APRIL 2021 ISSUE 76

MM
MEDIAMAGAZINE

ROCKS

NEW STATESMAN
BBC SOUNDS
CITIZEN KANE
VAN ZOONEN
FRANCES HA
THE CROWN
BANDCAMP
THE BOYS

EMC
MediaMagazine

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Making the Most of MediaMag

Applying van Zoonen's Ideas

How does your favourite TV show represent females?

Media and Film Studies students often complain that their teachers have 'ruined' film or TV for them because they can no longer watch things without analysing them. Don't worry - I know it's annoying for your families but it's definitely a good thing, a sign that you're developing your critical thinking.

In case you're not quite that far gone yet, have a go at answering these questions, written by Mark Dixon, that will help you apply van Zoonen's ideas to something you have recently been watching.

Questions to explore female representations in media texts

- Does the text limit the roles accorded to female characters?
- Are women active or passive?
- Does the text objectify women through composition, costuming or acting decision?
- Are female representations marginalised or made invisible?

Questions to explore male representations in media texts

- Does text place men at the centre of stories?
- Does the text encode men as strong or powerful?
- Does it use sports imagery to encode masculinity?
- Is male eroticisation contextualised within a romantic framework?
- Are men empowered to look or gaze at female presences?

Magazine Front Pages

New Statesman

In this task, you're going to have a go at choosing the image, design and layout for a front cover of the current affairs magazine the *New Statesman*.

Make sure you've read the article on page 6 so that you understand the sorts of decisions and considerations editors and designers have to make when putting together a front page.

Work in groups in role as the designers and editorial team of the *New Statesman*.
You have been sent these four cover designs for an issue that leads with a story on the launch of the Covid-19 vaccination roll out in the UK. Your job is to come to a decision about which cover to choose and to write the coverline for the story and decide where you would place it on the cover.

Spend some time carefully discussing the 4 different images and their different meanings

- How are the messages across the four choices subtly different from each other?
- How is colour used? For example, does the amount of red and where it is used create a more positive or negative tone?
- What's the effect of having multiple syringes as opposed to one?
- As a designer, which one would have more impact on the newsstand or posted as an image on social media?
- As the editor of a left-wing magazine, think about whether you want your cover to appear critical of the current right-wing government. Or, during a pandemic, is it more important to present a more positive attitude towards the vaccine's roll out?

Challenge: Once you have chosen your cover, written your cover line and decided where to place it, use your understanding of the NS from the article or do a bit of your own research into the sorts of stories they cover and write the smaller headlines and sublines for the top of the front cover.

Our web subscribers can have a look at the cover they finally went with, along with Erica Weathers' explanation of why they made that decision, on the *MM* website.

https://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/media-magazine/

A

B

C

D

New Statesman's Got it Covered

WE CAN'T BREATHE

From Covid-19 to police brutality, how systemic racism is killing black people

By Gary Younge

How does a weekly current affairs magazine make a splash with its covers? Tom Gatti, the deputy editor of the *New Statesman*, explains.

'We Can't Breathe', 5th June

In May 2020 the journalist Gary Younge was working on a story for us about why Covid-19 was killing members of Britain's Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities at a disproportionately high rate. The answer, he argued, was entrenched discrimination. As Gary's deadline approached, George Floyd, an unarmed black man, was killed by police officers in Minneapolis in the United States. Soon after, protests began, linked to the Black Lives Matter movement. I suggested to Gary that the two stories, which both have systemic racism at their root, were connected and could be brought together in his piece. He agreed.

We knew it would be a challenge to encompass the two subjects on one cover. But when it dawned on us that Floyd's dying words, 'I can't breathe', linked his death to the threat of coronavirus, we realised that the phrase could provide the key. Our cover art director Erica Weathers commissioned one of our favourite illustrators, André Carrilho, who has produced many striking images relating to racism. At first he submitted a sketch showing a white hand over a black man's mouth. It was already stark and powerful, with the eye contact

drawing the viewer in – but Andre suggested he could add a superimposed mask, and we agreed that would help bring out the two elements of the story. We usually place our coverline text at the top of the page (traditionally this is the area that is most visible on a newsstand, where the bottom half of the magazine is often obscured), and we initially tried this layout. But reducing Andre's image lessened its impact, so we made it as large as possible and settled on running the text over the face-mask / hand. Erica explained that she made

the unusual decision to use a dark background and a limited colour palette to add drama. The red accent colour helped reinforce the danger surrounding both topics, as well as linking to the *New Statesman*'s red masthead.

The cover was widely read and shared, as was Gary Younge's piece, and it won cover of the year (consumer) at the British Society of Magazine Editors awards 2020. We felt it rose to the occasion and captured the mood of one of the most intense periods in a tumultuous year.

It won cover of the year (consumer) at the British Society of Magazine Editors awards 2020. We felt it rose to the occasion and captured the mood of one of the most intense periods in a tumultuous year.

'A World in Revolt', 12th June

In the days following George Floyd's death, the Black Lives Matter movement went global. We had been working on a different cover story but as our print deadline approached it became clear that we needed to reflect the feelings of anger and hope that had gripped the younger generation. Our creative editor Gerry Brakus had been keeping an eye on the pictures that were being submitted to her by photographers covering the demonstrations in London. This one – by Tommy Sussex, a young British photojournalist – immediately stood out. Gerry explains

The central figure here had a direct-to-camera gaze that captured the passion and conviction of the movement and conveyed the feeling of what we were going through at the time. Photographs of protests can be very busy – they don't always suit the cover. But you could tell that this would work with our layout.

It perhaps helped that Tommy Sussex and many of those covering the protests were working in black and white – which tends to give images the feeling of history in the making. Erica made sure that the design complemented the photo, by changing the *New Statesman* masthead to black and 'A world in revolt' to red, allowing the headline to dominate the cover and capture the urgency of the moment.

'Anatomy of a Crisis', 3rd July

By the summer of 2020, the public had heard many different opinions about the UK government's response to the coronavirus pandemic. We decided to bring together analysis and comment from our writers, our data journalism team and a panel of scientific experts to produce a special issue. Overall the findings were damning of the government, and we were tempted to go for a more strident headline – but eventually we agreed that the issue's strength lay in its cool, objective tone, effectively conveyed by 'Anatomy of a crisis'. We then allowed the second line to indicate our conclusions.

Erica commissioned the Canadian artist Lincoln Agnew to come up with some cover concepts: his ideas are strong, his style of photomontage has a seriousness and edge that suited the story, and his use of black and red works well with our masthead. Of his ideas, one immediately felt dynamic, with the arrows referencing the data analysis inside the magazine. It also provided a clear area for the coverline, though Erica and Lincoln had to tweak the composition to reach a shape that she was happy with.

Erica told me

If I look at covers that aren't successful, it's when the headline has been shoehorned in as if it's an afterthought. In fact it's an integral part of the cover. Often I'll send illustrators mock-ups of cover positions. Otherwise they might come back with something that fills the whole page. And you'll have to say: 'It's beautiful, but where the hell am I going to put the headline?

'The Great Reckoning', 30th October

Erica has long admired the American graphic artist Mike McQuade, known for his striking photomontage work. In the autumn, we had a piece on the return of American fascism, and Erica commissioned Mike to come up with a possible cover. He submitted an image of Donald Trump with a snake, marked with the Nazi SS insignia, emerging from his mouth – showing the influence of fascism on his politics. In the end, that article did not make the cover. But then, as the presidential elections got nearer, we decided we should produce an issue on what was at stake for the US. The polls were looking good for Joe Biden but many felt that Donald Trump could be elected for a second term – and many feared the violence that might erupt if he wasn't. Mike submitted several other ideas for this issue, but although the imagery, based around flags and ballots, answered our brief for an election special, it did not feel quite as urgent as that original Trump head. So we returned to that, and Mike altered the 'skin' of the snake so that it showed stars, evoking the stars and stripes and changing the emphasis from fascism to the general threat of Trump's America. An integral part of Mike's illustration was the red background – evoking the Republican party, as well as menace – so to make it work we needed to change the *New Statesman* masthead to black, and Erica whited out the coverline to incorporate it into the image.

Christmas Special, 11th December

Three times a year – spring, summer and Christmas – we have a special issue that covers two, three or even four weeks. As our covers are often very serious, for these issues we try to offer our readers a bit of levity and wit. For the Christmas issue we turned, as we often do, to the cartoonist Ben Jennings, who draws on the traditions of political satire to capture the mood of the present moment and skewer those in charge. Most covers are designed for instant impact, but these specials hang around for weeks, so the fact that Ben uses a lot of detail is ideal – his work repays repeated views. The Christmas 2020 cover was challenging: how do you get laughs out of a deadly pandemic? Ben's image covers the ground perfectly: he foregrounds Trump as a turkey, with Biden – a little confused, wearing his cracker as a face-mask – about to tuck in; and nods to the virus with a socially distanced set-up for Father Christmas, stockings full of the vaccine, stockpiled loo roll and Covid baubles. Is Boris Johnson in control of the situation? You be the judge.

The Christmas 2020 cover was challenging: how do you get laughs out of a deadly pandemic? Ben's image covers the ground perfectly.

NewStatesman

Enlightened thinking in dark times   29 January – 4 February 2021/No.75

THE

A special issue on our moment
of national mourning

LOST

> 'If I look at covers that aren't successful, it's when the headline has been shoehorned in as if it's an afterthought. In fact it's an integral part of the cover,'

'The Lost', 29th January 2021

As it became clear that the UK would soon reach 100,000 deaths from Covid-19, we decided to do a special issue to mark this grim milestone. For the cover, Erica asked two illustrators to submit concepts, and at the same time she worked on a purely typographical option. The illustrator's ideas were clever and but did not quite seem to match the gravity or poignancy of the subject. But as Erica stripped her designs back to the essentials, with plenty of breathing space, we started to see how it could work.

This cover took a long time to come together. It evolved through lots of conversations: should it just be type? Are we brave enough?

It is rare for us to venture outside the *New Statesman*'s set of fonts, but for this Erica settled on Caslon, a historic British serif typeface that gives the headline, 'The lost', a sense of space and solemnity. In 'Anatomy of a crisis' the emphasis was on holding those responsible to account, while 'The lost' offered mourning and reflection – and a cover treatment to suit.

Tom Gatti is the Deputy Editor of the *New Statesman.*
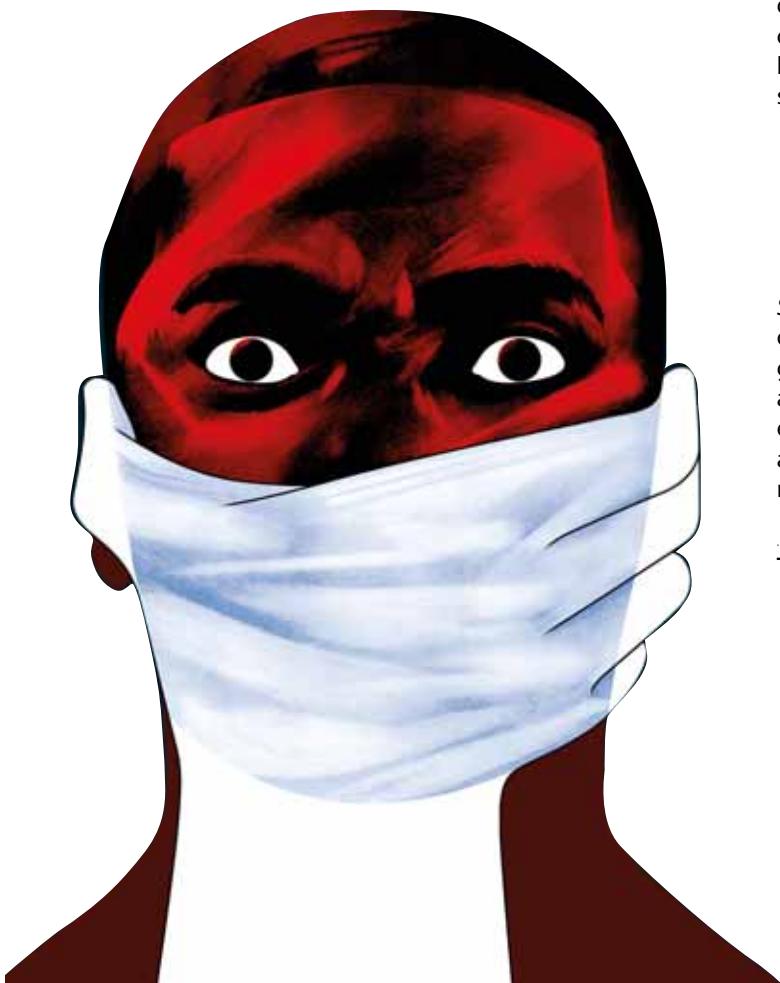
REPRESENTING
ROYALTY

Truth vs Fiction in The Crown

Images courtesy of Netflix

The Crown is a fictional drama based on real events. But are the creators of the show playing fast and loose with the truth? James Middleditch doesn't think so.

Emma Corrin plays
the late Diana,
Princess of Wales

Images courtesy of Netflix

'Just how clever are
television audiences?'
and 'do they believe
everything they're shown
without question?'. In other
words, are they active and
engaging in critical thought,
or are they passive and
easily manipulated?

The current controversy around the reality or otherwise of the events depicted in Netflix's *The Crown* is a gateway to some of the biggest on-going debates and theories about the media. As a television drama that fictionalises real historical events it stands right on the blurred boundary between truth and imagination, where the term representation becomes most crucial.

It is the latest in a long line of texts that invites us to ask, 'just how clever are television audiences?' and 'do they believe everything they're shown without question?'. In other words, are they active and engaging in critical thought, or are they passive and easily manipulated? On one side of this debate we have politicians worrying that we will believe the wrong things. On the other, we may see that the programme itself is textually constructed to invite us to be much more active, encouraging us to learn about the power, possibilities and responsibilities of representation itself.

Courting Controversy

Although it launched on Netflix in 2016 as a dramatisation of the lives of the Royal family through the 20th century, it wasn't until late 2020 that a simmering debate became a news story, following the release of the fourth series in November. Triggering the debate was the government's Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden, who told the *Daily Mail*: 'I fear a generation of viewers who did not live through these events may mistake fiction for fact.' This assumes a highly passive audience who are not able to distinguish between reality and its representation in drama. Another voice on this side of the debate, former royal correspondent Jenny Bond, fears that the drama may be treated 'as a documentary'. As we will see, this ignores the textual construction of the programme as a drama and depicts an audience so passive that they do not even recognise the codes and conventions of different genres.

Netflix has so far refused to give in to demands to place a 'fiction warning' at the start of the episodes. One of the show's stars, Josh O'Connor, explains the boundary between fact and fiction upon which it sits, as he explains that the creator and writer Peter Morgan 'takes the historical facts… and then paints in between those 'punctuation moments''. This relies on a more active audience who can recognise which are the facts and where the 'creative imagination' (in the words of Morgan himself) occurs. A blunter way of seeing the fictional nature of the text is suggested by *Radio Times* writer Eleanor Bley Griffiths, who simply asks, 'isn't that just blindingly obvious?' When we look at the textual construction of the series, we may find ourselves agreeing.

Drawing Attention to Representation

The opening title sequence of a drama is often a highly symbolic and condensed mission statement for a series (if you can resist the urge to 'skip'!). In *The Crown*'s case, its nature as a representation is made apparent for those who can decode the initially unusual imagery. When viewed alongside the powerful score by Hans Zimmerman (best known as composer for fictional films), we can 'read' the title sequence as a further reinforcement of the programme's dramatic nature.

Initially we see the material formation of the crown itself, providing connotations of construction and creation. We next see the parts of the object in extreme close-up; this not only connotes the dominance of the

Claire Foy getting into role as the young Queen Elizabeth

Des Willie/ Netflix

relatively small object in the lives of the Royal family (and the country), but also makes it impossible for us to see its entirety, reminding us that we have a limited perspective and will never access 'the whole'. Finally when the camera does pull back to reveal the finished crown, it is blurred and silhouetted by bright light. Although titled *The Crown*, the object is always obscured to us, and will remain so. The series makes no promises to reveal a clear truth, only a partial and filtered depiction.

Alongside this regular reminder of artificiality, we are also treated to key episodes that raise issues of representation as part of the storytelling. Both Series 1's 'Assassins' and Series 2's 'Beryl' concern the efforts of artists to capture the 'truth' of their subjects – Winston Churchill in a painting and Princess Margaret in a photograph respectively. Much discussion is had about the inability of such images to represent the real person, inviting the audience to remember that the same is true of the series too. Series 3's 'Bubbikins' goes even further by depicting the filming of a documentary at Buckingham Palace, which the Queen apparently disliked so much that she banned its repeat (even when it surfaced on YouTube in early 2021 it was swiftly taken down). Representations, even supposedly factual ones, are constantly critiqued and their realism challenged.

Former royal correspondent Jenny Bond, fears that the drama may be treated 'as a documentary'. As we will see, this ignores the textual construction of the programme as a drama and depicts an audience so passive that they do not even recognise the codes and conventions of different genres.

Even the process of using actors to represent the real royal personage is drawn attention to, for example when Olivia Colman takes over the role of the Queen from Claire Foy for Series 3. In her first appearance, rather than try to hide the obvious fact of a new actress taking over (as happens in soap operas), the drama uses dialogue and the symbol of the 1967 updated postage stamp to reflect on how she looks different. Everyone is 'delighted with the new profile Ma'am, which they feel to be an elegant reflection of Her Majesty's transition from young woman to… mother of four and settled sovereign', which of course could be said of the new actress as much as the profile. With these frequent reminders, we could perhaps reassure Dowden and Bond that they need not worry about the passivity of the audience. When we see how 'real history' is depicted too, we could further allay their fears.

The 'Real' History?

As well as reminding us textually and narratively that the series is fictional, it remains highly respectful of its historical origins, or the 'punctuation moments' that Josh O'Connor described. This is where the term verisimilitude is useful – the ways in which the text seeks to faithfully recreate a convincing, but still artificial, version of the past.

As well as the much-praised production values, including realistic external locations and internal sets, the series is known for recreating particular historical events, but with a unique twist; when showing supposedly real footage of moments on television such as the Queen's Coronation, foreign tours and Royal weddings, recreations with the actors are used instead of real archive footage. These 'screens within screens' maintain a level of verisimilitude precisely because they are not real, but similar to reality.

In terms of textual construction, we can also look to the endings of many episodes for more evidence of the self-conscious nature of the fictional depictions of real events and people. Written captions are frequently used to clarify what is known about the reality behind the situation and what happened next; examples include the Aberfan disaster and the Queen's challenges by Lord Altrincham and her trespassing visitor Michael Fagan.

Beyond the episodes themselves, the series has proliferated into a wide range of secondary or supporting texts such as the officially connected podcasts and YouTube documentaries that cover the historical inspirations and how they were adapted. Publishers and broadcasters are also cashing in on the interest by producing guides to the 'history behind the show' and increasing the number of documentaries such as those that fill Channel 5's Saturday night schedules. Whether these bring the audience much closer to the 'truth' of events than *The Crown* does is another debate.

> Writer Peter Morgan 'takes the historical facts... and then paints in between those 'punctuation moments'.' This relies on a more active audience who can recognise which are the facts and where the 'creative imagination' (in the words of Morgan himself) occurs.

Shooting Matt Smith as Prince Philip

Robert Viglasky / Netflix

Des Willie/ Netflix

Conclusion

To return to the central debate that started this exploration, we can perhaps see that while it might not always be blindingly obvious that the series is fictional, as we could argue it is more textually confident and subtle than that, we can certainly see that there are many flags and anchors that keep the show grounded by and open about its artificiality.

Ultimately though, it is a fascinating debate that could be explored backwards all the way to Shakespeare's history play depictions of royalty via other television series such as *Victoria*, *The Tudors* and *The White Queen* and innumerable films, novels and plays. In an age where concern over 'fake news' seems contemporary and uniquely modern, it's interesting to see that debates about how clever and sensible the audience is when it comes to truth and representation are age-old. *The Crown* is just the latest battleground.

James Middleditch teaches English A-level and related subjects at Havant and South Downs College.

Further reading and watching

BBC News : *The Crown* should carry fiction warning, says culture secretary, 29th November 2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-55122965

Radio Times blog: *The Crown* may be fiction – but it still contains a lot that is fundamentally true, 2nd December 2020, https://www.radiotimes.com/tv/drama/the-crown-fiction-drama-comment/

You can listen to Jennie Bond's view in *The Guardian* podcast, 2nd December 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/audio/2020/dec/02/the-crown-netflix-drama-fact-or-fiction

The debate is also covered in more detail in Inside Culture with Mary Beard, 11th February 2021, available to watch on iPlayer at https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m000s66h/inside-culture-with-mary-beard-series-2-4-fact-v-fiction

from the MM vaults

The Monarchy, Television and British Identity: A Reign of Change – Nicholas Hobbs, *MM34*

ROCKS

Sarah Gavron's *Rocks* has been praised for its authentic representation of a diverse group of London teenagers. Shanaé Chisholm explains how the casting of this film played a significant role in its success and how *Rocks* can provide a form of escapism for audiences.
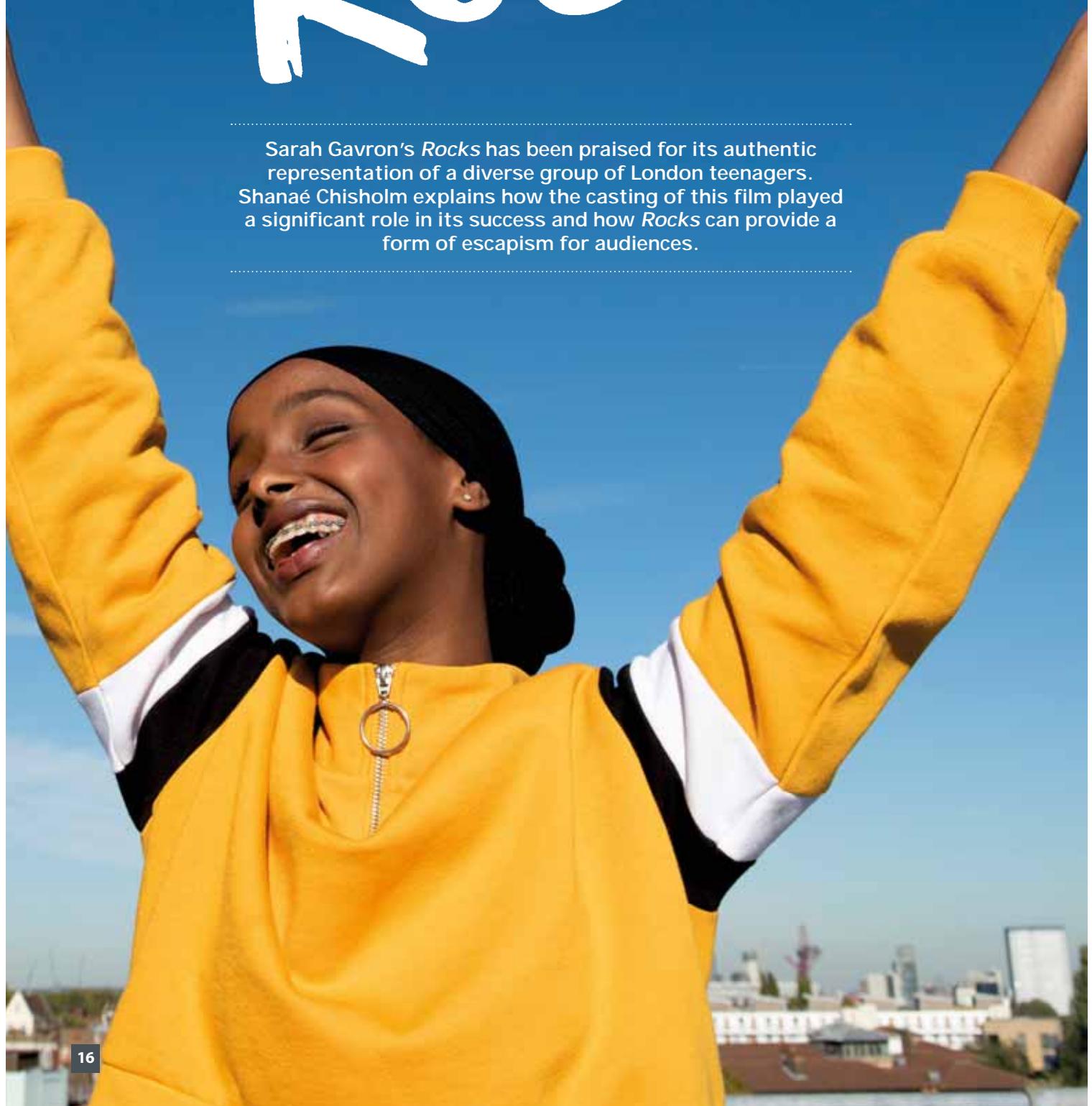
Rocks, nominated for seven BAFTAs , captures the spirit of teenage girls in London

Images courtesy of Altitude Films

Sarah Gavron directing young, first-time actors Bukky Bakray and D'angelou Osei Kissiedu

Images courtesy of Altitude Films

> Unlike the society we live in, films that represent people's everyday lives authentically, allow the characters within them to fail and flourish, without the lens of judgement and pity.

A lot of what makes a film enjoyable is its ability to provide us with a temporary escape from the lives we're living. Initially, you may think that to experience escapism, the film has to be significantly removed from what you know, or at the very least, be an exaggeration of it. The distance and difference between reality and the world created in a film, is what can allow us to escape. What happens when a film isn't a distant world? Films such as *Fish Tank*, *Kidulthood* and *I, Daniel Blake* depict the everyday lives of normal people; can these portrayals still offer the audience a form of escapism? I would like to argue that yes, they can.

As a Black British female of Caribbean heritage, it is a rare occasion for me to see myself in the characters that I see onscreen. When I do see similar characters being portrayed, they are frequently draped in trauma, pain and oppression. So, for me and others who can relate, watching a film that centres my lived experience and those that exist in it is a form of escapism. Consuming content that centres the communities that I belong to in their natural state removes me from my reality of a society that perpetuates and maintains negative assumptions and expectations, and places me in a world that feels more authentic. Unlike the society we live in, films that represent people's everyday lives authentically allow the characters within them to fail and flourish, without the lens of judgement and pity. They aren't victimised or criminalised because of their socio-economic status or used as tokens to serve the narrative. Authentic representation allows me to view the involuntary labels that have been ascribed to me and people like me, as just that, involuntary

Rocks

Seeing people you can identify with simply existing can sometimes be the breath of fresh air that you need. Watching these characters experience small wins can be just as comforting as their moments of defeat are devastating.

and forever subject to change. These films allow us to see the individual behind the story.

There are many elements that work in tandem to create authentic representation. For me, the cast and the dialogue are two elements that are key in achieving authenticity. The world around the characters and the actors who play the roles need to feel like a reflection rather than a misguided reproduction. When this blend isn't accomplished, the end product can feel like a parody, and to be quite blunt, it can be insulting. Authenticity isn't about repackaging, rebranding or re-presenting a community, group or individual. It is about holding up a mirror to the world you want to share and allowing things to occur as naturally as possible. *Rocks* (2019), directed by Sarah Gavron is a great example of escapism through authentic representation.

In *Rocks*, we follow a Black teenager nicknamed Rocks, who is left to look after her little brother when their mother abandons them. Set in inner-city London, we watch as Rocks attempts

to balance her school and social life, with her struggle to remain under the radar of social services whilst she awaits her mother's return. What I enjoyed most about this film was how honest it felt. As an audience member, the proximity to the characters was so close that the film felt more like a documentary, and I think a lot of why I felt like that was down to the cast.

There are a variety of methods that casting directors use to find the right actor for each part. The traditional method of casting may include, but is not limited to, looking at recent drama school graduates, comparing projects that are similar to the current project at hand or visiting the theatre to find emerging talent. Experienced casting directors will already have an extensive mental list of actors and work from that knowledge. However, the approach that Casting Director Lucy Pardee and Casting Assistant Jessica Straker took to find the cast for *Rocks* was different; they used street casting. Street casting is a method of casting that aims

to locate talented individuals who may not have access to professional training and provide them with the opportunity to explore and develop their talent. It is also a way of tapping into local communities and schools to find actors who both embody the spirit of a project and are also reflections of the characters in the script. Street casting is one way of achieving authenticity.

Once community groups and schools are identified, a series of open call auditions are organised to identify who could play those roles. Especially with younger actors, auditionees are split into groups and are workshopped by the director, to see which individuals would work best as the main cast. In relation to *Rocks*, many group combinations were made. Through the workshops, they were able to develop a relationship with one another and trust each other during a process that was new to all of them. With this in mind, it is very clear to see how street casting played a role in how effective the cast's performances were because of the relationships that were built prior to filming. The choice to use street casting meant that the cast weren't playing roles that were far away from their own lived experiences; for example, these actors were current students in secondary school. As an audience, it was easier for us to go on a journey with them because their authentic experience enabled us to trust them. In turn, the dialogue in the script felt natural, because consideration was taken to find actors who lived similar lives to the characters that they were cast to portray. Moreover, several of the scenes in *Rocks* were improvised, which further highlights the significance of finding a cast that can be co-creators, which is something that they can become when they can relate to their role. The magic that exists within *Rocks*, is its ability to create and nurture the essence of friendship

Kosar Ali is
outstanding as Rocks'
best friend Sumaya

Public domain

With a mostly female cast and crew, *Rocks* creates authentic representations of young women and young women of colour

Images courtesy of Altitude Films

Authenticity isn't about repackaging, rebranding or re-presenting a community, group or individual. It is about holding up a mirror to the world you want to share and allowing things to occur as naturally as possible.

and this, I believe, is because of the casting process and therefore the cast themselves.

As previously mentioned, there are many elements that work together to achieve authentic representation and I don't want to reduce the charm of *Rocks* to just its cast. From the writer to the producer, it is everyone's responsibility to strive for authenticity and because of this, the biases and belief systems of those creating the film are just as important. If it wasn't for Theresa Ikoko's words, we wouldn't have the characters that we see on screen today. If it wasn't for Hélène Louvart's cinematography, our level of access to Rocks and her friends whilst they navigate through this moment in their lives, would be completely different.

When a film represents aspects of our lived experience authentically, there is a new realm of discovery and validation that presents itself, a realm that isn't always accessible in real life and that, in itself, is a form of escapism. Seeing people you can identify with simply existing can sometimes be the breath of fresh air that you need. Watching these characters experience small wins can be just as comforting as their moments of defeat are devastating. *Rocks* creates a safe space to escape to where you can reminisce and feel joy, and most importantly, feel seen. It demonstrates how, through simplicity and authenticity, a film can provide a safe space for those who are underrepresented or misrepresented to meet and explore the ups and downs of life together. At a time when we all need a place to escape to, it is encouraging to know how authentic representation can facilitate escapism in the everyday.

Shanaé Chisholm is a theatre blogger and writer studying casting at the National Film and Television School.

THE WORLD OF VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENT

With political campaigning increasingly moving online and online politics spilling over into real-life upheaval, some politicians are seeing the potential for engagement through unexpected platforms. Laurence Russell has a look at what's been happening on Twitch.

Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez, the youngest woman ever to serve in the United States Congress

While the majority of US political campaign spending continues to go into television, budgets for online engagement – a space with greater opportunities to micro-target voters – rise year on year.

n the 20th of October, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez shocked the Western world when she participated in a Twitch stream of *Among Us*, a viral whodunnit mystery game, as part of her promotion of the Democratic Party during the run-up to the 2020 presidential election.

She was joined by fellow congresswoman, Ilhan Omar, who chose to use a piece of fanart of a giant fighting robot as her profile image, referencing the 'Give Ilhan Omar a Gundam' meme, a joke from 2019 which styled the statement as one of Bernie Sanders' campaign policies, which Omar has since enthusiastically embraced.

Ocasio-Cortez, or AOC as she's become more popularly known, played as the killer in the first *Among Us* match which she instantly agonised over. After bungling the murder of online singer-songwriter Maia 'mxmtoon' and accidentally reporting the body, the congresswoman buried her face in her hands in front of her smirking

fellow players. She went on to bump off streaming star Imane 'Pokimane' Anys, who merely nodded soberly as she uttered, 'It was an honour. It was an honour to serve you.' By its close, the event had racked up enough viewers to be in the top 20 of largest Twitch streams in the platform's history.

Recent figures report Twitch enjoyed an average of 2.1 million viewers watching streams at any given time in July 2020 rising to nearly 3 million in February 2021, placing it firmly in the top 50 most visited sites in the US. 81.5% of these viewers are male, 55% of whom are between the ages of 18-34, a demographic with historically poor election turnout who are often poorly engaged by political parties globally.

Julian McDougall identifies these demographics as 'temporary collectives', meaning they are young and connected enough to be rapidly changing, making it difficult to pin down tropes and platforms to invest in on a long term, because they evolve quickly. Twitch is a perfect example. The company didn't exist until 2011 and only became a household name around 2017. It's perfectly likely that the site will lose

relevance in the next five years like so many other abandoned web platforms.

The uncertainties associated with temporary collectives are what make effective engagement opportunities such singular experiences online. Effective strategies must be developed quickly before trends wane in popularity, and must be discarded just as fast in favour of the next big thing.

Virtual Engagement

AOC has often followed these trends superbly. In May, she made virtual visits to voters' islands in *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*, a wildly popular game which became inexorably associated with the pandemic, as online communities widely acknowledged it as a cosy reprieve from world news. The Congresswoman brought gifts of fruit that she grew on her own island, leaving a doodle on a constituent's town hall bulletin board and thanking them for their hospitality before taking her leave, visiting whoever signalled their availability to her through private messaging.

AOC boasts a respectable silver II ranking in the popular e-sports game *League of Legends*, which she's put more time into during the lockdown, establishing her as a mid-tier contender, which those who follow ranked play will recognise as no easy feat.

While the majority of US political campaign spending continues to go into television, budgets for online engagement – a space with greater opportunities to micro-target voters

Ilhan Omar and AOC: online engagement squad-style

So much winning

Public domain

– rise year on year. Joe Biden and Donald Trump both possessed Twitch channels in the 2020 election, run by campaign teams who streamed relatively impersonal content through the platform. Bernie Sanders disappointed his large following of younger voters by doing likewise. These men's follower bases reflect this disconnect, enjoying little over 100k people apiece, whilst AOC has over 800k at the time of writing.

A New Frontier in Politics

Millennial politicians like AOC, Omar, and dozens like them don't just utilise these online spaces; they live there. And like the disaffected young voters they've been engaging, they essentially grew up there. They've earned what we might refer to as 'cultural capital' in digital spaces. Without the cultural capital to follow online terminology, platforms, and protocol,

they would find no place among the demographics they're targeting.

Proving to be relatable or having the human touch in politics is an art, and one that politicians bend over backwards to achieve. In the UK, many still remember the hyper-analysis Ed Miliband was subjected to as he attempted to eat a bacon sandwich in a London café in 2014, or the dismay when Boris Johnson completely obliterated a 10-year-old child, Toki Sekiguchi, with a rugby tackle in 2015.

Failed stunts like these are remembered for a lifetime, which makes bold gestures like those ventured by AOC this year all the more remarkable. Reportedly, the idea to stream was conceived, planned, and organised in a single day, before being conducted without a hitch, meeting the format of the temporary collective she sought.

With live events severely limited, and no way to safely meet voters face-to-face, there was a window to engage with constituents virtually in 2020, one which has been inevitably capitalised upon. With a new precedent set, it can be expected that political scientists are hard at work refining this brave new formula AOC appears to be trailblazing. The chance to humanise yourself before a massive audience of first-time and reluctant voters is far too valuable for campaigns to continue to miss out on.

Some of AOC's streaming cohorts were career political commentators such as Hassan 'Hasanabi' Piker or Harris 'Hbomberguy' Brewis, who, while also being content creators, are best known for their critically partisan politics, acting like politicians without any of the responsibility or accountability, freeing them to focus wholly on engagement.

These figures have the potential to embody what the former editor of *Wired*, Chris Anderson, referred to as the 'long tail', only in a political sense rather than a commercial one. Commentators marketing themselves by their identity, nationality, and viewpoints can attract niche audiences largely disaffected by mainstream politics: those outside the 'big tent' popularly described by the Democratic Party, who don't quite understand how their specific values are represented. They're exactly the kinds of people politicians ought to be striving to empower.

The Sinister Side of Engagement

Of course, online spaces are by their nature often deeply unregulated places. In the USA, Twitch has accepted heavy advertising budgets from the US military, who have been working hard to increase recruitment in younger generations. These ads even accompanied AOC's record-breaking stream.

While parents might take umbrage with military recruitment ads playing between their children's Saturday morning cartoons, the kind that might fan the flames of a moral panic, they perhaps aren't as aware of the same thing occurring between their children's *Minecraft* or *Fortnite* streams.

In the Summer of 2020, AOC presented an amendment to the House of Representatives to ban such advertising. She summarised her argument in a tweet, explaining

War is not a game. Twitch is a popular platform for children FAR under the age of military recruitment rules. We should not conflate military service with 'shoot-em-up' style games and contests.

While her amendment was voted down, she celebrated the support it received from the Democratic Party calling it a 'really solid start' for the first time it was presented to Congress. She added that

When our legislative bodies aren't sufficiently responsive to tech, then that means we don't have the tools required to protect people. This is partially why companies know way more about you than you may even be aware of – because it's legal, and Congress is struggling to keep up.

Fans of AOC will know her as a political figure standing at the forefront of online regulation in the Western world, having been the one to grill Mark Zuckerberg in 2019, questioning Facebook's hosting of radical political content, cleared by fact-checking groups with known links to the far-right.

The potential for radical online politics to influence the public is apparent in the 2021 storming of the US Capitol, in which nationalists and conspiracy theorists occupied Congress, combing the floor for political representatives to hold hostage. Never has it been harder to refute hypodermic needle theory than when we saw violent domestic terrorists – streaked with supremacist tattoos, spouting QAnon theories and chanting various Trumpian slogans – attempt insurrection.

Needless to say, the opportunities to influence political thought and passion have never been richer. Used responsibly, engagement like this could produce the kind of political literacy Western democracy requires to thrive, though in the wrong hands it leaves us at the mercy of fascist uprisings. Much like the internet itself, virtual engagement appears to be a thoroughly mixed bag.

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Laurence Russell is a freelance technology journalist.

📁📁📁 *from the MM vaults*

Critical Hit – Caroline Bayley, *MM64*

Millennial politicians like AOC, Omar, and dozens like them don't just utilise these online spaces; they live there. And like the disaffected young voters they've been engaging, they essentially grew up there.

From left: Ayanna Pressley, AOC, Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib who formally condemned Trump's verbal attacks on minority congresswomen

REUTERS / Alamy Stock Photo

TRUTH, TRUMP AND THE US ELECTION
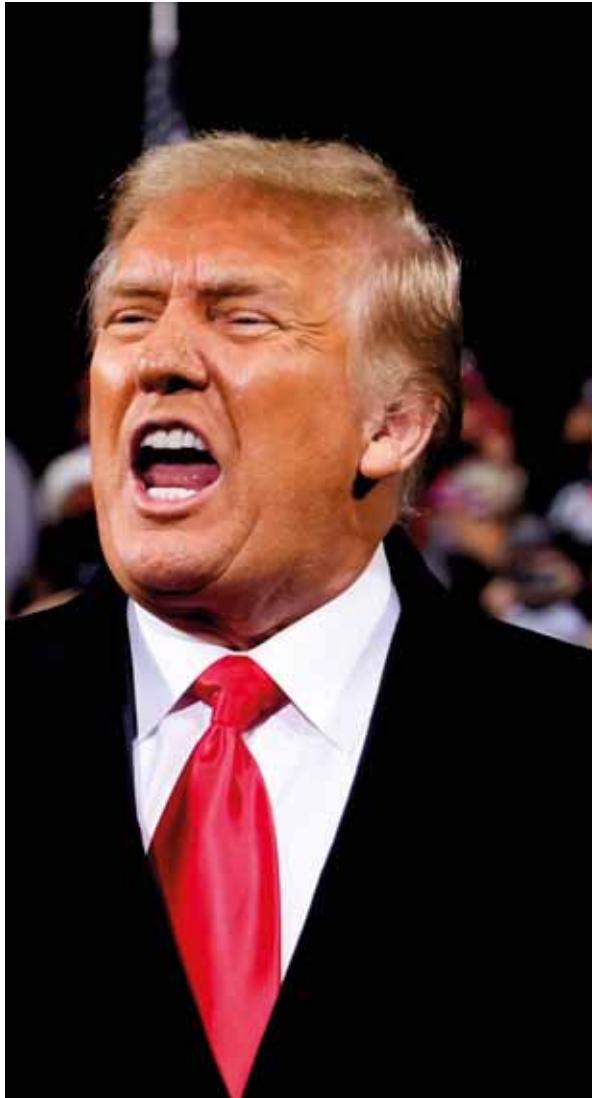
Picture this: a narcissistic reality TV star runs for high office. He is a known climate change denier, racist, misogynist and alt-right sympathiser. He threatens every value you cherish and directly attacks your rights. He is elected by deception, with a populist agenda that promises the moon to the dispossessed now' to be despicable.

Donald Trump was never going to go quietly. As the final votes of the US election were counted and Joe Biden was declared a clear winner, Trump and his supporters began a campaign of lies that culminated in an attack on the Capitol by Americans whose 'truth' was very different from that of much of the rest of the country. But how did things get to that point? Jonathan Nunns explains.

Picture this: you live in poverty in a once prosperous inland region of the USA. The well-paid local jobs have gone to other countries with cheaper labour. Your position seems hopeless. Then a charismatic hero rises: he promises to bring back the work, fix the economy and Make America Great Again. He is elected to massive acclaim and you wait for things to change. But then, his every move to improve your life is blocked by mysterious forces, by liberals and Black Lives Matter activists. He is demonised by a biased media that reports 'fake news' to undermine his every move, as the 'deep state' seeks to illegally remove him from office. And finally, when you can hardly bear it anymore, he runs for a second term and wins fair and square, but even that is not enough. Mass voter fraud is deployed to steal his win, replacing him with one of the deep state liberals who stole your job in the first place. Will you accept this? Like hell you will!

Now, picture this: you live a difficult life in an East or West Coast American city. You struggle to support your family on insecure minimum wage work. A narcissistic reality TV star runs for high office. He is a known climate change denier, racist, misogynist and alt-right sympathiser. He threatens every value you cherish and directly attacks your

Trump supporters and The Proud Boys protesting against the results of the US election in Dec 2020

REUTERS / Alamy Stock Photo

Amidst the shock and recrimination following the January 6th invasion of the Capitol, Trump's account was finally suspended. Social media had clearly covered itself in something other than glory.

rights. He is elected by deception, with a populist agenda that promises the moon to the dispossessed. Once in power, he abuses his position, fills his government with yes-men, elevates his family to senior posts, ingratiates himself to other tyrannical world-leaders, dodges a justified legal effort to remove him and finally, when you can hardly bear it anymore, he runs for a second term and is democratically voted from office. He loses by a huge margin, but even that is not enough. He seeks to overturn the result, using every trick to cling to power, attempting to steal the election from the legitimate winner. Will you accept this? Like hell you will!

Can both these interpretations of the 2020 US Presidential Election be correct? No, but one version or the other is emphatically believed to be

true by the millions on either side of the binary that splits America. And the truth? The truth is lost, as people shout, but do not hear the opposing voices of those they 'know' to be despicable.

This is the problem: what you 'know' to be true depends on the voices you hear, not the ones you block. It depends on the influencers you follow, the opinion leaders you respect. Those voices become echo chambers in which you hear only the views you want to hear. Those views are uncontested, they become natural, normalised as Gerbner would have it. They become 'true'.

If we look back over history, there are multiple examples of this. In the 17th century, people believed in witchcraft. Opinion leaders told them to fear witches, so they burnt them. For 300 years, people believed that humans from an unfamiliar place,

with different coloured skin, were in fact closer to animals. Opinion leaders told them this, so they enslaved and oppressed them. In Germany in the 20th century, a highly influential opinion leader convinced a whole country, through propaganda, that people who lived peacefully amongst them, but had another religion, were evil, so the country looked away, whilst they were murdered.

In hindsight, we can see that those ideas are wrong and despicable. That is the problem with truth. It is not only about what can be proven. It can easily be twisted and manipulated and it can be difficult to see in the moment.

What happened in America was not that the people had changed; humans are prone to irrational hatreds and resentments, which can be exploited by the unscrupulous. Propaganda

may be a dark art, but it is not new. What changed was the technology – and with it, access to a personalised form of media. In the democratic heyday of legacy media, like TV and newspapers, there were regulators and gatekeepers to try and ensure that what was broadcast/published trod the line between being in the public interest and simply interesting to the public. Which meant that there was more likely to be a shared national basis for understanding a given situation. Now though in America, with Fox News, Newsmax and One America News broadcasting alongside unregulated online media with niche audiences, such as Breitbart, and Parler, it is perfectly possible to avoid any information that is not presented from a highly opinionated, hard-right perspective.

Equally, whilst the supposed left-wing outlets (such as CNN, ABC and CBS) are actually centrist or slightly right of centre (they are all part of large corporations owned by billionaires after all), they are now so far removed from the ideology of the hard-right outlets that they are demonised by Trump's supporters as fake news hotbeds of communism/socialism.

Such change was accelerated by the 45th President's command of Twitter. His social media barrage, before and during his time in office, provided a perfect echo chamber for his fans. With fact-checkers and gate keepers side-stepped, the influencer-in-chief was able to spread his message directly. Only now, with the damage done, have the social media giants started to actively flag content which is directly misleading or untrue.

Amidst the shock and recrimination following the January 6th invasion of the Capitol, Trump's Twitter account was finally suspended. Social media had clearly covered itself in something other than glory. As euphemisms go, 'a day late and a dollar short' might sum it up, but it hardly begins to describe the moral failure which had taken place.

So here we have, from the perspective of Baudrillard, a perfect example of post-modern hyperreality. It looks real, it feels real, your opinion leaders tell you it's real, everyone in

your echo chamber says it's real, but it's not, it's a mediated construction. At best, a perspective or viewpoint, at worst, a lie, but one that cannot always be disproven. Least of all to you. After all, anyone who might dispute it, has already been othered and demonised. Would you really trust the word of someone you 'knew' to be despicable?

So how does the USA (and the rest of us) get out of this? How do we learn to talk to each other again? With difficulty, but the answer lies in shared truths. Ethical media outlets, which are held to account by genuinely independent regulators, with a legally enforced obligation to represent with fairness and objectivity. They won't always get it right, but at least they will try to restore/retain a shared commonality of fact. In the UK, for now, we still have outlets that do this and we need to retain them. In the US

it would need to be nurtured, almost from scratch and trust re-established. Is a fix really that simple? No, of course not, but it's a start.

At the time of writing, the unrepentant and gloating ex-president had just been acquitted in his second impeachment trial, despite overwhelming evidence of his incitement of the attack on congress (including video of his inflammatory speech to his fans minutes prior to the assault). But isn't that the nub of the problem? If you swim in the right silo, all that (and this article too) is just more fake news.

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Jonathan Nunns is Head of Media Studies at Collyer's College in Horsham.

Glossary

Deep state
A state within a state, a secret and unauthorised network of power, manipulating the public for its own ends.

Echo chamber
A closed media system in which beliefs are amplified and protected against rebuttal.

Silo
A metaphor for media (such as chat rooms or encrypted messaging groups) that store, promote and share access to highly selective information amongst their membership, whilst creating firewalls to prevent access to contradictory facts or opinions.

📚 *from the MM vaults*

Twitter Wars: 280 Characters That Changed the World – Axel Metz, *MM66*

Logan Weaver / Unsplash

The Theory Drop
The Theory Drop
The Theory Drop
The Theory Drop
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The Theory Drop

Liesbet van Zoonen

Ever wondered how Liesbet van Zoonen would get on hosting Channel 4's *Naked Attraction*? Or what she would make of *Bridgerton*? Mark Dixon has some answers.

At best, one might describe *Naked Attraction* as a cringe-inducing 'must avoid' televisual experience, a show that induces its fair share of slack-jawed incredulity. Once you've seen it, sadly you can't un-see it but for those lucky enough not to have seen Channel 4's latest take on the dating show format, let me explain: *Naked Attraction* is hosted by Channel 4 sex-guru-in-chief, Anna Richardson, who gently prods one 'lucky' contestant (clothed, initially) to select a partner from a naked line-up of romantic hopefuls.

Needless to say, this unashamedly voyeuristic approach to finding a partner effects limited success in terms of forging meaningful, life-changing, romantic bonds. The show's contestants shuffle nervously in their seats during their post-date interviews, realising only then that almost all their relatives, work colleagues, university friends and so on will have borne witness to the private things that lurk beneath.

This sounds strange, but I wonder – I mean I really wonder – what would happen if Channel 4 managed to dupe Liesbet van Zoonen into hosting the show. 'Let's have the first reveal' Liesbet would read from the teleprompter – the set lights dimming, the show's music booming, while the cubicle screens that protect the modesty of the naked contestants shimmy upwards to reveal their birthday-suit splendour.

I'm almost definitely positive that the show's screen shimmying wouldn't make it beyond the first contestant's badly inked yin-yang ankle tattoo before Liesbet would call a halt to proceedings. 'No,' she would cry, 'for the love of female objectification, no!'

Certainly, *Naked Attraction* provides much evidence to support van Zoonen's assertion that the media readily displays the female body as an object to be gazed at. The show actively invites contestants, and therefore the viewer, to unashamedly appraise potential partners in terms of visual appeal alone, so it constructs a concentrated and objectifying form of spectatorship. *Naked Attraction*, too, bestows power to those who affect the voyeuristic gaze in that the clothed 'choosers' are granted the power to direct the stripped contestants in whatever way they please.

Objectifying representations of femininity such as those found within *Naked Attraction* aren't new. After all, sex sells, but van Zoonen tells us that the impulse to frame femininity as something to be looked at plays a pivotal role in maintaining the patriarchal oversight of society: the media, van Zoonen tells us, is run by males for the pleasure of male

> The media, van Zoonen tells us, is run by males for the pleasure of male viewers, and, as a result, patriarchal power – the power granted to men to look – is internalised as a social norm by male and female viewers alike.

CHOOSING WHAT TO WATCH HAS BECOME A COMPLICATED BUSINESS...

BUT WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THE PATRIARCHAL POWER STRUCTURE BEHIND YOUR FAVOURITE TV SHOWS WAS **LAID BARE?**

WELCOME TO...

NAKED OBJECTIFICATION

WITH YOUR HOST, LIESBET VAN ZOONEN!

LET'S TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT THE FIRST SHOW COMPETING FOR YOUR ATTENTION...

AT FIRST GLANCE, **BRIDGERTON** SEEMS TO OFFER A REFRESHING REVERSAL OF THE **MALE GAZE**

BUT IF WE PEEK BENEATH THE SURFACE, WE SEE THAT THE MALE BODY AS A SPECTACLE IS SOFTENED BY THE ROMANTIC STORYLINE AND ASSOCIATED WITH **STRENGTH** AND **GRIT**

INVITING US TO ENJOY THE MALE PHYSIQUE AS EROTIC SPECTACLE

THESE MALE CHARACTERS ARE FAR FROM **OBJECTIFIED**...

NEXT, HOW ABOUT A TRIP TO **LOVE ISLAND**? OR MAYBE **MAFSA** TAKES YOUR FANCY?

THERE'S CERTAINLY NO SHORTAGE OF MALE FLESH ON DISPLAY...

BUT BEFORE WE APPLAUD THEIR FEMINIST CREDENTIALS, LET'S DIG DEEPER AND NOTE THAT THE OILED-UP MALE CASTS ARE HARDLY **EROTICISED**

RATHER, THEY ARE BEING EVALUATED IN TERMS OF THEIR POTENTIAL AS HUSBANDS, PARTNERS OR FATHERS!

FINALLY, FEAST YOUR EYES ON... **NAKED ATTRACTION!**

WHAT COULD BE MORE RADICAL THAN A SHOW IN WHICH WOMEN ARE FINALLY GRANTED THE POWER TO VOYEURISTICALLY **SIZE UP** MEN BASED ON PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES ALONE?

SO, WHAT'S IT GOING TO BE?

HAVE YOU MADE YOUR CHOICE?

DON'T GET TOO CARRIED AWAY THOUGH, THERE ARE CRUCIAL DIFFERENCES IN THE WAYS THAT THE FEMALE AND MALE PHYSIQUE ARE PRESENTED...

THE LATTER AS SOMETHING TO WITNESS WITH AWE OR EVEN FEAR!

I THINK I'LL JUST READ A BOOK

viewers, and, as a result, patriarchal power – the power granted to men to look – is internalised as a social norm by male and female viewers alike.

Of course, we could argue that *Naked Attraction*'s saving grace is that female contestants get to turn the tables on the male gaze. They too get to evaluate and objectify the male bodies that are presented to them, and, in so doing, are gifted the power of looking. Indeed, Anna has a ruler handy for the purposes of such occasions. What's especially interesting is that the returned female gaze in *Naked Attraction* tends to be accompanied by discussion that evaluates the strength and athleticism of the show's naked male participants. Male contestants, for example, are prompted to flex muscles or to demonstrate their agility while the host prompts the show's female voyeurs to stand in awe at what they see.

Naked Attraction, like so much other media, presents the male physique in wholly different ways to that of the female body. 'In a society which has defined masculinity as strong, active, [and] in possession of the gaze,' van Zoonen writes, '....it is of course utterly problematic if not impossible for the male body to submit itself to the control of the gaze' (van Zoonen, 1994). As such, male bodies in patriarchal cultures are presented and discussed in ways that invoke awe or fear on the part of the spectator, and in so doing associate masculinity with power or prowess. So even when, in *Naked Attraction*, the gaze is turned upon the male body, it does so in a way that continues to reinforce ideas of male dominance and female submissiveness.

Male sports imagery, van Zoonen tells us, exemplifies this propensity of the media to celebrate empowered masculinity, with photographs of male footballers, rugby players or athletes traditionally constructed to suggest skill or mastery, while qualities such as 'grit' or 'determination' are readily played as natural markers of manliness.

Of course, van Zoonen acknowledges that men can also be constructed as erotic spectacles for the female gaze. Certainly, *Naked Attraction*'s bawdy ruler-measuring moments readily supply a female

audience with a jiggling excess of objectified masculinity. Arguably, the presence of male flesh as erotic spectacle is also emerging as an on-trend feature of contemporary television drama. The Duke of Hasting's dimple-dented tush in *Bridgerton*, for example, provided Netflix viewers the world over with a particular highlight at the start of 2021, while who could forget Sam's shower scene in *Married at First Sight Australia* (*MAFSA*) or the smorgasbord of sun-oiled masculinity that makes for *Love Island*. Of course, van Zoonen argues, male objectification exists, but the male body as an erotic spectacle, she tells us, is usually framed within romance-oriented contexts. In plain English, she points to the fact that when men get their kit off, they usually do so within storylines that are underpinned by bigger relationship-based themes, wherein males are evaluated in terms of their potential as husbands, partners, or fathers. Female nudity however occurs repeatedly out of context.

Arguably, *Bridgerton*, *MAFSA* and *Love Island* provide perfect examples of this softened form of objectification. Hasting's tush exposure in *Bridgerton*, for example, is safely packaged within a fairly conventional romance-based story arc, while *Love Island* and *MAFSA*'s male-based objectification too are presented within stories that pursue relationship and romance outcomes as their narrative end goals. *Naked Attraction*, conversely, perhaps prompts controversy and shock because it dares to show the male body within an erotic rather than romantic context. Certainly, *Naked Attraction*'s stripped-down treatment of both men and women is a rarity, even in terms of contemporary television broadcasting.

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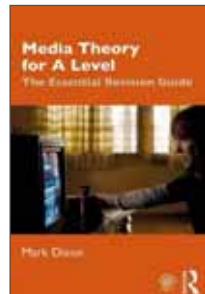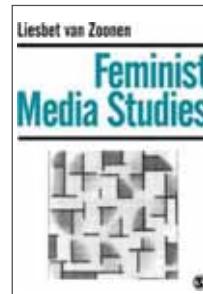
 from the MM vaults

Fighting Fit or Bad Medicine: *Men's Health* – Georgia Platman, *MM72*

BBC
SOUNDS

Brian Asare / Unsplash

Andrew McCallum offers an evaluation of the BBC Sounds app's latest advert and comes out singing its praises.

> BBC Sounds brings together live and on-demand radio, music and podcasts into a single personalised app and website. It recognises that listeners now have an increased expectation of choice and control.

Which costs more: a BBC television licence, or a subscription to Netflix Premium? It's Netflix: £167.88 per year, compared to £157.50. And what does each organisation have to do for its money? Very different things, it seems. Netflix, a global commercial enterprise, must make available enough content - both original and existing - to build subscription numbers. Its ultimate purpose is to turn a profit (about $1.9 billion in 2019) for its shareholders.

The BBC, a British public service broadcaster, must satisfy the terms of its Royal Charter. This states that the organisation's mission is

> **to act in the public interest, serving all audiences through the provision of impartial, high-quality and distinctive output and services which inform, educate and entertain.**

Which, then, has the more difficult task? The answer depends on your ideological beliefs. Devotees of a free market ideology will point out that Netflix has to survive on quality alone. Poor quality equals diminishing subscription rates equals loss of income equals end of company. The BBC has no such worries. The licence fee is a tax (and has legally been called one since 2006; previously it was known as a 'service charge') on watching BBC output on any device. The money is guaranteed regardless of viewing figures.

Believers in public sector broadcasting as a corrective to the market will counter by arguing that the BBC has an almost impossible task. How can one broadcaster serve 'all audiences' with 'high quality and distinctive output' that simultaneously manages to 'inform, educate and entertain'? To fail is to risk being legislated out of existence, particularly by right-wing politicians who often view the BBC as standing in the way of free and fair competition.

Bear in mind too that the BBC has a much smaller budget than Netflix. In 2019 the American streaming service generated revenue of $25 billion, about £18 billion. The BBC made do with about £5 billion, £3.5 billion of which came from the licence fee, the rest from its commercial wing.

So if an entity like Netflix can seriously out-muscle the BBC financially, and if the BBC's mission seems impossible to meet in an age of extreme market fragmentation, is it time to throw in the towel? After all, it's not just the giant streaming

BBC Sounds on YouTube

services the BBC is up against. There's also the tsunami of free content available on platforms such as YouTube and TikTok.

The BBC might seem particularly irrelevant to younger audiences. 16-24 year olds watch less broadcast TV than any other adult demographic, with numbers dropping rapidly year-on-year. In the case of one of the BBC's most important public services, providing impartial and reliable news coverage, this age group has deserted the BBC almost entirely. A 2020 report showed 16-24 year olds watching, on average, two minutes of news broadcasting per day; over-65s watch thirty-three.

The licence fee does not just cover television, though. 17% of money collected goes towards national and local radio. Perhaps it's here that Auntie can develop audience loyalty among the young.

The listenership figures would certainly suggest so. Radio One, which aims to deliver a distinctive mix of contemporary music and speech to a target youth audience, attracted just under nine million adult (15+ in their terms) listeners per week in 2020. Its flagship breakfast show drew average audiences of about five million. The figures are far larger than those of any competitor. Somehow, BBC radio is appealing to large numbers of the audience with most knowledge of alternative forms of audio entertainment.

These large numbers, though, mask a troubling trend for the BBC. Listening figures have fallen steadily year-on-year for a decade, from a high of about 12 million in 2011.

Attempts to hold on to the youth audience are a constant at Radio One. In 2014 it launched a strategy of 'listen, watch, share'. While this didn't stem the steady loss of live listeners, it added 14 million weekly viewers via YouTube and a dedicated iPlayer channel. In addition, the station now has 10.5 million social media followers.

'Listen, watch, share' recognised that a young audience in particular listens to music on multiple devices. It also focused on the boost to audience that comes from sharing content.

The Beeb is now entering the next phase of hanging on to its youth listenership, via the BBC Sounds app. BBC Sounds brings together live and on-demand radio, music and podcasts into a single personalised app and website. It recognises that listeners now have an increased expectation of choice and control. They might want to listen to live radio (which they can on the app) but they might also want to

BBC Sounds on YouTube

Believers in public sector broadcasting as a corrective to the market will counter by arguing that the BBC has an almost impossible task. How can one broadcaster serve 'all audiences' with 'high quality and distinctive output' that simultaneously manages to 'inform, educate and entertain'?

catch up on a show they missed, listen to a podcast, or tune into a tracklist curated with a particular genre in mind.

Sounds also recognises that having too much choice brings its own frustrations. Consequently, it learns from your listening habits (just like Netflix from your viewing) in order to point you in the direction of audio you might have missed from the 80,000 hours available.

Given 15-34 year olds are 3.7 times more likely than their elders to listen to music on-demand, and 1.8 times more likely to listen to podcasts, it makes sense to target Sounds at that tricky youth audience (though it's worth pointing out that it has plenty of content to meet the interests of pretty much all age and identity demographics). Its latest video advert does just that to brilliant effect. Whether or not it ultimately boosts youth listenership remains to be seen. But it's worth watching as a visual representation of how, for a youth demographic, the BBC is trying to meet its mission to 'inform, educate and entertain' in a world of multiple platforms and identities and seemingly limitless content.

The advert opens on a young woman in a hijab, travelling by bus. She taps the app on her phone and starts listening to music on the Clara Amfo show on Radio One (so signalling the importance of this station to any youth strategy). Almost the entire ad then looks like a single-take POV shot, moving from the bus to urban street market to hipster coffee shop (the astonishing visual effects mean there must have been an awful lot of trickery along the way). All the while a multicultural cast of characters come into view, each listening on headphones, via their phones, to a different offering from Sounds: trance, grime, hip-hop, dance, spoken word, sport, a broadcast from space.

The message is clear: on Sounds you can listen to anything, anywhere, and what you listen to will absolutely suit your personal tastes. There's so much more on offer than a simple message, though. This is the BBC's mission in action. Bodies twist round each other and hang suspended in the air, eyeballs
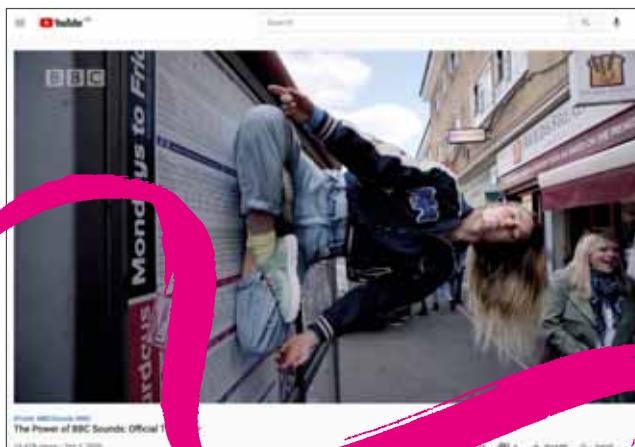
bounce to the beat, heads get spliced into segments; one coffee-drinker sees a dozen versions of himself floating round the ceiling. Sound is unique to each user and will almost literally infiltrate your body. At the same time, it joins everyone together in a utopian vision of multiple identities living harmoniously side-by-side. This app can cater for everyone.

It's an advert of national unity too. Red, white and blue lines, the colours of the Union flag, appear throughout: first on a bus route map, next on a young woman's jacket, finally on the coffee-drinker's shirt. Each time the straight lines twist and bend. No single linear narrative for this vision of Britain. Instead we have a brilliant distillation of the sentiments contained in Danny Boyle and Frank Cottrell Boyce's celebratory opening ceremony for the 2012 London Olympics.

Maybe I'm getting carried away with the unifying message carried in the advert because I want the BBC to succeed. I want young people to see its value and so commit to its ongoing existence as a counterpoint to increasingly powerful commercial broadcasters and streaming services. I also want to celebrate its role in British public life.

When people question the licence fee, they often compare the television output of the BBC with commercial broadcasters and streaming services. They forget that it also pays for radio. Imagine asking Netflix's shareholders to allocate 17% of its income stream for a network of over 40 national and local radio stations. All free to listen to (radio listeners don't have to pay the licence fee), anywhere, any time, on any numbers of devices. The challenge is in getting a new generation to see the value of that service. With the BBC Sounds app, younger audiences may see that public service broadcasting is something worth paying for.

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

Watch The Power of BBC Sounds here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7GwMmOmuSpM

BBC Sounds is helping the BBC reach youth audiences in new ways
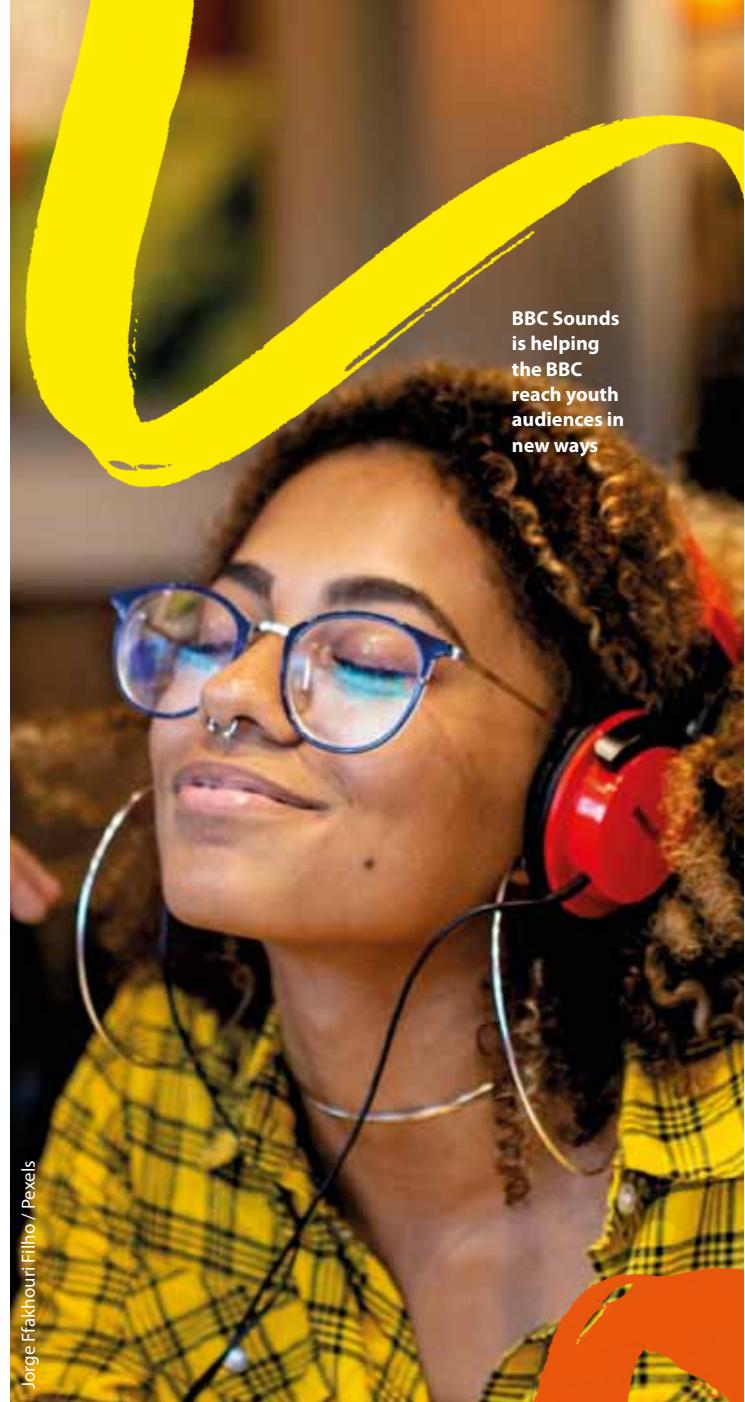
Jorge Ffakhouri Filho / Pexels

It's an advert of national unity too. Red, white and blue lines, the colours of the Union flag, appear throughout: first on a bus route map, next on a young woman's jacket, finally on the coffee-drinker's shirt. Each time the straight lines twist and bend. No single linear narrative for this vision of Britain.

🗄️ *from the MM vaults*

The Breakfast Club: BBC Radio Breakfast Presenters – Jo Dunne, *MM70*

THE 21st CENTURY FINAL GIRL
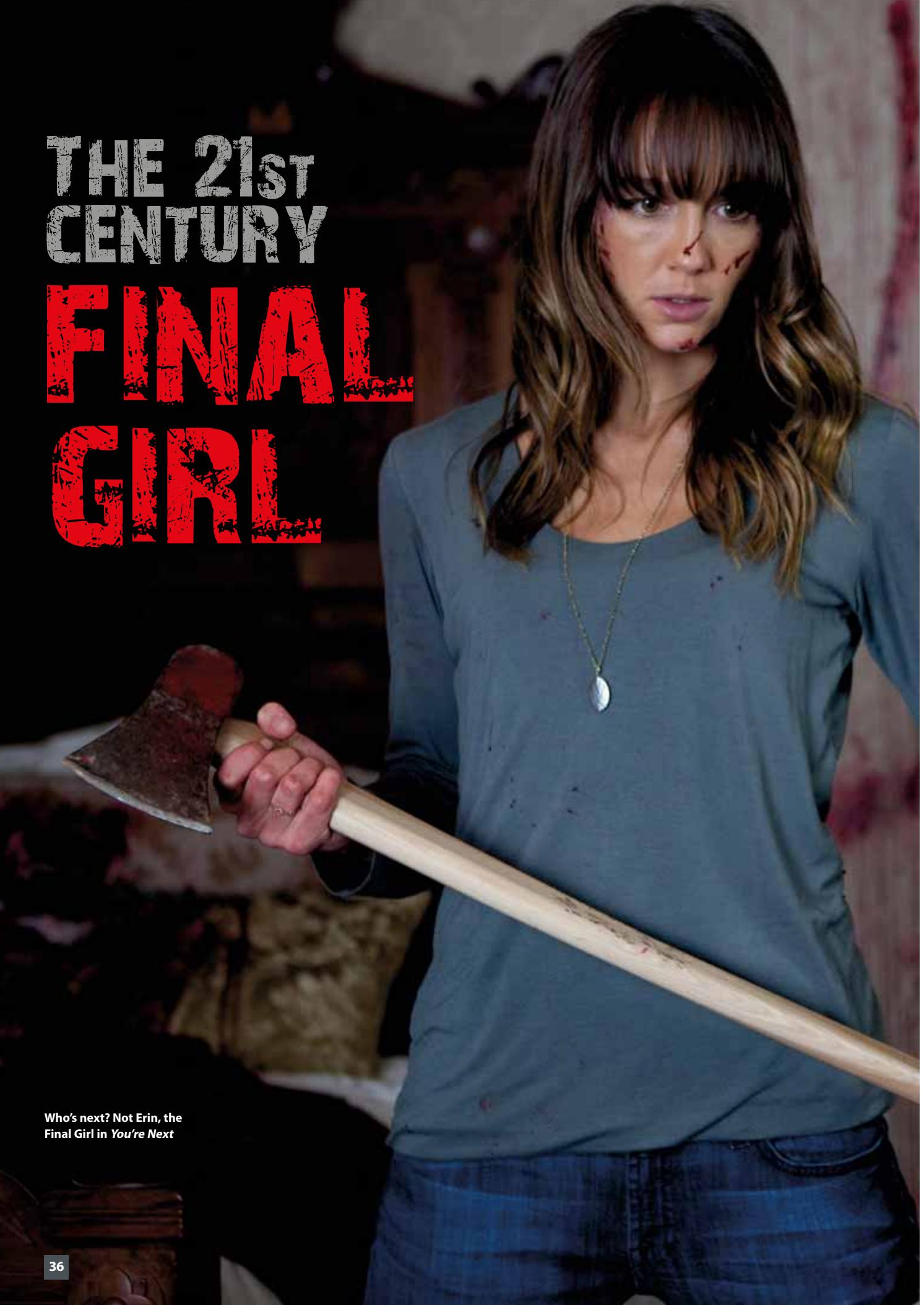
Who's next? Not Erin, the
Final Girl in *You're Next*

Many horror films, from *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* in 1974 to *Midsommar* in 2020 use the convention of the Final Girl. But as ideas about gender roles shift, so do representations of these characters who are the last remaining survivors of horrific attacks. Matt Taylor traces the evolution of the horror genre's Final Girl.

> Clover's original Final Girl finds her home in a variety of horror subgenres, from the slasher to the rape-revenge flick, but the broad strokes of the theory remain the same. She is the last of the main characters left alive to defend herself against the film's villain.

Sally Hardesty, Final Girl in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*

Horror's leading ladies have been an iconic part of the genre for decades now. Since the 1960s audiences have seen them scream, fall, and crawl their way past spooky ghouls and grisly murderers, hoping to all that is holy that they make it to the end credits. In many cases, these women are known as 'Final Girls' – a theory first proposed by Carol J. Clover in an essay entitled *Her Body, Himself* (1987), before being expanded upon in her book *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (1992).

In giving a name to the tropes audiences had seen for years before her book's publication, Clover's theory turned out to be instrumental for the horror genre, and ended up influencing swathes of films in the decades that followed. The 2010s, however, saw a marked change in how horror presented the Final Girl to its audiences, as movies actively subverted Clover's ideas to make the Final Girl more appropriate for a modern setting.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves: before we can discuss the horrors of the present, we need to look at the horrors of the past. And to do that, we need to dive into the idea of the Final Girl – what does it mean? What does it entail? And why is it so important to the genre?

'Her Body, Himself'

Clover's original Final Girl finds her home in a variety of horror subgenres, from the slasher to the rape-revenge flick, but the broad strokes of the theory remain the same. She is the last of the main characters left alive to defend herself against the film's (often unkillable) villain. She is usually blonde and conventionally attractive, often a virgin, and there is always a distinctly masculine pleasure taken in her punishment (the male gaze is ever-present in these films).

She is also, as Clover describes her, 'abject terror personified'. To go further,

She is the one who encounters the mutilated bodies of her friends and

perceives the full extent of the preceding horror and of her own peril; who is chased, cornered, wounded; whom we see scream, stagger, fall, rise, and scream again.

She lives with the knowledge that she could well be murdered at any given moment, and survives long enough to either wait until help arrives (what Clover dubs ending A), or dispatch the killer herself (ending B). We see her in Sally Hardesty of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Hooper, 1974), in Laurie Strode of *Halloween* (Carpenter, 1978), in Nancy Thompson of *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Craven, 1984), and in Kirsty Cotton of *Hellraiser* (Barker, 1987).

Even within this small group we see that there is room for how the Final Girl is portrayed in different horror films – but what separates these from more modern horrors is that ending A is present. What horror films of the last ten years have done is to reject ending A entirely: the Final Girl now saves herself through various acts of distinctly feminine rage that mercilessly punish her male oppressors.

A New Age

With the dawning of the 21st century, and the 2010s in particular, horror films appeared to actively become more feminist – or at least, to reject the male gaze that plagued the genre throughout the 20th century. Where once we saw Final Girls being rescued at the last possible moment by a secondary (male) character, we now see a woman more than capable of looking after herself without male assistance.

We see this new, more capable Final Girl in films like *You're Next* (Wingard, 2011), *Revenge* (Fargeat, 2017), and *Ready Or Not* (Bettinelli-Olpin & Gillett, 2019). In each, the central main character is vastly underestimated by the film's male antagonists, and pushes back against them with a merciless femininity. Even within these three films we see different approaches to the same idea: *Revenge* is a rape-revenge thriller that spits in the face of the patriarchy; *Ready Or Not* is a bonkers thriller with big 'eat the rich' energy; and *You're Next* is a home invasion slasher that closely resembles the films that Clover wrote about nearly 30 years ago.

It's for this reason (as well as the fact that it ushered in this new era of Final Girls) that *You're Next* will be the first of two focal points in this essay. In theory, it's a film that could have come straight out of the mid-1970s: a rich, white family reunite to celebrate a wedding anniversary, but their festivities are cut short when they are suddenly attacked by a group of masked killers. In the ensuing chaos, a hero emerges: Erin, the girlfriend of one of the family's sons, who steps up to protect the Davisons when no one else will.

One of the things that makes Erin so remarkable is just how well she takes everything in stride. She is, by definition, a Final Girl, because she is the last

Ari Aster subverts the Final Girl trope in his 2020 film *Midsommar*

Florence Pugh in *Midsommar*

TCD/Prod.DB / Alamy Stock Photo

of the main characters left alive at the end of the film, but she actively rejects almost everything we think we know about the trope. Where the Final Girl panics, Erin remains calm; where the Final Girl flees, Erin stands her ground; where the Final Girl flails helplessly in the face of danger, Erin takes the time to plan with care. She's a fantastic example of how far the horror genre (once deemed misogynistic and cruel) has come in recent years – but there is more change yet to come.

His Body … Herself?

In a bookend to the 2010s, slow-burn horror *Midsommar* (Aster, 2019) does away with the gender of the Final Girl entirely. The film sees the character of Dani accompanying her boyfriend and his friends on a research trip to a convent in Sweden, where they witness increasingly violent atrocities and Dani's already-unstable psyche begins to unravel. A key component of the film is Dani's abuse at the hands of her boyfriend Christian; he consistently gaslights her, and that leads to her getting revenge at the end of the film when she orders his execution in a sacrificial ritual.

But what subverts the Final Girl in *Midsommar* is that it has two: both Dani and Christian are Final Girls in different aspects of the film. Christian's abuse of Dani can be read as him being the killer in her slasher film, but it is Christian who goes through the motions of encountering 'the mutilated bodies of [his] friends and [perceiving] the full extent of the preceding horror and of [his] own peril; who is chased, cornered, wounded; whom we see scream, stagger, fall, rise, and scream again' (Clover uses female pronouns in line with the traditional gender of the Final Girl).

In making Christian a Final Girl, Ari Aster ties *Midsommar* to a decades-long conversation about gender in the horror film: much more could be made about his film's discussion of gender dynamics, but his decision to merge the genders of Christian and the Final Girl is one of his most fascinating. As Clover says,

Just as the killer is not fully masculine, [the Final Girl] is not fully feminine

This, then, is not a new idea from Aster; he is simply making explicit what has been implicit for decades. In turning his male antagonist into a Final Girl, he asks his audience what such a trope even means in the 21st century – and that question is hard to answer.

Next Steps

It's hard to answer because we simply don't know; though the last ten years have seen a fantastic wave of feminist and female horror films, few of them have made use of the Final Girl. But why is this? Having reclaimed the misogyny of the trope, where do we take it from here? Is there anywhere we can take it? Or have filmmakers done all they can with it, and left it in the past? Right now, we have no way of knowing.

Regardless of the genre's next steps, we can certainly revel in what we already have. Clover's theory of the Final Girl proved instrumental in shaping an entire wave of horror films, and those films formed one of the most fascinating aspects of the genre's resurgence. With the 2020s already seeing films like *Relic* and *The Invisible Man* focus on distinctly female trauma, we can be sure that horror is in safe hands – whether we see the Final Girl again or not.

Matt Taylor is a freelance journalist who specialises in film, television, and music.

from the MM vaults

Genre - the Postmodern Horror Movie – Tonia de Senna, *MM23*

Girl Power: the Politics of the Slasher Movie – James Rose, *MM38*

Ari Aster ties *Midsommar* to a decades-long conversation about gender in the horror film: much more could be made about his film's discussion of gender dynamics, but his decision to merge the genders of Christian and the Final Girl is one of his most fascinating.

Frances Ha

Frances and Sophie, the intimate relationship at the heart of Baumbach's movie
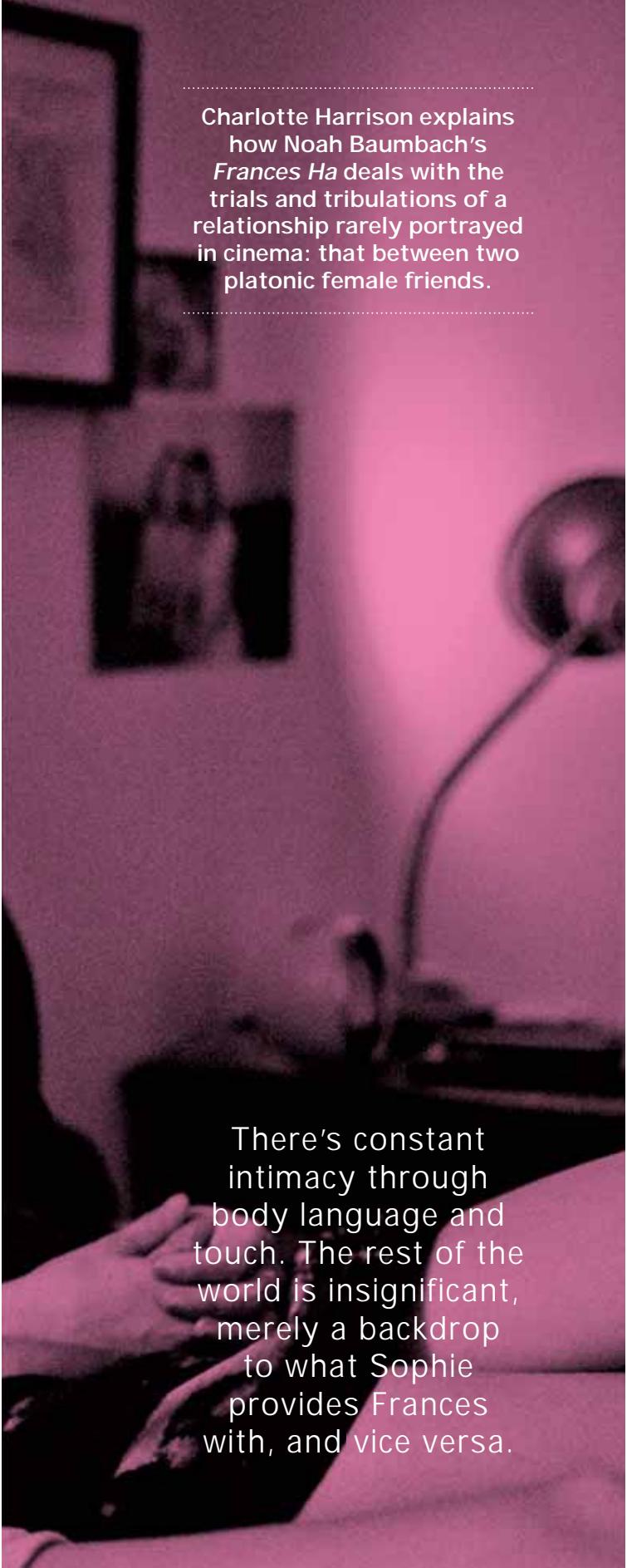
There's constant
intimacy through
body language and
touch. The rest of the
world is insignificant,
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to what Sophie
provides Frances
with, and vice versa.

For the most part, cinema seems to have a difficult time portraying female friendship on the big screen; something which seems increasingly baffling as more studies into friendship show just how impactful and meaningful these platonic relationships can be – as much, and sometimes even more so, than our romantic entanglements. Which is why 2012's *Frances Ha*, directed by Noah Baumbach and starring his long-term collaborator and life partner Greta Gerwig (they also co-wrote the film together), is so significant and is viewed with such affection by critics and audiences alike.

The film opens with a pre-title sequence, a montage that follows Frances (Gerwig) and Sophie (Mickey Sumner) as they go about their day-to-day lives. We watch these best friends from college as they play-fight, busk, catch the subway, cook, read, craft, exercise, smoke, chat, play, clean, drink and sleep together – all in a sequence that is just shy of 2 minutes long. It's the epitome of 'show don't tell' storytelling. We don't know their origins or who they really are, yet. But, framed in a manner usually reserved for lovers, we see the depths and extent of their friendship. They're regularly entwined, in some way or the other – there's constant intimacy through body language and touch. The rest of the world is insignificant, merely a backdrop to what Sophie provides Frances with, and vice versa. Even the two moments when they are not doing exactly the same thing, when Sophie is working out to an exercise video whilst Frances reads or whilst Frances dances as Sophie provides musical accompaniment – there's an ease within these contrasts, a comfortable and familiar routine that they both depend on. It's a fantastic entry point into their world and their dynamics – compounded by the fact that, for many of us, that's the version we are more likely to have experienced than the idealised romantic montage we usually see in cinema. This one is made up of the ordinary, almost dull, events of life but shows how, with the right person, there's still joy to be found within them. And, not only that, the right person in this instance – the person who understands you most profoundly and deeply – is your best friend.

This is reinforced by the following scene, the first after the title, when Frances is sat on a sofa with her boyfriend as he shows her a polaroid of a cat he'd like to buy. Together, with her, after she moves in with him. The entire interaction is stilted in comparison to the sublime mundanity of her friendship with Sophie, there are more pauses and more hesitancy within Gerwig's delivery of her dialogue as she contemplates/disregards the possibility of their moving in together – which Frances declares to be impossible as she lives with Sophie and she doesn't plan on leaving her. She tries to explain this by saying 'Yeah, but it's my friend.' Having previously played observer to their friendship, we understand what an iceberg of a statement it is, of how much it really conveys even if she is not overtly expressing it. Her boyfriend doesn't see it that way, viewing it as a flippant statement which exposes how Sophie means so much more to Frances than he does – any doubts over this

Greta Gerwig, who co-wrote and stars in *Frances Ha*

are solidified when Frances answers a call from a drunk Sophie at a party. Frances' tone is significantly different: there's overt enthusiasm within her words, unlike those interactions said to her boyfriend and the ease with which she almost yells 'I love you' to Sophie make it even more than apparent who her real number one priority is. The resulting break-up is unsurprising. After all, 'This hasn't been so great in a while.' But it's also inconsequential as we know so little about him and have little reason to care – he's insignificant compared to Sophie.

Which is why what follows hits so deeply, the break-up that really hurts. We return to the Frances and Sophie dynamic and things are still pretty dreamy, although there's a brief dig about Sophie being on her phone too much and Frances not washing dishes enough. Frances askes Sophie to 'tell me the story of us.' It's the story of things to come, their wishes and hopes for the future; it's not a case that they appear in each other's dreams, the other person is their dream. They're entwined. Forever. Or at least it appears that way. Yet Sophie announces on a journey home that she's

moving to relocate from Brooklyn to Tribeca. It's Sophie's dream neighbourhood, but it's somewhere struggling dancer Frances cannot afford to follow her to. Sophie says 'I'm not leaving you, I'm just moving neighbourhoods.' The words feel hollow and uncertain, emphasised by the fact they're said with Sophie slightly out of frame as it rests almost entirely on Frances' shell-shocked face. It's her second break-up in just a few days, yet this one is clearly a greater blow and is far more consequential. Having the two separated by the frame, starkly different from their introductory sequence, foreshadows what is to come.

We don't see the move happen, but we instantly see the effects in the next scene. The same apartment, now near empty. A flat Frances who – upon burning herself on a pan – calls Sophie and leaves an enraged voicemail. Framed as being a complaint about her having taken the kettle they bought together, it instead feels like an unleashing of her feelings of anger at being abandoned. A new joy of sorts is found with burgeoning new friendship with Lev (Adam Driver) and Benji (Michael Zegen) – something Frances

> It's Frances admitting that all she wants is to be seen and known; to feel true connection – a metaphorical cord linking her to the person who loves her the most – instead of continuing to feel adrift and lost.

with those who don't understand her humour or references. It's at this dinner party, about halfway through, that the film's most profound motif is introduced.

Frances ruminates on the moment she wants in a relationship – to be able to 'look across the room and catch each other's eyes – that is your person in this life.' That shared look acknowledging that there's a 'secret world that exists right there, in public, unnoticed, that no-one else knows about.' It's a beautiful moment, the standout speech of the film. It's Frances admitting that all she wants is to be seen and known; to feel true connection – a metaphorical cord linking her to the person who loves her the most – instead of continuing to feel adrift and lost. As Frances' life continues to pivot from one life disaster to the next, it feels like she's further away than ever from having that intimate certainty in a relationship.

An unexpected reunion with Sophie, after a chance meeting and some unexpected revelations, sets the scene for reconciliation. In the film's final chapter Frances seems more settled within herself, with a job she seems happy with and an innate hope, confidence and optimism that's been absent since Sophie left. At Frances' afterparty of her well received showcase – at which all the film's key players are in attendance – that's when it happens. Although there are hints that a romance with Benji could be on the horizon, that pales into insignificance compared to the next moment. Frances is mid-conversation with someone else when she turns to look at Sophie and they share that look. It's for just a few seconds yet it says everything – their love is restored, perhaps even stronger than ever. They see each other at the rawest possible level, with a passionate and consuming aromantic intimacy. And it's heartwarming and utterly joyous to witness.

Frances Ha is a film that celebrates the extraordinary within the ordinary, the unexceptional moments that make life so messy and yet so wonderful. That's what makes the film so relatable and so quietly revolutionary.

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directly acknowledges when she declares, 'This is the best night I've had since Sophie dumped me'. To describe what has happened as being 'dumped' – a phrase best associated with romantic relationships – explicitly states what we have already observed about their dynamic and indicates that the consequences of it will continue to be seen and felt.

The exuberance Frances' feels over her next friendships and new home (epitomised by the song choice of David Bowie's 'Modern Love', a song about using fear to stay positive 'But I try/I try') is short-lived as things with Sophie become increasingly strained. Sophie's relationship with Patch gets more serious as her friendship with Frances suffers – just as Frances' life slowly disintegrates – with nowhere to live, horrific job prospects, a dire financial situation and now she has been abandoned by the great love of her life. Sophie's role in Frances' life shrinks to second-hand updates from mutual friends – people with whom Frances is shown to be distinctly uncomfortable; the quick rapport she had with Sophie (with whom she was 'the same person') is now mannered conversation

📂 *from the MM vaults*

Grace and Frankie: An Exploration of Sexual Identity and Relationships – Caroline Reid, *MM65*

BOYS KEEP SWINGING

Subversive takes on the superhero genre are nothing new but the gleeful relish with which *The Boys* lays into tradition and taste is refreshing. Underneath the shock (and occasional schlock) there's a more serious challenge being offered though. Giles Gough explores what the show reveals about hegemonies and how they can be critiqued.

When Season 2 of *The Boys* dropped in autumn 2020, fans welcomed its triumphant return, praising its mixture of incisive wit, nuanced characterisations and insightful critique of dominant forces in society. Actually, that's a lie; many of them just bombarded Amazon with one-star reviews for having the audacity to release each episode week by week rather than in one big binge-watch. Toxic fanboys aside, many critics have embraced the show for its ability to address societal issues such as the fallout of unchecked capitalism, sexual harassment in celebrity culture and even social media's unwitting role in the rise of the alt-right. We could talk about any of these issues at length, but what we're going to look at today is the thing that unites the show's approach to all these issues: attacking a hegemony.

Hegemony is a tricky term, so before we get into it, let's back up and make sure we understand what an ideology is. An ideology is a set of beliefs or philosophies offering a shared view of social or political issues. Touchstone political theorist Karl Marx popularised the study of ideologies, mainly focusing on capitalism, the ideology that economic systems should be privately owned and run for profit. Marx saw the negative effects that capitalism had on the working class, or the proletariat as he called them. His answer to this was an ideology that came to bear his name: Marxism. Marxism is the belief that workers should control the means of production, and that property should be shared out equally in order to meet everyone's needs. Once you've got your head round the idea of an ideology, then you can understand what a hegemony is. There's an old joke that goes something like this: Two young fish were swimming along one day when they passed an older fish. The older fish swims by and says 'Hello! The water's lovely, isn't it?' One of the young fish turns to the other and says, 'What's water?'. In many ways, this is what a hegemony is like. It is an ideology so dominant, so pervasive, so baked into the fabric of our society, that we struggle to see it. Let's take for example, an idea such as 'if you work hard you will succeed'. This is a common value, probably held by the majority of people around the world, and therefore could be considered a hegemonic value. Antonio Gramsci was an early twentieth century Marxist philosopher. He argued that hegemony could be imposed through culture, that

Left: Karl Marx and Antonio Gramsci

Homelander serves as a personification of the USA, perpetuating American exceptionalism, the ideology that America is a superior nation with the ability to transform the world, all the while committing human rights violations on its own soil and abroad.

Uncage the colours,
unfurl the flag!

Julija Surova / https://jusu.artstation.com

the dominant ideologies of a society's ruling class could be reflected and imposed to justify the social, political and economic status quo as natural, inevitable and beneficial for everyone, rather than as human-made social constructs that benefit only the ruling class. Returning to our earlier example, all the different pillars of society – education, religion, industry, media – knowingly or otherwise, might contribute to the idea that individual effort can lead to success. This belief that we can 'pull

ourselves up by our own bootstraps' masks a much more unpleasant truth: that how rich your parents are will have much more of an impact on your success than your own abilities.

So what does all this have to do with superheroes and *The Boys*? Well, like *Watchmen*, *The Boys* starts with a simple premise, 'What if superheroes were real?'. Ever since the 'Golden Age of Comics' (roughly 1938 to 1956) superheroes have often explicitly embodied hegemonic values. Since World War II, Superman has supposedly stood for 'truth, justice and the American way', suggesting that those three things are inseparable. In more recent years, an oppositional reading of these characters has produced both fascinating and hilarious results. For example, no one would argue that both Batman and Superman are heroes, by any conceivable metric; but if brought into the real world, questions would have to be raised about the fact that one is an interplanetary illegal immigrant who also happens to be a potential weapon of mass destruction while the other is a privileged, straight, white billionaire who disguises himself as a bat to beat up the mentally ill. This kind of subversion of figures who represent hegemonic values is exactly what *The Boys* chooses to do, and by focusing on the most extreme embodiments of these values – superheroes who symbolise an America First ideology, work for unfettered

corporations and whose unchecked toxic masculinity goes largely unpunished – it challenges that hegemony.

Adapted from the graphic novels of the same name written by Garth Ennis and illustrated by Darick Robertson, *The Boys* follows a small team, loosely affiliated with the CIA, whose job is to bring to justice superheroes that have gone rogue. In this world, not only are superheroes real, but they enjoy a celebrity status and are for the most part, controlled by a US corporation called 'Vought'. As well as having a premier superhero group called 'The Seven' (a group that at first glance look like an off-brand version of the Justice League), Vought also have lower profile hero teams that are contracted out to be heroes for specific cities. Not only does Vought control the superheroes, but they also produce big budget movies in which the heroes star as themselves, further perpetuating the myth of their superheroes being noble and heroic. By making Vought a corporation trying to get their superheroes embedded into the American military and expanding into the entertainment and merchandising industries, Vought appears to be a strange mix of the defence contractor Lockheed Martin and Disney. Disney's acquisition of Lucasfilm, Marvel Studios, and most recently 20th Century Fox, means that Disney occupied nearly 40% of the movie market in 2019. This means that Disney, as a corporation that borders on a monopoly of the entertainment industry, is well-placed to influence millions of viewers. Both young and old are consuming cultural products that perpetuate ideologies which could easily become hegemonies.

All of the superheroes in The Seven are concerned about their public image. For example, the character of A-Train is much like a pro-athlete who needs to stay in the spotlight in order to make a living. Then there's Queen Maeve, (whose outfit bears a resemblance to Wonder Woman) who sees and despairs at the way Starlight, the new female recruit to The Seven is treated but is tacitly complicit in enabling this abuse. However, the most obvious example of a critique of hegemonic values lies in the most powerful hero/villain of the show, Homelander.

Nothing stands in your way, when you're a boy
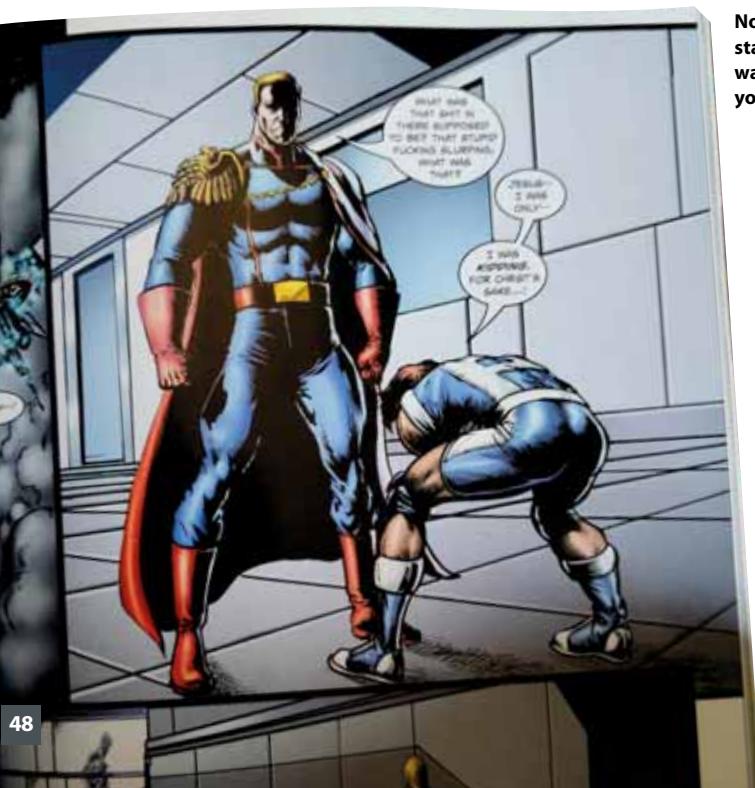
Aesthetically, Homelander is the love child of Superman and Captain America. He is massively overpowered compared to the other characters, with little in the way of vulnerabilities. However, unlike Clark Kent who was raised by loving parents, or Steve Rogers who was specifically chosen due to his moral nature, Homelander is an amoral sociopath who is more concerned with his own public image than the sanctity and dignity of human life. His cape, with white and red stripes, evokes the US flag, and the costume designer Laura Jean Shannon also made eagles a recurring theme in his outfit. The eagle is a popular national symbol around the world. However, when we consider not only America, but Nazi Germany used the eagle as a symbol, we can see that even the costume is a nod to his fascist tendencies, which in turn draws attention to the character's Aryan features, the physical characteristics commonly thought of as belonging to Hitler's 'master race'.

Homelander's carelessness with his powers results in the death of countless characters, including innocent passengers on a plane. As no one in his sphere of influence is able to stand up to him outright, we see many characters seek to justify or defend his actions, in order to be able to function and survive. Homelander serves as a personification of the USA, perpetuating American exceptionalism, the ideology that America is a superior nation with the ability to transform the world, all the while committing human rights violations on its own soil and abroad. In this context, we can see how Homelander serves as a critique of the hegemonic values that America has frequently perpetuated. When, in Season 2, he enters into a relationship with the character Stormfront, the perennially young superheroine who is revealed to be a literal Nazi, that is the icing on the allegorical cake and perhaps the most blunt representation yet of what *The Boys* is telling us about the state of the USA

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📚 *from the MM vaults*

Superheroes: the Impact of 9/11 – Steph Hendry, *MM31*
Dark Knight, Dark Ideas: The Ideology of Nolan's Batman Trilogy – Pete Turner, *MM44*
Cutting the Übermensch Down to Size: Challenging Fascism in the Comic Book Genre – Dan Clayton, *MM75*

Many critics have embraced the show for its ability to address societal issues such as the fallout of unchecked capitalism, sexual harassment in celebrity culture and even social media's unwitting role in the rise of the alt-right.

When you're a boy, other boys check you out, you get a girl

CITIZEN KANE

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

Orson Welles on the set of his debut film, *Citizen Kane*

Citizen Kane **was the first film by Orson Welles and is considered by many to be a masterpiece. Michael Massey explains how narrative techniques are used to create an air of mystery and enigma that still captivates audiences today.**

f you thought binge-watching was a phenomenon brought about by box sets, Netflix and iPlayer, think again. Over 80 years ago, a young man in his early 20s was given what he described as 'the biggest electric train set any boy ever had!' What he actually got was free access to an RKO Pictures film studio to make a movie. He'd had some success as a theatre director and radio producer, but he knew nothing about making films.

To prepare for this exciting challenge, he binge-watched the same movie every night for over a month. It was a western called *Stagecoach,* directed by John Ford. It was his textbook - he watched it, studied it, distilled from it all the knowledge he could about film-making, and then he put it to one side in order to create his own film. His name was Orson Welles, and his film was called *Citizen Kane*, believed by film students, critics and movie professionals to be the greatest American film ever made.

It's the fictional bio-pic of a man, Charles Foster Kane, from a poor childhood, who inherited millions of dollars from a goldmine, and made many more millions from his media empire, including his flagship newspaper, *The Inquirer*. He had two broken marriages, one son, who was killed in an accident, and he lost his one close friendship. His dying word was 'Rosebud', and much of the film is a quest by a journalist, Jerry Thompson, to find out what that word meant.

The film is multi-generic – it uses elements of documentary-style, historical drama, bio-pic, love story, melodrama, comedy, tragedy, mystery. Many students, however, find the way it treats narrative style and structure particularly interesting which is what I will focus on in this article. Still others are grabbed by its very impressive photography (see box on page 53 for more).

Non-linear Narrative

Although many movies use linear narratives to tell their stories, *Citizen Kane* most certainly does not. To begin with, this non-linear narrative starts at the end, with the death of Charles Foster Kane, media mogul and multi-millionaire.

The film opens with a shadowy shot of a 'NO TRESPASSING' sign hanging on a chain-link fence; it establishes an atmosphere of mystery – indeed this scene will set up the question that the film's narrative is hinged upon. The camera tracks forward through a monumental gateway, with a huge letter 'K' above it, across acres of grounds, lakes, a golf course, all the time keeping one illuminated window of Xanadu, Kane's mansion house, in the frame. The tracking shot ends with a close up of the window whose light then goes out. We cut to the interior of the room, where a man lies dying in a large bed.

With his dying breath, his lips fill the screen in extreme close-up and he whispers the word 'Rosebud'. A nurse folds his arms and covers

> By presenting Kane from these different perspectives, the film enables its audience to gain a very rounded picture of a very complex man, but those perspectives also allow the audience to make up its own mind about Kane.

his body with a sheet. The scene fades to black and silence.

A death is a classic narrative disruption technique. In this case it gives way to the narrative enigma: 'Rosebud'. This enigma introduces the idea of a 'quest', and raises two questions: What is or was Rosebud? Can one dying word explain a man's whole life?

Newsreel – Exposition

The sequence that follows, 'NEWS ON THE MARCH!', is completely different in style and presentation. It's a mock newsreel, of the kind that used to be shown before the main feature film in an ordinary high street cinema. The content is an obituary for Charles Foster Kane including highlights from his life story, except it's not being shown in a cinema; instead it's being screened in a news agency screening room for journalists in advance of a public showing.

This sequence, modelled on a real-life newsreel 'THE MARCH OF TIME', is pure exposition, setting out the basic details of Kane's life, in effect, covering the whole story of this man whose death we have just witnessed. It does not, however, solve the enigma; it doesn't even mention Kane's dying word.

Interviews – Multiple Perspectives

The reporter, Thompson, has heard about Kane's last word and, convinced its meaning must be significant, begins the quest to discover to what it refers. He interviews those who knew Kane best: his oldest friend, his second wife, his manager and the caretaker of his mansion. The journalist also researches an account of Kane's early life from the papers of his guardian, now dead.

Each person provides a different narrative perspective, taking us back to different periods of Kane's life, and letting us see the character of the man as he confronts different aspects of his marriages, his friendships, his businesses and his ambitions.

Jed Leland is Kane's best friend from his days at University and a drama critic of *The Inquirer*. He applauded Kane's decision to print a 'Declaration

of Principles' concerning honesty and integrity in the first edition of the paper, but he became disillusioned by Kane's treatment of his second wife, Susan. Leland refuses to sacrifice his principles and write a good review of her abysmal performance, just to please Kane. It is clear that Kane has abandoned his principles, and has become a power-obsessed, self-serving megalomaniac. Later Leland sends Kane a copy of that first 'Declaration', which he has torn to shreds to show Kane his contempt for his abandoning them.

His second wife, Susan Alexander, provides an image of Kane as a coercive abuser. Her description of their marriage turning sour presents Kane as a control freak, obsessed with his own wealth and power.

Mr Bernstein, his business manager, admires Kane and presents a very positive view of his earlier years, when running his papers really excited him. He describes Kane as a very successful businessman and employer.

The caretaker of Xanadu has considerable contempt for his employer, particularly because of Kane's treatment of Susan. He provides an outsider's view of Kane's appalling behaviour towards others. However he is presented as a cynical realist, who will say anything for the journalist's money.

Walter Thatcher, his guardian, provides his perspective of Kane's childhood posthumously through his papers. From these we get a picture of a selfish boy spoiled by his mother, who attacks Thatcher with a sled when he learns that he is to be taken away from his family and brought up by Thatcher. We get later glimpses of Kane as a young man from a Thatcher who has little time for his self-centred behaviour and frequently finds himself at the receiving end of Kane's poisonous attacks on him through the pages of The Inquirer.

By presenting Kane from these different perspectives, the film enables its audience to gain a very rounded picture of a very complex man, but those perspectives also allow the audience to make up its own mind about Kane.

The first four individuals are asked about 'Rosebud', but no one can

> A death is a classic narrative disruption technique. In this case it gives way to the narrative enigma: 'Rosebud'. This enigma introduces the idea of a 'quest', and raises two questions: What is or was Rosebud? Can one dying word explain a man's whole life?

throw any real light on the word's meaning. It is suggested that it might have been symbolic of something Kane had lost, or failed to acquire, or a person he had betrayed.

After Thompson has completed his enquiries, his colleagues decide to visit Xanadu in a last attempt to solve the 'Rosebud' riddle once and for all.

'Rosebud' – Resolution

The final sequence shows the journalists now looking through Kane's possessions at Xanadu, as workmen begin the process of clearing them out – thousands of works of art, crated statues, and countless other valuable pieces. The camera tracks over the middle of this mountainous heap, until a workman, in close-up, grabs a small child's sled and tosses it into a giant furnace. An extreme close-up of the sled, now being consumed by the raging flames, reveals its trade name: 'Rosebud'. Thus it will remain an unsolved enigma, just like its owner. Although we, the audience, now know what 'Rosebud' was, we are still left without an explanation of its meaning. Did it stand for lost innocence, nostalgia for the childhood taken from Kane by Thatcher, a reminder that it was the 'weapon' used by Kane against Thatcher, a simple artefact contrasted with the myriad works of art purchased by Kane throughout his life, or a means of escape from a life mapped out for him by others? We shall never know.

The final shot tracks back from the mansion's chimney belching out clouds of black smoke, some generated by the burning sled, back over the grounds of the mansion, back to its chain fence, with the 'NO TRESPASSING' sign: meaning 'keep out of my property and keep out of my business'. The End. The meaning of Rosebud will go with Kane to the grave.

Michael Massey is a freelance author and former Head of Media Education at Southgate School in London.

Charles Foster-Kane the rags to riches owner of the fictional media empire in *Citizen Kane*

Cinematography

All the photography in *Citizen Kane* was conducted by Gregg Toland, another young man keen to experiment with the technology. Both he and Welles had been influenced by German Expressionist Cinema, whose silent movies had used big close-ups and much play with chiaroscuro lighting (sharp contrasts of bright light and dark shadows), among other techniques, to produce exaggerated effects and a heightened sense of drama and emotion.

Toland also made great use of a technique called deep focus, where details in a frame, both in the foreground and in the background, are in sharp focus, thus highlighting their significance, but also leaving the audience to decide which detail might be the more important without apparently being influenced by the director.

To produce an effect of dominance by Kane himself, but also to underline the claustrophobic nature of his personality - his presence is often overwhelming - Welles and Toland decided to shoot many sequences from a very low angle. For one memorable shot, a small trench was dug into the concrete of the studio floor to bring the camera down almost to shoe level! The claustrophobia was further enhanced by filming many interior shots complete with low ceilings, which was very rare in mainstream Hollywood at the time, because of the cost and time needed to construct such rooms, and the need to make room for lighting rigs and microphones.

There is no doubt that *Citizen Kane* is a masterpiece of photographic technique, and every frame merits close observation. The framing, mise-en-scène and the overall approach to the finished image have all produced a film that is deliberately larger-than-life, to suit the character at the centre of its narrative.

from the MM vaults

The Third Man: A Narrative of Names, Numbers, Music, Metaphor and Monochrome – *MM3*

Lost in Translation

Joe Molander re-examines this modern classic through the lens of the #MeToo movement – and he doesn't like what he sees.

Inappropriate relationship: Bob and Charlotte in *Lost in Translation*

Album / Alamy Stock Photo

Sofia Coppola's *Lost in Translation* was released in 2003, and has gone on to be analysed from every angle. Critics and academics have discussed how it subverts the male gaze and operates as a critique on capitalism, and it has been criticised for its depiction of Japan. Finding new ground to cover might be tricky, then.

However, for all the discussion it's inspired, almost none has considered the presentation of the age gap between its two main characters. Charlotte, played by Scarlett Johansson, is decades younger than Bob Harris, played by Bill Murray. Murray was 52 when he appeared in the film whereas Johansson was just 17. To a lot of modern viewers still in the orbit of the #MeToo movement, this is an age gap that's inappropriate. Looking at what the age gap does for the film suggests that they have a point.

Minding the Gap

The characters' respective ages are no small part of the film. Their age or stage of life is what has set the two of them adrift, in different ways. Where Bob is having to contend with being an unhappily married faded movie star, Charlotte has recently graduated, and is struggling to find purpose after Yale.

Furthermore, the age gap is the film's emotional core. Charlotte's relative youth brings out Bob's humour. Bob's age and wisdom allow Charlotte to think and feel more deeply than when surrounded by her contemporaries. When they first speak together, Charlotte jokes about Bob entering a mid-life crisis, which wouldn't be nearly as cutting if she were the same age. 'Did you buy a Porsche yet?' she teases.

It's also what they argue about. When Bob sleeps with a lounge singer, Charlotte jealously chastises: 'Well, she is closer to your age. You could talk about things you have in common, like growing up in the 50s.'

Consider how poorly the film would work without an age gap. An aged-down Bob has none of the answers that Charlotte is looking for in someone older. An aged-up Charlotte no longer has to worry about the malaise caused by her recent graduation and the worry about the decision she has to make about the direction of her life. She would also lack the youth that Bob finds so charming.

Performance

Detractors may argue that there's nothing wrong here. After all, the relationship between Bob and Charlotte is never sexual. In the rare moments where the film does become sexual, it's hardly romantic. When Bob has an encounter with a prostitute, sex is the last thing on his mind. She mispronounces 'rip' as 'lip', and flails around on the floor hysterically, screaming 'don't touch me!' at an extremely weary Bob. The implication is that he is expected to fulfil a rape fantasy. It's played for laughs rather than eroticism, in a particularly cringe-worthy example of the film's often insensitive portrayal of Japanese culture. In another scene, a strip club only piques the interest of Bob and Charlotte in so far as it bemuses them. In both cases, sex and sexuality are performative, which makes them just as superficial as Bob's encounter with the lounge singer.

Thus, it's not just that Bob and Charlotte don't have sex with each other, it's that they don't want to. Both their lives are filled with enough performance as it is. Bob performs contentedness in his marriage. In an early scene, Charlotte performs being okay while on the phone to a friend, pretending to be fine whilst crying. In *Lost in Translation*, sex is coded as so superficial that its absence is part of what makes Bob and Charlotte see their relationship as special.

Their relationship isn't entirely platonic either, though. Otherwise, the tension that arises from Bob sleeping with the lounge singer would make no sense. Bob is married, so it's possible that Charlotte's annoyance stems from his infidelity. However, Bob's wife is discussed so infrequently between the two of them that she's unlikely to be at the forefront of Charlotte's mind. Even before Bob and Charlotte kiss at the very end of the film, there are fairly heavy hints that their involvement is romantic. They watch movies together late at night. They lie on the same bed, a careful few feet apart. Coppola herself said that their relationship is 'romantic, but on the edge'.

Power

With that romance come some of the hallmarks of an inappropriate relationship, namely an uneven power dynamic. In a scene where they're at their most candid and vulnerable, Charlotte asks Bob:

'Does it get easier?'

'No… Yes. It gets easier,' he replies softly.

Though far from invulnerable himself, Bob is able to provide comfort to Charlotte because of the experience that he has and she lacks. Charlotte is attracted to Bob because

of, not in spite of, the years he has over her. Meanwhile, Bob is attracted to Charlotte because of the wit and youthfulness that he seems to find lacking in people his own age.

The power dynamic that comes from age only serves to entrench the one that comes from gender. Bob is at least formerly successful, paid enormous amounts of attention, highly affluent and in Japan to work. He tells Charlotte he's being paid $2,000,000 for the whiskey advert he's shooting. Charlotte, on the other hand, is here for her husband John's (played by Giovanni Ribisi) work. When she's with John's friends, she's passive. On their first encounter, her husband's movie star friend Kelly (played by Anna Faris) admires Charlotte, but makes no effort to talk to her. The second time, another friend Charlotte's age talks to her about himself and his music.

The only time Charlotte isn't passive is when she's around Bob, who lavishes her with attention. With Charlotte alienated by the vapidity and self-absorption of her husband's friends, he doesn't have much competition for her affection.

Exploitation

Whatever relationship they have, then, some form of exploitation is present: Bob relies on Charlotte's naivety and alienation for her to like him. It's important to emphasise that – unlike some relationships with big age gaps – this one never strays into harassment, or assault. They're both consenting adults who hardly touch each other, bar the kiss at the end.

That doesn't erase the question of agency. If Charlotte were surer of herself, it's unlikely

Innocence: Johannson was 17 when the movie was shot

she'd feel the need to come to Bob looking for answers. Were she to walk away from him, she'd be left marooned, surrounded by people who don't understand her. Bob, it would seem, is Charlotte's only real option for companionship.

Bob also has limited choices for company, but he's been round the block. It falls on him to spot that the forces bringing him and Charlotte together are not healthy. This includes the fact that a big part of Charlotte's appeal to Bob is that she's young, and he's not. That the relationship goes on for as long as it does has one of two explanations. The first is that Bob fails to recognise that the relationship is inappropriate. The second is that he has some sense of what's happening, and presses on regardless. Either way, the relationship relies on Bob exploiting the vulnerability of a young woman, and neglecting an implicit duty of care.

A New Age

It's not unfair to say the film was made in a different social climate. As new generations of students enter the industry and academia, they bring new tools for looking at it that make that more obvious. For example,

critics writing more recently are quicker to acknowledge the film's racial stereotyping and Orientalism; Bob's mocking Japanese accent is brief, but acutely nasty.

In becoming more socially conscious, film students develop a better vocabulary for analysing things like age gaps. With *Lost in Translation*, they are presented with a relationship built on an exploitation of innocence that earlier scholars either never noticed or wilfully ignored. Now, students have the opportunity to fill that gap, and see what those that came before them never could. They can see that a film with an age gap that both facilitates exploitation and is essential to the plot must be fundamentally flawed.

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Joe Molander is a freelance journalist and head of current affairs at *The Courier* in Newcastle.

Experience: Bob knows what he's getting into

📁📁 *from the MM vaults*

Films of Sofia Coppola –
Lucy Mead, *MM18*

ALTERATIVE MUSIC BUSINESS

A Case Study of Bandcamp

With the pandemic bringing live music, festivals and even trips to our favourite record shops to an unwelcome standstill, musicians and bands have struggled to make ends meet. And while streaming has grown in 2020, the revenue for artists is insultingly small. Enter Bandcamp…

A t the dawn of the 21st century the music industry was staring into a disruptive digital abyss of declining physical sales, piracy and file-sharing sites such as Napster. The proliferation of cheaper digital hardware and software lifted the lid on just how big the mark-up on the 2.4bn CDs sold worldwide in 2000 was and few had much sympathy for the industry's protests. Fast forward to 2021 and via iTunes' creation of the legal download and the recent hegemony of major streaming platforms, the industry seems to have been thrown a lifeline. Add to this a comparatively small but niche and growing market in new vinyl and cassettes and the music industry has arguably survived and adapted to take advantage of the age of stream. However, as with many areas of media dominated by global tech giants, this new era of musical consumption provides a whole new set of winners and losers and raises the question of whether there are better models out there and, if so, do we actually want them?

The Covid Contrast

The pandemic devastated the income streams of artists with ruthless speed, cancelling events large and small. The tour and festival circuit that sustains the bands outside of the premier league of established stars disappeared. The cancellation of Glastonbury in both 2020 and 2021 suggests a full return to packed live gigs and festival crowd surfing is some way off. Campaigns such as #LetTheMusicPlay in the UK were successful in securing some funding for artists and venues. Elsewhere, creatives got creative with seated gigs, streamed shows, and The Flaming Lips even performed with band and audience inside giant zorb balls! However, this was small change for bands, many of whom were already facing a precarious financial existence.

As with most areas of media consumption, music listening surged during 2020 with streaming on platforms such as Spotify, Amazon and Apple rising by 22% and a 35% jump in subscriptions worldwide in the first quarter of 2020. As is often the case with the best and worst moments in life, someone has a song for us. A grim irony emerged: people wanted media products more than ever, yet those whose toil and craft forged such beautiful distractions were getting our attention whilst losing their livelihoods. Meanwhile, the streaming giants (whether Subscription Video on Demand (SVOD) or music) saw profits and subscriptions soar.

The dominance of Spotify, in particular, has led to increased concerns about the share of spoils between platform and producer. Music streaming is a billion pound business in the UK but as little as 13% of the revenue made from streaming services gets paid to the artists, an imbalance currently

Images courtesy of Warner Music

Images courtesy of Warner Music

Flaming Lips going into Zorbit

under investigation by the UK parliament. The chorus of criticism, from Taylor Swift to Thom Yorke, fell on tone-deaf ears with billionaire Spotify CEO, Daniel Ek, sparking a furious backlash by responding with, 'Music = product and must be churned out regularly'. According to Ek, if bands wanted to earn more they needed to make more music: arguably, an even cruder manifestation of the assembly-line approach of some 20th century major labels.

So what can fans, artists and indie labels do if they don't want to dance to Spotify's curated pay-list?

> Free from the release schedule shackles, bands can forge their own path and choose what to release, when and at what price: all without a membership fee or hosting cost.

A Fair Deal

Step forward Bandcamp. Founded in 2007, the growing global platform focuses mainly on underground or alternative music with everything from soul to post-punk to be found. You will find established indie labels such as Ninja Tune on there, artists with a single release to their name and even an established artist such as Bjork. However, if you are looking for Ed Sheeran's music then you will be disappointed. Aly Gillani (Bandcamp's EU Artist and Label Rep) told *MM*

Ed would be more than welcome but, in truth, we've not had much interaction with major labels - and whilst we would be open to them or anyone else, we maintain a very democratic way of running the site. No special deals, preferential treatment for 'big' operators or plugged/sponsored content, something major labels aren't normally keen on. Having said that we have some of the largest indie labels in the world using the site, so it's not the case that we're only for small DIY acts

Artists and labels can set their own prices, release dates and formats. It could be vinyl only, vinyl plus download, cassette, T-shirts, bundles, subscription schemes or even artwork, giving increasing opportunities for fandom. Free from the release schedule shackles, bands can forge their own path and choose what to release, when and at what price: all without a membership fee or hosting cost.

> The dominance of Spotify, in particular, has led to increased concerns about the share of spoils between platform and producer.

Fans can become supporters, share their collections, follow each other and receive advance notice of limited editions and buy downloads or vinyl in the knowledge that the artist will receive more than 80% of the money they spend. What's more, you can stream all your collection via an app. An in house radio/podcast and reviews section finishes off what feels to all intents and purposes the closest thing to an online record shop. Indeed, Bandcamp recently opened their first physical record shop in Oakland, California. What the remaining independent record shops think about this is less clear.

Gillani describes the platform as

[...] building a community where artists and labels can sell their music to fans whilst engaging with them in an unfiltered, intimate way

Current innovations include a vinyl service (artists can create a 30-day campaign to press a vinyl version of their album), and most recently Bandcamp Live, a ticketed live streaming

service, whereby artists can stream a show directly from their page. Likewise, Gillani says

If your band is starting out and wants to release your recordings we have tips and advice on how to make the most out of your page.

Bandcamp Fridays

As the pandemic ravaged the livelihoods of performers and musicians, Bandcamp initiated monthly 'Bandcamp Fridays', scrapping their 15% commission with 100% of the money going directly to artists - usually within days! Gillani explains, 'If you want the artists you love to continue making their music, you need to pay them and this is a very direct way of doing that. The response has been incredible.' The $4.3m paid directly to artists from the first one in March 2020 proved this was no corporate overstatement. Initiatives to support activists arrested during the BLM protests and support for various other causes has shown a company unafraid to wear its values on its sleeve.

Bandcamp's homepage displays this direct support of artists loud and proud with the current amount that 'Fans have paid artists…' constantly updated and, at the time of writing, exceeding $681million. In various interviews, co-founder Ethan Diamond declares, 'We only make money if the artist makes a whole lot more.'

It is a drop in the ocean in comparison to Spotify, Tidal and Apple. Bandcamp is not looking to compete with the big players, just forge a successful alternative. Music on Bandcamp can be found on Spotify too and whilst Musical Gateway calculate you would need 300 Spotify streams to equal £1 made from a Bandcamp Friday, the exposure to wider and global audiences a trending track or inclusion on a popular playlist would bring perhaps makes such direct comparisons difficult.

Can other media industries (such as news) learn from what has happened in music to survive and adapt to the age of technological disruption? If so, let's hope there is a Bandcamp around to provide an alternative.

Chris Welch is Head of Media Studies at Tupton Hall School, Chesterfield.

📚 *from the MM vaults*

Stream-Age Kicks: Music Streaming Services – Ian Bland, *MM58*

Spot(ify) the Difference: Swift, Bragg and the Maths of Making Money in the Music Industry – Christopher Budd, *MM53*

Public domain

Careers download

Aly Gillani

Chris Welch of Tupton Hall School interviewed Aly Gillani of Bandcamp on behalf of *MediaMagazine* to find out what life is like for an EU Label Rep

What is your job title and what are your main responsibilities with Bandcamp?

I'm the EU Artist and Label Representative. My job involves signing up new artists and labels to Bandcamp, working with existing artists and labels to make sure they know how the site works, and also representing the company at conferences, doing workshops and generally spreading the good word about Bandcamp in Europe.

How did you get into the music industry and the job with Bandcamp?

I started out as a club promoter in Leeds 20 or so years ago. From there I met lots of talented artists with no outlet for their music, and alongside Sheffield DJ Andy H we started First Word Records. 10 years and many mistakes later I got to know the guys at Bandcamp through using the site to sell the label's music. I asked if they had any work going, and... here we are!

I started out as a club promoter in Leeds 20 or so years ago. From there I met lots of talented artists with no outlet for their music.

bandcamp

What are the advantages and challenges of working remotely for a website with a global audience and reach?

I love working remotely. I'd been self-employed for 10 years before joining Bandcamp so I'm not sure I'd really flourish having to go into an office every day. I love the flexibility and in ordinary times I'm still getting lots of contact with people, visiting labels, going to events etc etc, so there's no danger of boredom or isolation. I love being part of something with such a huge reach – it feels good to contribute to something that genuinely helps people too.

If someone wanted to work at Bandcamp, how would they apply, what do they need and what can they expect?

We post jobs up at bandcamp.com/jobs - most of the company are web developers, although we also have our Artists and Labels team (that I'm part of), our editorial team plus product managers, finance operatives and designers. In terms of what you need, it varies from role to role, but the ability to work on one's own initiative is key, a good approach to teamwork and a willingness to learn. Also being passionate about the mission and values that Bandcamp promotes: that's probably the biggest thing.

If you could give some advice to your 20-year-old self entering the music industry, what would it be?

Good question! I think I could have benefited from working for other people earlier on - I've never worked at a label other than my own so I've had to learn as I go. Some experience from an established label could have been helpful. Otherwise, I think you've just got to work out your own process – I've made tons of mistakes, but I'm happy with where I am now, so I guess it was all worthwhile!

> I love being part of something with such a huge reach – it feels good to contribute to something that genuinely helps people too.

DASK FILMS PRODUCTION TIPS #6

How to keep crew happy

Our last production tips covered how to keep actors happy. But crew members have feelings too! You have to keep them sweet, and on zero budget, that's not always easy. So here are a few tips that might help.

Dask Films is a Northwest-based video production company

Have a production meeting

You can't really expect everyone to arrive knowing exactly what they need to do. So as well as explaining your aims and the schedule, this is a time to introduce people, and big them up. Whether this is the first film a person has shot, or the twentieth, make sure to let them know publicly that they are valued and why their skills make them a good choice for this project.
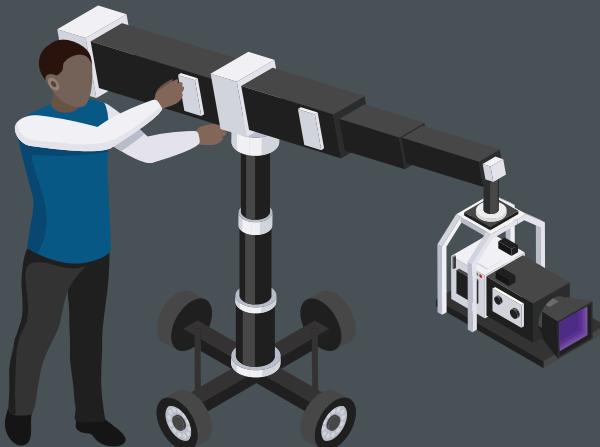
Cover their expenses

If you are not paying people for their time, you can at least make sure they are not out of pocket because they are working on your project. This usually means covering people's food or transport. For a small project, this might just mean sandwiches and bus fare. One of the reasons that this is important is that it makes you think like a producer handling a budget. Do you have to have that person on that day? Does it have to be that location or can it be somewhere closer? The more efficient your shoot, the better.

Have snacks handy

People the world over are usually in a better mood when they have something to eat. Tensions can run quite high on any set, and you never want someone being hangry to be the reason. Sugary snacks can give people a burst of energy but you will then have to deal with the inevitable crash. So make sure that you've got plenty of healthy snacks in there too. Also, a flask of hot water will mean that people don't have to wait for a kettle to boil to make themselves a brew.

Make all your creative decisions before you get on location

Whilst some choices will inevitably have to be made whilst filming, you want to keep them to an absolute minimum. Discussing the relative merits of one piece of costume versus another with your leading man is fine, but not when you have people standing, holding equipment ready to shoot. Don't test people's patience!

Set generous timings for scenes

It's a particular skill to try and estimate how long it will take to shoot a scene. It requires knowing roughly how long it takes each person to do their job in order to finish filming a scene, then allocate a period of time for it that includes time for people to make mistakes. Therefore, be conservative in how long you think it'll take to shoot a number of scenes. It might take you an hour between arriving and being ready to call action, so factor that in. If you think you can get ten scenes shot in that day, then plan for eight. That way, no-one is rushing and making mistakes. Also, if you find you have more time at the end of the day to sneak in a bit more filming, that means people can go into the next day knowing it was a bit shorter than they first expected it to be. People love finishing a shoot earlier than expected and that makes you look awesome as a result.
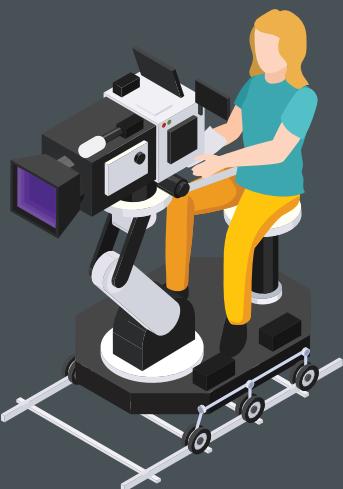
Keep options open where you can

Sometimes people will come up with a great idea in the middle of filming. It also might not be what you, the creator of this film had in mind. Rather than debating with people on a question that has no definitive right answer, why not try and shoot both if you have the time? Having an alternate shot can give you more options in the edit, and it makes a person feel like their ideas are valued. Sometimes however, it's not possible to shoot their idea. It's always a good idea to respond with empathy rather than authority. 'that's brilliant, but unfortunately it doesn't work within the wider context of the script' sounds a lot better than 'no, we're not doing that'. It's your project, so ultimately, you have to be firm, but that doesn't mean you can't consider other people's feelings.

Stay focused

This should be obvious, but these people have given up their time for you, so put your phone on silent and don't get caught up with in-jokes with people that are not relevant. Set timings for breaks and make sure everyone knows you plan on sticking to them. To get a film finished, you have to be terrifyingly single-minded but if you ever want people to work with you again, you need to be an empathetic inspiring leader. It's a tricky balancing act, but with a little practise, you can do it.