serve the needs of a large rural community. Imagine people now at the centre of such protest. Now, sometimes it seems as though almost anyone can be a broadcaster if they are in the right (wrong) place at the right time. Many people have mobiles or cell phones as they are called here in South Africa. People can even receive money through their mobile phones now via a code which they show in a shop and simply cash in. Technology has empowered many people in many ways. **The horrors of Apartheid could not be repeated now.** People would use their mobile phones or the internet to make their protests known. The truth would be known virtually instantly.

The effects of photojournalism

Towards the end of the film we cut back to Kevin Carter and the question being asked in the opening sequence: **'what makes a photo great'**? We finally hear his answer. He speaks of wanting to get a shot that has something to say, of seeing bad things and wanting to make



a difference. But then he says that 'they are right that we wait to photograph death'. **Director Steven Silver** presents us with a debate about when is the time to put the camera down? Would it be more authentic now to get a member of the public to supply the shocking image to illustrate their story instead of death and destruction being a commodity that photographers make a living from? Ordinary people could use their own images, uploading these images to YouTube or Facebook and tell *their* truth, minus editing and censorship.

The politics of social media

But what would be the effects of showing equally shocking images from Jo Public's mobile phone? Images could be relayed such as the ones shown in the film of people being shot, butchered by a panga or burnt to death. Would this be a good use of technology? It raises the question: **what are the politics behind social media?** Social networking can allow communication between disenfranchised people all across the world. It can be a vehicle for free dialogue and contribute towards positive changes in societies. **Would the end justify the means here?**

Recently we have seen evidence of this. The so-called Arab Spring owes some of its success to people's innovative use of social media. In just over a few months and after years of silence people were voicing their total dissatisfaction with their governments. People used social media to unite and to demand change. The first country to do this was Tunisia in January. In Egypt people protested against Hosni Mubarak. After a regime of nearly 30 years a UK *Guardian* article exposed the Mubarak family fortune at \$40-\$70 billion, with homes in London, New York and Beverley Hills. This triggered a massive reaction. People

used internet chat rooms, emails and Facebook to organise their protests. By the next day thousands of people met in Tahrir Square in Cairo. It took the people of Egypt less than a week to remove Mubarak from power.

The uses and abuses of social power

Social media played its part in bringing about this revolution. This was what was so powerful in the Arab spring. Social media provided a vehicle to quickly amplify public sentiment. Even as I write, Egyptians are organising demonstrations in Tahrir Square, applying pressure on the military keeping control to continue to prosecute Mubarak for various crimes. Social media is being used to keep their dialogue moving. Social media such as Facebook and Twitter give such immediate communication. They are examples of powerful social media, dynamic media working in real-time, affording interaction around the world.

But there is arguably a negative side to this communication too. On something like Twitter anyone can ask anyone anything. An instant reply is expected and of course your message goes to everyone who 'follows' you. Imagine a high profile person, maybe a politician, being asked a sensitive question, or one that at least demands a thorough response. Twitter only allows 140 characters so maybe you won't get to explain yourself clearly or in sufficient detail and people may take what you have said the wrong way. The recent riots in UK were widely reported across the world's media. Prime Minister David Cameron defended courts for handing out 'tough' sentences for those involved in the riots across England. Two men were jailed for four years for using Facebook to incite riots. The Metropolitan Police announced that more than 1,000 people had been charged in connection with riots in London alone. One 17-year-old from Suffolk was banned from using social networking sites for 12 months and was ordered to observe a three month overnight curfew for using Facebook to encourage people to riot.

So what is a good use of technology? Clearly there are politics behind the use of social media. It has the potential to be used for good and for ill. I'm reminded of the words of 'Street Guru', a track by Nitin Sawhney: 'I think there's going to be a backlash against technology'. I used to think that the street guru was right, now I'm not so sure. I suspect that computer technology and social networking is here to stay. It has given people a means to communicate in new ways. The challenge is to think about how we use it, and to use it well.

Maggie Miranda teaches at the International School, Dubai.



BANG B'ANG

Sex, Lies and Espionage

The role of the media in the Profumo Affair



The role of the media in exposing corruption is not new. Here Jade Hunter explores one of Britain's greatest political scandals of the 20th century: the Profumo affair, which led to resignations, suicide and the collapse of the Conservative Government in the 1960s. Intrigue, espionage and sex – it could even be something out of *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* ...

In 1963, a young showgirl, **Christine Keeler**, found herself at the centre of the **Profumo Affair**, a scandal which brought the Conservative Government of Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, to its knees. The scandal arose after a brief affair between **John Profumo, the Minister for War**, and **Christine Keeler**.

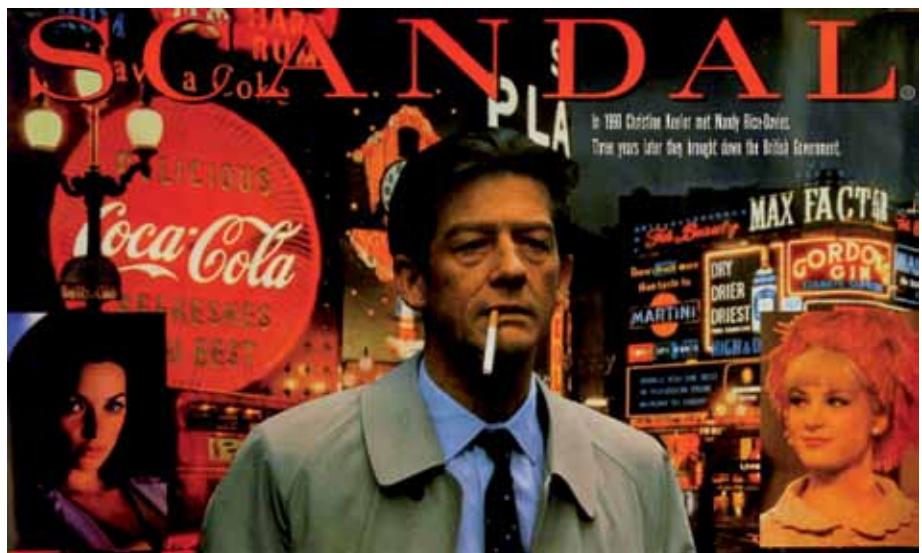
Society call girl

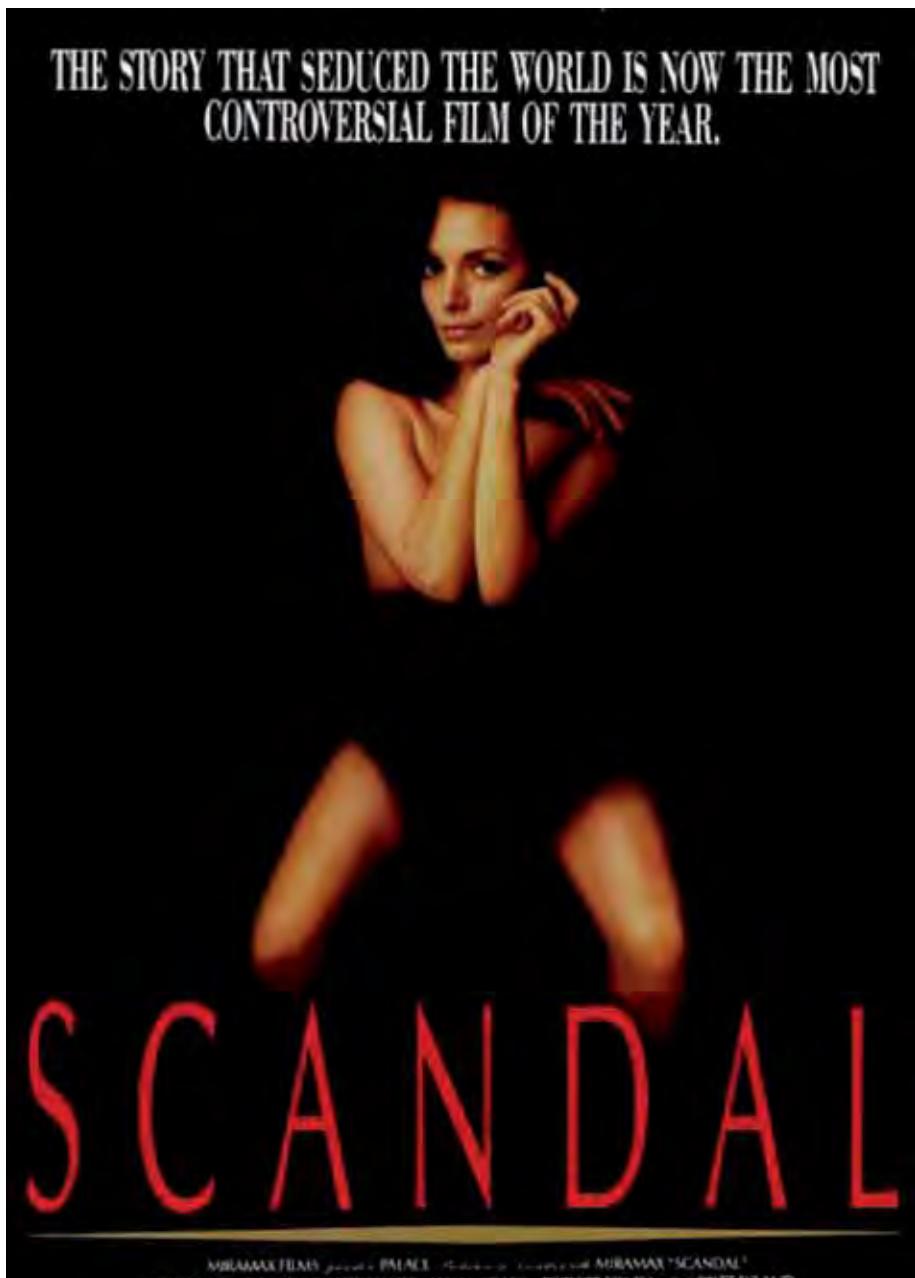
In the wake of the **Cuban Missile Crisis**, a conflict between Cuba, the USA and the Soviet Union a year earlier, and with increasing political anxiety about the Cold War, an extended period of tension primarily between the Communist Soviet Union and the United States, an increasingly tense Britain was uneasy about links with the Soviet Union. This was a time marked by spies and espionage. The affair between Profumo and Keeler became of national interest when it arose that Keeler had also been romantically involved with a Russian military expert, 'Eugene' Ivanov.

In her autobiography, *The Truth at Last*, written almost 40 years after the scandal took place, Keeler claims that her liaisons with Profumo and Ivanov were set up by **Stephen Ward**, an osteopath and artist. He requested she extract secret information from Profumo, including 'when nuclear warheads were being moved to Germany' (Keeler et al, 2002:107). Following the media's disclosure of the affair and its security implications on 26th June 1963, Lord Denning launched an inquiry which investigated any compromise of national security that may have happened as a result of the scandal. When the conclusions of the report were published, John Profumo's career was left in ruins, Keeler was imprisoned for six months for perjury and Stephen Ward was prosecuted for living on the immoral earnings of prostitutes. However, he evaded sentencing as he committed suicide before the verdict was announced.

The Role of the media

The media played an integral role in publicising the Profumo scandal. In February 1963, the tabloid newspaper, *The Sunday Pictorial* was considering their newspaper's publication of the story Christine Keeler had given them, which sensationalised her high-society London life and her affair with John Profumo. Keeler claims that





she was 'set up' to tell her story to *The Sunday Pictorial* by Nina Gadd, a London 'prostitute' (Keeler et al, 2002: 164). Gadd allegedly arrived at Keeler's flat; with a man she claimed was her fiancé, but who later revealed himself to be from the newspaper (Keeler et al, 2002:165). Lord Denning states that Stephen Ward contacted the newspaper and discredited Keeler's story, while at the same time the newspaper realised that they 'could not safely publish Christine Keeler's story, but they could safely publish Stephen Ward's' (Coates, 2003:83).

On Friday 15th March, 1963, the front page of *The Daily Express* was emblazoned with the headline, 'War Minister Shock' with the accompanying article claiming that:

Mr John Profumo...has offered his resignation to Mr Macmillan for personal reasons

This article was juxtaposed with a photograph of Christine Keeler, who was at the time a witness for an unrelated incident, headed 'Vanished Old Bailey Witness'. In fact at that point in time, the story of Profumo's resignation was untrue, but

the juxtaposition of the two stories implied a connection between the two, which *The Daily Express* claimed 'was entirely coincidental'.

Many people have likened the Profumo Scandal to the affair between US President, Bill Clinton, and White House intern, Monica Lewinsky in the mid 1990s. Keeler herself claimed that she was

one of only a few people in the world who could hope to understand...the shaky nightmarish life that Monica Lewinsky endured at the height of that scandal

As Jerry Palmer suggests, **even the power of the American Presidency cannot control the flow of communication of the media**.

It can be argued that the media were responsible for revealing the Profumo scandal, holding power over the Government because of their dissemination of information. However, it is debatable whether public interest was entirely focused on issues of national security, or whether in fact, **the sensationalism of sex among socialites** was the main focus. It's worth comparing the revelations with contemporary



media coverage, such as David Beckham's alleged affair in 2004 with PA Rebecca Loos, or the widely-reported tumultuous relationship between Ashley and Cheryl Cole.

Media coverage of these contemporary celebrity issues arguably holds little value for true public interest. However, back in the early 60s, the focus of the media on titillating details of Keeler's private life may have provided a convenient distraction from the potentially dangerous breach in national security. This interest in **the sensationalism of the scandal** is epitomised by the 'vast queues outside HMSO' (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, which publishes Government documents) on the day of the publication of Lord Denning's report. Scandalous information about public figures had become 'a marketable commodity' for the media (Coates, 2003:184).

Because of the incremental release of information about the scandal, public interest was retained over a period of time. One of the most notable examples is the letter from John Profumo to Christine Keeler. According to Lord Denning's report, on the 22nd January 1963, Keeler sold her story to the tabloid newspaper, *The Sunday Pictorial*, and presented them with the letter sent to her by the War Minister, thus providing the newspaper with proof of the integrity of her story. It was photographed, but not published by the newspaper until the 9th June 1963, five days after Profumo's resignation from Government (Coates, 2003:121). This could be seen as the climax of the scandal, which as a story had unfolded as a result of fragments of information released by the media.

The scandal made John Profumo's role in Government untenable and he was forced to resign from his position as War Minister. Prime Minister Harold Macmillan resigned shortly after, as a result of ill health, to be replaced by Alec Douglas-Home, who after a year as Prime Minister was replaced by a Labour Prime Minister, Harold Wilson. Just as *The Sun* suggested it had swayed public opinion towards the Conservative Party in the 1992 election ('It's the Sun wot won it'), it could be argued that media coverage of the Profumo affair assisted Harold Wilson's Labour Government in gaining power.



The Profumo affair was a prime example of **the hugely influential role of the media in swaying public opinion and, in this case, toppling a Government**. The scandal and the media frenzy which surrounded it are still frequently referenced in contemporary society and culture. An article in the *Daily Mail*, published in 2005, showed Christine Keeler shopping at a London supermarket, and described how she is 'still haunted by the scandal of 42 years ago' (*Daily Mail*, Saturday November 19, 2005). Both the media and the subsequent public interest in the Profumo affair prove the topic still newsworthy over 40 years later.

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Taking it further

The Profumo Affair was the basis of a 1989 feature film *Scandal*, featuring Ian McKellen as Profumo, John Hurt as Stephen Ward, and Joanne Whalley as Keeler. It's available on DVD.

Coates, T. (2003): *The Scandal of Christine Keeler and John Profumo, Lord Denning's Report 1963*

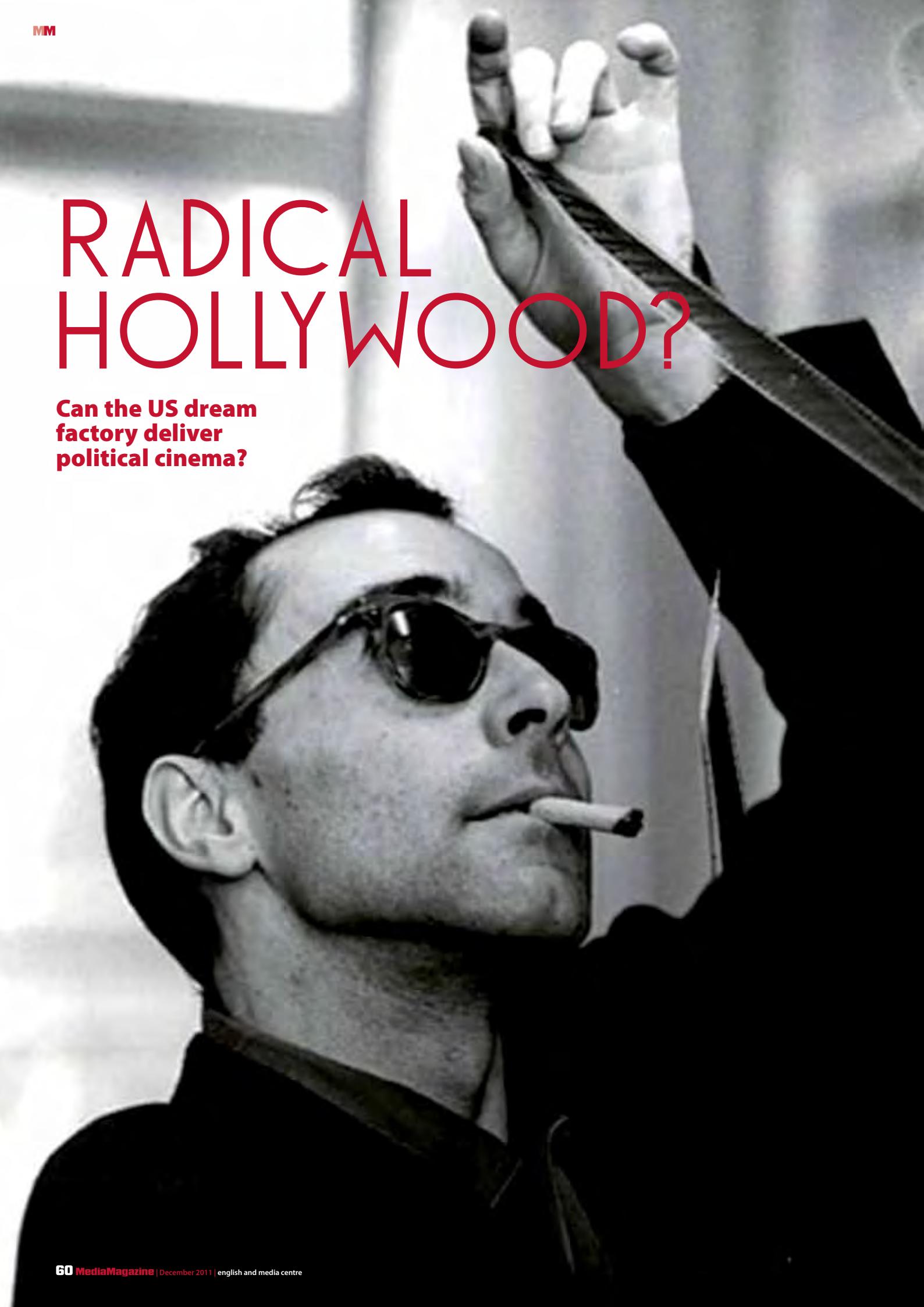
Haste, C. (2002): *Rules of Desire: Sex in Britain, World War 1 to the Present*

Keeler, C. & Thompson, D. (2001): *The Truth at Last*

Palmer, J. Political Scandal, Goldsmiths University, Available Online: <http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/departments/media-communications/pdfs/jerrypalmer-paper.pdf>. Date accessed 04/09/11.

RADICAL HOLLYWOOD?

**Can the US dream
factory deliver
political cinema?**



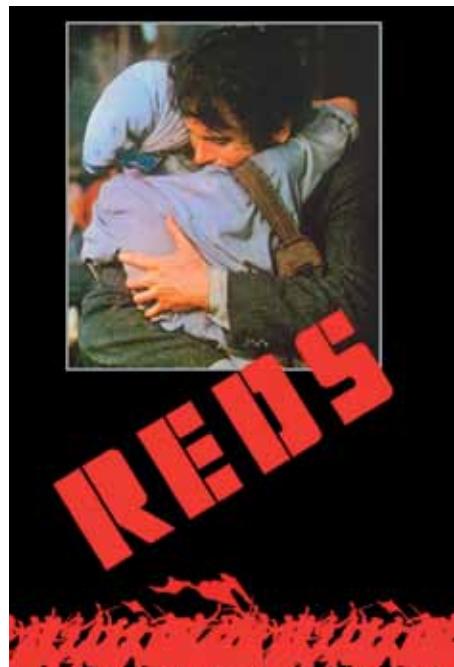
Hollywood is synonymous with entertainment. Its films usually offer 'escapism' and their 'happy ever after' endings are as reassuring as fairy tales (see Dyer 1992). This might suggest that Hollywood doesn't deal with the serious subject of politics. However, Nick Lacey argues that is impossible as everything is 'political'.

In May 1968 there were riots on the streets of Paris, as there were in many other cities in the world at that time (see Kurlansky 2005). However, unlike the English version of rioting in the summer of this year, these were overtly political in nature. Workers and students united to take on the government that was seen to be serving the rich at the expense of the poor.

This was a significant moment in the history of Film Studies, as the analysis of film suddenly became politicised. In the following year the French film magazine, *Cahiers du Cinéma*, published an influential editorial by Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni (1976). They suggested there were **five ideological categories of film**.

These were summarised as:

- a. The vast majority of films, whose form and content both **carry and endorse** the **dominant ideology** unthinkingly, through realism.
- b. A small number of films which attempt to **subvert the dominant ideology** through both their content and formal strategies that breach the conventions of 'realist' cinema.
- c. Movies whose content is not explicitly political, but whose **formal radicalism** renders them subversive.
- d. The reverse of category c): movies whose **explicitly political content** is contained within the realm of dominant ideology by their conventional form.
- e. Films which seem at first sight to belong firmly within the ideological and to be



completely under its sway, but which turn out to be so only in an **ambiguous** manner. (Maltby, 1995: 397)

Let's unpick these categories in a little more detail.

a. Endorsement through realism

The 'dominant (bourgeois) ideology' of Hollywood is the **myth of the 'American Dream'**, where everyone, regardless of class, ethnicity or gender, can succeed if they work hard enough. Success is invariably defined in terms of wealth and finding 'Mr/Miss Right' in order to bring up a family, preferably with a male breadwinner. The protagonists of such films are usually white and male, with the female lead reduced to the 'helper' narrative function. The 'form' of these films consists of a 'realist' style that emphasises continuity between shots so audiences can easily follow the action. Most films, including arthouse cinema, fit into category (a).

b. Subversion

The second category refers to films that deliberately **challenge the dominant ideology and conventional film form**. From the mid-1960s onwards, for example, director Jean-Luc Godard has challenged bourgeois ideology in non-linear or avant-garde films that are often extremely difficult to follow. Even in his 80th year he's still subversive – see his latest, *Film Socialisme* (Switzerland-France, 2010). Both the form and content is the opposite of Hollywood.

c. Formal radicalism

The distinctive aspect of category (c) films is their **non-conventional form** where, for example, continuity between shots is avoided; these are often experimental in nature, such as *Meshes of the Afternoon* US, 1943 (see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4S03Aw5HULU>). Despite the fact that it was literally made in Hollywood, *Meshes* was made independently of the major studios. It is usually the case that American films that challenge the status quo, in their content and/or form, are **independently produced**.

d. Conventional form, subversive content

Category (d) films, which we will be focusing on here, use conventional film form but seek to challenge the dominant ideology through their **content**.

Films in the final category appear to belong to category (a). However they are open to readings that **subvert** the dominant ideological message. For example, Douglas Kellner has argued that the *Saw* films (US, 2004-10) criticise the George W. Bush presidency as they put:

on display the demented illusions, grotesque hypocrisy, obscene violence, and utter lunacy of the Bush-Cheney era.

Politics and Hollywood

Hollywood is often considered to be a **conservative institution**. That is, it reinforces the status quo and is primarily interested in making money. As a mass medium, films have the potential to be extremely effective propaganda (something the Nazis exploited). The American government was aware of that when, in 1915, just as Hollywood was getting established as a serious business, the Supreme Court insisted that the film



industry must produce 'demonstrably harmless entertainment'. As Richard Maltby suggests:

The effect of the 1915 ruling has persisted, encouraging the industry to avoid political controversy in its products.

It wasn't until 1952 that this restriction was lifted and films were granted the protection of **'freedom of speech'**, under the **First Amendment of the US Constitution**. However, throughout the history of Hollywood, category (d) films can be found, even though they are still very much in a minority.

The Grapes of Wrath

For example, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) is an Oscar-winning adaptation of **John Steinbeck's** novel about the appalling treatment of farmers fleeing the dust bowl in Oklahoma during the Great Depression. The novel was highly critical of capitalism; and although this was toned down in the film there are highly emotional scenes about the **exploitation of workers**. When a family's home is about to be destroyed, by order of the bank that owns the land, the shotgun-toting farmer asks the man with the bulldozer who he should shoot, but finds his resistance is futile against financial institutions.

The film is **conventional** in using a star, **Henry Fonda**, as the protagonist, Tom Joad, and in offering an **upbeat ending**; insisted upon by the producer, **Daryl Zanuck**, against the director **John Ford's** wishes. Steinbeck's novel, published only a year earlier, included further chapters that ran parallel to the Joad narrative. They were descriptions of typical experiences of those displaced and desperately seeking work. Thus in the novel, Steinbeck pulled readers out of the narrative flow, encouraging them to think about, and critique, what was happening at the time. Yet the film version is a typically seamless Hollywood film that **engages the emotions before the intellect**.

It was produced by **20th Century Fox**, which was at the time owned by Chase National Bank, who, despite the book's criticisms of capitalism, 'green lighted' the project. The irony of the New York premiere is notable as it:

was attended by stars in jewels and furs and by executives of the banks and land companies that had evicted people like the Joads.

McBride 2003

Clearly it was felt by the industry that the film would not offer an effective challenge to the forces of capital. Indeed, by awarding the movie an Oscar, the film was used to celebrate the 'system' of Hollywood by emphasising that it **can**



Images courtesy of image.net



be critical of contemporary society and thus perpetuate the myth that America is the 'land of the free'. It's likely that if the film had faithfully adapted the source material, such establishment approval would not have been forthcoming.

A more recent 20th Century Fox film that attacks the American political system (and is critically scathing about Hollywood itself) is *Bulworth* (1998) where writer-director **Warren Beatty** plays a senator who starts speaking the truth. It is a hilarious satire and it is a testament to Beatty's star power that it ever got made. Beatty had also been an important factor in the release of *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), a film that revolutionised Hollywood's attitude to representations of sex and violence (see Jonathan Nunn's piece in *MediaMagazine 37* on the film's production history).

New Hollywood politics

Bonnie and Clyde predicated what became known as New Hollywood by a couple of years. After the unexpected success of *Easy Rider* (1969) the studios, whose box office takings had been in serious decline for 20 years, decided to finance independently produced films in the hope that the 'indies' were more in touch with youth audiences. Many see the early 1970s as a 'Golden Age' for Hollywood; a number of films were freed from the requirement of the 'happy ending' and filmmakers were able to make contentious statements about American society.

These films have more in common with arthouse cinema than mainstream Hollywood: see, for example, *Five Easy Pieces* (1970) starring Jack Nicholson; *The Last Picture Show* (1971) with Jeff Bridges; *Klute* (1971) with Jane Fonda; *The Godfather* (1972) with Al Pacino; *The Long Goodbye* (1973) with Elliot Gould; and *The Parallax View* (1974) with Warren Beatty. Unfortunately few of these films made much money at the box office and by the mid-70s, stimulated by the success of *Jaws* (1975), High Concept, producer-driven filmmaking held sway and is still with us today – see the *Transformers* franchise (2007-). For an extremely readable and fascinating account about independent filmmaking and New Hollywood see **Biskind (1999)**.

By the 1990s independent filmmakers seemed more interested in making films that would act as a 'calling card' that would allow them to 'get into' Hollywood rather than an artistic statement. Independent filmmaking itself also became a **marketing tool for the studios**, producing 'smart movies' for a niche audience (see Biskind 2005).

The Bush regime and the rise of documentary features

In 2000, George W. Bush was elected President of the United States under very contentious circumstances, and embarked on an extremely **right-wing agenda** that included foreign wars, reducing freedom of speech and cutting taxes for the rich. During the first decade of this century documentary feature films became relatively popular, primarily due to the work of **Michael Moore**. His *Bowling for Columbine* (2002) took over a \$100m at the North American box office and his follow up, *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) was an overt attempt to ensure Bush wasn't re-elected. Many of the documentaries have focused on the war in Iraq that was inadequately reported in the mainstream media. *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008), for example, argued that the torture of Iraqi prisoners, by Americans, at Abu Ghraib was sanctioned at the highest level and not the work of rogue soldiers. (See Pete Turner's article on page 27.)

There have also been a large number of fictional films dealing with conflict in the Middle East such as *Syriana* (2005), *In the Valley of Elah*, *The Kingdom*, *Redacted* (all 2007), *Stop-Loss* (2008) and the Oscar-winning *The Hurt Locker* (2009). These films were not all critical of the American foreign policy; *The Kingdom* in particular celebrates a 'gung-ho' attitude to foreigners. *Syriana*, on the other hand, is a complex film that highlights America's desire to protect oil supplies as the driving feature of US actions. It's likely that one of the reasons such a difficult film as this gets made is the presence of its stars: **George Clooney** and **Matt Damon**. Clooney, it seems, is taking on Warren Beatty's mantle of getting challenging movies made in Hollywood. His Oscar winning *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2005), which he also co-wrote and directed, although set in the 1950s, was clearly a critique of the way in which the American media were acting as cheerleaders to Bush's military campaigns. Clooney has also starred in challenging films such as *Michael Collins* (2007), *The American* (2010) and *The Ides of March* (2011).

All these films are **category (d) films**: although they challenge the dominant ideology, they do it using **conventional techniques of filmmaking**. But does this mean that audiences simply watch the film as a piece of entertainment and so don't particularly engage in the political message? One way of emphasising the political is to break the conventions of how films are made: to **challenge the 'seamless flow' of the conventional narrative**. By using a **Brechtian device** (named after the left-wing German playwright Bertolt Brecht) that

'defamiliarises', we can be made to 'think again' about what we are seeing, as Steinbeck did in his novel. But the risk there is that the film becomes so challenging that audiences stay away and thus the political message remains unheard.

Reds – a genuinely radical film?

Hollywood primarily entertains because it wants to make money out of you; it has no wish to challenge the dominant ideology and entice you to think. However, there are still some filmmakers who resist the idea that making money is the most important thing in life, and try to make films that engage audiences in thinking about the world.

Possibly the most remarkable film ever made in Hollywood is *Reds* (1981), co-written, produced and directed by **Warren Beatty**. Released by Paramount Pictures, and nominated for 12 Oscars, it told the story of John Reed, an outspoken socialist (something of a dirty word in America now) and the only American to be buried in the Kremlin. *Reds* is in many ways a conventional love story told against the dramatic backdrop of the 1917 Russian Revolution. However, throughout the film elderly real-life witnesses speak about their memories of the time. This casts both light and doubt on the Hollywood version of events. They also serve to distance the viewer from the narrative and encourage us to think about what we are seeing. Maybe Hollywood has made one Brechtian film!

Nick Lacey is Head of Media Studies at Benton Park School Technology College, Leeds.

Taking it further

Peter Biskind (1999): *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls: How the Sex 'n' Drugs 'n' Rock 'n' Roll Generation Saved Hollywood*

Peter Biskind (2005): *Down and Dirty Pictures: Miramax, Sundance & the Rise of Independent Film*

Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni: 'Cinema/Ideology/Criticism' in Nichols (ed., 1976) – see below

Ben Dickenson (2006): *Hollywood's New Radicalism: War, Globalisation and the Movies from Reagan to George W. Bush*

Richard Dyer (1992): *Only Entertainment*

Douglas Kellner (2009): *Cinema Wars: Hollywood Film and Politics in the Bush-Cheney Era*

Mark Kurlansky (2005): *1968: The Year That Rocked the World*

Richard Maltby (1995): *Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction*

Joseph McBride (2003): *Searching for John Ford*

ed. **Bill Nichols** (1976) *Movies and Methods*

Media, Politics and Power in Cuba

A Case Study

Over Easter 2011, Principal Examiner Julian McDougall visited Cuba. He shared his research into Cuban media with teachers and students through the medium of Twitter, and then wrote a 'joined up' version for his forthcoming book, *Media Studies: The Basics* from which this article is adapted.

The material here will be useful for topics such as Global Media, Media in the Online Age, Media and Democracy and Collective Identity. But the relationship between politics, media, people and technology in Cuba is complicated and raises all kinds of issues about the role of media in society, so all critical students of media should find rich analytical pickings here.

Why is a study of Cuban media useful in the context of **globalisation**? Cuban media, by virtue of being in an **economically challenged Communist context**, is unique, so the international perspective is clear – a comparison of Cuban media with any other nation will yield rich data to 'theorise'. At the same time, the complexity of Cuban media in terms of **democracy, access, inclusion and regulation** is striking and this connects the 'micro' detail to all of the 'macro' themes explored in Media Studies.

The Cuban Context

Firstly, a brief history of politics and economics in Cuba. **Cuba is a Communist state**, and understanding its place in global politics and culture is complicated. On the one hand, its **educational and medical provision** is the envy of most countries. But on the other, **trade restrictions** mean that material possessions are scarce, and the infrastructure of the nation is crumbling. **Lambie (2008)** describes Cuba's place in the world 'against the grain' of much analysis by arguing that it is global capitalism which is fragmenting and Cuba exists as a vital **counter-hegemonic** alternative. The argument here is that the current economic crisis allows us to see Cuba in a new light:

By looking at Cuba, not in isolation from

the world, it questions how its 'unity of purpose' can continue to influence and be absorbed into the growing popular resistance movements emerging within the core of 'globalisation'.

Cuba is generally represented as **a unique, socialist 'red herring' in the course of global capitalism**. Lambie's interpretation challenges the dominant discourse, and instead sees Cuba as **a surviving alternative to a failing economic system**. Famously, in the aftermath of the Cuban revolution, Fidel Castro declared that his leadership of the coup would be 'absolved by history' and clearly Lambie finds evidence of such exoneration in current global struggle. However, any serious exploration of Cuban media needs to explore **the relationships between state ideology, public responses, and private concerns** – most notably evident in new digital spaces. Lambie describes 'influences that are diluting the revolution' and clearly new social media, alongside a tradition of counter-cultural cinema in Cuba, can be seen in this way.

To visit Cuba is to witness confusion and contradiction on every level. **Literacy levels** are the highest in the world and citizens are proud of **free healthcare**, but a sense of time warp pervades. **Richard Gott**, one of the county's most notable commentators, describes the experience:

I found a Cuba preserved in aspic: nothing seemed to have changed – one of the unique and neglected charms of communism. An intelligent, healthy and well-educated population, younger than the revolution itself, survived in buildings battered by time, with rations that were barely adequate, and with a transport system that did not serve their needs. They had plenty of reasons for complaint, yet they were slow to attack the revolution or its leadership.

Cuba's material poverty is the result of **trade restrictions** imposed by the US. These have varied according to the will of presidential regimes – Reagan was very hostile, Clinton tightened the economic embargo but relaxed travel rules and Bush, after 9/11, made the latter much stricter again. Cubans are hopeful that Barak Obama will lift these, and recreate commercial relations with the island. At the time of writing, Obama just reduced restrictions on US citizens applying for visas to travel to the island for study.

'Old' Media in Cuba

'Old media' dominate in Cuba, so it is important to look at newspapers, film and TV next. **The state controlled newspaper** *Granma*, named after a boat which played a historic role in the revolution, is distributed for free on the streets and is available online in translated, international, form. It is overtly and shamelessly a vehicle for **propaganda**. On June 22nd 2011, the main story concerned a UNESCO report on children's handwriting which:

...put Cuba at between first and third place in all parameters' and that 'it can be said that Cuba has very high results in written texts, taking into consideration moreover that the percentage of blank or illegible texts was less than 1% in both grades.

In television broadcasting, academic debates offer contrasting interpretations of the role of **popular soaps (telenovellas)** in facilitating public debate about social issues, as opposed to providing another medium for government ideology. For example, *Mulheres Apaixonadas* (Passionate Women) is broadcast three times a week on **Cubavisión**, one of Cuban state television's four

national channels, to millions of viewers. For reasons that shed some light on freedom of speech in Cuba, it has been argued that the social issues covered in telenovellas could not be freely discussed by Cubans otherwise:

Although this is a country with excellent laws that protect women in their relationships, there are still many deeply rooted patriarchal customs. These serials serve as spaces for bringing up subjects like violence, lesbian sexuality, alcoholism and others that we don't know how to approach otherwise.

Acosta 2008

Buena Vista Social Club

This film and its soundtrack offers for many an iconic version of Cuban culture, and provides a rich example of a hybrid media form. American producer **Ry Cooder** reconstructed the musical ensemble from original members of the pre-revolutionary club. It's interesting to consider the political implications of an American intervention of this nature? What the club represents is important in the context of capital city Havana as a symbol of the richness of Cuban culture before Castro. An African-Cuban venue, the BVSC hosted a range of converging musical styles – mambo, jazz, rhumba and son montuno and charango, cha-cha-cha and pachanga dance movements to choreograph the sound. As such we can see in the *Buena Vista Social Club* the hybridised and even postmodern nature of **pre-revolutionary Cuba**, and this offers a rich comparison with more contemporary musical subcultures.

Cuban Hip Hop

Guerilla Radio – The Hip Hop struggle under Castro (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e-rDkhvR_4) – is a documentary which chronicles the battle over freedom of speech in contemporary Cuba from the perspective of DJs, rappers and other musicians.

Another example of the complexity of Cuban media and identity, the film explores **state suppression** of counter-cultural art, along with violence towards women and the omnipresence

of poverty. At the same time it shows that the hegemonic absorption of American hip hop into the mainstream (to the extent that the more 'cutting edge' variations of the form arguably no longer manage to influence the culture) makes Cuban hip hop more radical – an 'explosion that's just started', as one young rapper in the film describes it. In this way, the potential for political and cultural change in Cuba – and the extent to which the people desire it – is often presented as being in the hands of the 'next generation' and there is a sense that **youthful radicalism and technological progress** that can facilitate this. For example, *Cuba Va* (directed by Dolgin and Franco) is a video-to-film transfer that presents a complex view of the island directly from the perspective of young citizens with contrasting opinions:

What they have to say or sing or rap suggests that everyone born after the revolution has an opinion, and those opinions are diverse. What it also suggests is that father Fidel, whether he intended to or not, has produced an extraordinarily articulate generation that defines itself through political positions. Here is a nation in which young men and women believe that their personal behaviour has a public meaning and consequence and that even being alienated is an act of social rebellion. The one area of agreement among those interviewed is the wish to be left alone after Castro's departure to sort out Cuba's future.

Kardish

Cuban Cinema

Another important film which addresses complex and diverse opinions and identities among younger Cubans is *Strawberry and Chocolate* (directed by **Tomas Gutierrez Alea**) which represents sexual discrimination at the end of the 1970s. The interesting 'angle' here is that the director is a committed revolutionary who wishes to explore critically the **double standards** of the post-revolution society 'from within'. Despite being firmly committed to the political project of the revolution, the lead character is eventually forced to leave the country, simply because of homophobic





persecution. The film is celebrated within Cuba as a triumph of state-supported filmmaking (the director was supported by the **Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematograficos – ICAIC**); this suggests the complicated nature of contemporary public sphere identity-politics. For example, posters of the film are sold to tourists in the gift shops and hotels of Havana, yet gay people in the country are still subjected to discrimination in formal political society. Indeed, Castro has declared that **homosexuals cannot be accepted as members of the revolutionary Communist party**. This approach is, according to West (1995) a 'dark stain' on the history of the revolution. **Strawberry and Chocolate** is a film which attempts to represent the 'identity crisis' of post-revolutionary Cuba in symbolic ways, as this extract from an interview (from the film journal **Cineaste**) with the director shows:

Cineaste: One of the central themes of the film is the question of Cuban identity. Would you comment on the Cuban altar in Diego's house and the film's use of Cuban music?

Gutierrez Alea: That altar, which was in the short story, defines Diego's personality very well. Diego is enamoured of Cuban culture. This aspect of his personality makes the ending of the film – when he must abandon his country because he cannot live out his potential fully – all the more dramatic.

West, 1995

Before Night Falls (Schnabel, 2001) offers a more hard-hitting filmic account of prejudice and repression in post-revolutionary Cuba. The film depicts the persecution of **exiled gay poet Reinaldo Arenas**. There are two ways in which critics see this film as more transgressive and bold than Alea's text. Firstly, the film is more overtly sexual, and adopts the perspective of the 'gay gaze'. Secondly, the film is more visceral and aesthetic, adopting magical realism in a far more straightforward celebration of gay life and condemnation of the Cuban regime, according to this reading from Smith (2001):

While **Strawberry and Chocolate** is static and earthbound, confined to the apartment where a stereotypical queen and a humourless Marxist

engage in relentless debate, **Before Night Falls** is mobile and volatile. (The producers) have already been bitterly attacked by so-called solidarity campaigns which confuse support for Cubans with support for the regime that has denied them democracy for over 40 years.

Generacion Y – Digital Transformations

More than political unrest, economic discomfort or even the death of Castro, **the internet** may be the **catalyst for change** in Cuba. However, it is important to understand the dynamic relationship between three aspects of online activity in Cuba:

- **state use of the internet** for disseminating political messages
- **state restrictions on internet** use by citizens
- **citizen media** in the forms of blogs which are often counter-ideological, or at least critically question the functions of the state.

State Use of the Internet

Fidel Castro no longer speaks publicly due to failing health, but regular '**reflections of Fidel**' are provided online for citizens. For example, in May 2011, after the execution of bin Laden, Castro posted an item about 'lies and mysteries' surrounding the events and disseminating the outcomes of various international surveys. These suggest there is a great deal of suspicion about the claims made by the US to have killed bin Laden, and that a significant number of people do not accept the US view of bin Laden as the mastermind of 9/11. Such 'reflections' are clearly intended to **frame international events in the discourse of revolution** and to override Cuban citizens' access to global (and particularly, American) media representations of such events.

In an earlier example (2010), Castro offered his response to the **Wikileaks exposure**, again with the aim of providing a lens through which Cuban citizens might view the events. Celebrating the roles played by **filmmakers Ken Loach and Michael Moore** in funding bail for the site's creator, Castro offered this view (translated online by *Granma International*) of the broader political context for Wikileaks:

The motivations which led him to the resounding blow that he delivered to the [US] empire remain unknown. All that is known is that morally, he has brought it to its knees. World opinion will continue closely following everything that happens in the context of Wikileaks. Responsibility for being able to know the truth, or not, about the cynical politics of the United States and its allies will fall squarely on the right-wing Swedish government and the bellicose NATO mafia, who so like to invoke the freedom of the press and human rights. Ideas can be more powerful than nuclear weapons.

Castro, 2010

Although the island has been online since 1996, for most Cubans, there is limited access to the internet. This is due to a combination of **Government restrictions**, the **US trade embargo** which means Cuba is cut off from American trade of various kinds (including websites, which are often 'reverse filtered' from the US so they cannot be accessed from Cuba), and **lack of finances: less than 5% own a computer**. Logistical barriers add to this disconnection – Cuban IP addresses are hard to acquire (from US providers) and bandwidth is inadequate. Those Cubans that can access the web in some form are in most cases restricted (financially) to a national, **state-controlled, intranet system**. Of course, this information only describes measurable legal use of the internet; but it is worth bearing in mind that illegal use of the internet, categorised as '**counter-revolutionary activity**', can lead to twenty years in prison. Clearly the Cuban state's approach to the internet is far from open and democratic. It uses the internet primarily to disseminate **political responses to events** and also for **tourism** and the administration of **medical services**, but on a limited and heavily controlled scale:

Reporters Without Borders considers Cuba one of the world's 10 most repressive countries [in regard to] online free expression because of the highly limited access and the severe punishment of illegal Internet use, including 'counter-revolutionary' usage. The restrictions stem from the strong desire of the Cuban government to prevent attacks upon its political ideology from broad access to contrary views.

Open Net, accessed 2011

Elian the 'Nowhere Boy'

A rich case study for understanding Global Media as a site of struggle over truth and origins can be found in **the story of Elian Gonzalez**. At the age of 7, his mother drowned whilst trying to sail illegally from Cuba to Miami in 2000, and Elian became the subject of a struggle between Miami and Cuba over his citizenship. Eventually, he returned to Cuba with his father. According to Allatson (2004), the case became '**virtualised**' in the sense that Elian became **an icon in popular media culture** through websites, books, films, radio shows, art, a **South Park** episode, T-Shirts and posters.

It has been suggested that the 'virtualisation' of Elian is a **metaphor** for the identity-crisis of Cuba in the context of global media. Elian was trapped between two Cubas – the island itself, and the



ex-patriate version of it in Miami. Cubans in America were campaigning (unsuccessfully in the end) to 'Save Elian' from Cuba itself. This struggle continues online; many of the US 'Save Elian' websites still exists in order to campaign against Castro more broadly. In Havana, meanwhile, posters can be seen all over the city condemning a US conspiracy of lies in the reporting of the case, and celebrating the repatriation of Elian as a 'replaying' of the failed attempt by America to invade Cuba. As such, this is seen as another victory against imperialism. In this case we can find elements of **cultural imperialism, hybridity and diaspora**, all mediated across borders.

In Cuba, Elián was hailed as the child-hero of the Revolution. In Miami he was a saviour sent by God. Day by day, Elián's story was propelled across the globe by melodramatic plot devices familiar to viewers of soap opera.

The internet, then, is the site of much political struggle; and attempts to regulate its use are often futile. For these reasons, commentators on Cuba are keenly 'watching this space' to assess how far radical citizen media might facilitate political change.

Yoani Sanchez

Yoani Sanchez is an acclaimed Cuban blogger who produces **Generacion Y**. She has been honoured by a Digital Journalism Award for her work in the area of **social justice**, which she was unable to collect due to Cuban travel restrictions; **Time Magazine** named her one of the hundred 'most influential people' in 2008. **Generacion Y** is not, however, explicitly political. Venegas (2010) describes the author's work in this way:

Her objective as a citizen journalist is to write from the personal about the political. Her entries focus on the obstacles of everyday life – inefficiencies, insufficiencies, infrastructure problems, impractical policies – as well as conversations with neighbours and fellow bus riders, capturing through their candid comments the ways that Cubans face difficulties. Her writing (in Spanish) avoids political rhetoric and reveals that she is not part of an inner intellectual circle but rather of an independent community of aficionados committed to expanding the content and participation of media in Cuba.

Despite this subtle weaving together of the personal and the political, Sanchez is alleged to be the subject of state surveillance and has been labelled 'mercenary of imperialism', a term which is



used to describe all counter-revolutionary activists. Sanchez would not accept this charge. Here she describes the state response to her blog:

The simple fact that I published my opinions and pointed out that all these organizations did more to control rather than represent us carried serious consequences. Even now, I can't leave the country. The state is seeking revenge because I contradicted it. People follow me on the street, watching my every move. My telephone has been tapped. I stopped parroting the government's slogans years ago and I no longer belong to any official organizations. I am a free citizen, a free radical. My blog, my political platform, consists of a single demand: the diversity of opinion can no longer be a crime!

In Sanchez, 2011

If this version of events is correct, then this proves Castro's assertion that '**ideas can be more powerful than nuclear weapons**' but at the same time demonstrates a profound **double-standard** which seems to underpin so much of contemporary Cuban politics. Powerful ideas are to be **liberated** (Wikileaks) and **suppressed** (Generacion Y) in equal measure. But Venegas (2010) warns against viewing the Internet in Cuba from a free market perspective – itself an imperialist approach – and instead suggests we should situate Cuban media in the context of change and complexity – a situation he describes in terms of '**digital dilemmas**'. The internet was, after all, 'designed by the enemy', so the switch from analogue to digital is a different transformation in Cuba:

A new social imagination has begun to shape the future of Cuba, taking it beyond earlier rhetoric even where that rhetoric is digitized.

Theoretical Perspectives: Control and Freedom

As I have argued there is an 'identity crisis' in Cuba and a sense of being at a crossroads. **Young people are cited as the agents of change**, and will play a key role in defining Cuba over the next decade, with students very much in the forefront of developments. As Obama has relaxed restrictions on study visas, it might be possible for students from across the world to be involved in this, as Joan Coatsworth from Columbia University in the US suggests:

Cuba has never been more interesting. Most Cuban students, whatever they think of Fidel Castro or his brother Raoul, and as much as they are proud of their country, are impatient for long-overdue changes. It's an exciting process that students can witness firsthand.

The final stage in a case study of this nature is always to 'map' this factual understanding to some relevant theories. These might include **Marshall McLuhan's 'Global Village'** idea, and, whilst some look back to McLuhan as a prophet of the online age, the case of Cuba requires study of the interplay of local, national, global; of personal, social and political, and of private and public. Another key theoretical framework for such analysis is provided by **Chun (2006)** whose '**Control and Freedom**' provides a way of balancing the Internet as a control system with the space it creates for **personal and political freedom**.

The internet's potential for democracy stems from the way it exposes a freedom we cannot control. Freedom does not result from our decisions, it is what makes them possible. This freedom is not inherently good, but can be used for good or for evil. The gaps within technological control, the differences between technological control and its rhetorical counterpart, and technology's constant failures mean that our control systems can never entirely make these decisions for us.

In conclusion to this Cuban case study, Venegas' '**digital dilemmas**' chimes with Chun's account in that both help us understand the importance of these '**in-between' spaces**: in-between local, national and global; in-between control and freedom; in-between private and public and in the case of Elian, in-between two versions of an identity. Whilst both argue that the idea of the internet as a utopian space beyond control is a fantasy, they suggest that this very fantasy allows for different kinds of decisions to be made (more idealist, or optimistic, perhaps) – and as such the illusion of freedom plays an important facilitating role in shaping the future – of Cuba and elsewhere. Critical students of media need to understand the complexity of these changes, over time, and must resist simplifying them into generalising binary oppositions:

Cubans will surely continue to pick the digital locks, perhaps increasingly for personal gain rather than common good, as global cybcultures creep under the Cuban door carrying new forms of social expression.

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