

# Leap into Media!

Inspirational tasks for  
Y11 and Y12



**EMC**  
Publications

An English and Media Centre Student Resource

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## What This Pack Is and How to Use It

Are you thinking about studying Media Studies at A Level, or looking to develop your Media Studies knowledge as you move from Year 12 into Year 13? The activities in this unit will help you, whatever the stage of your learning. For the complete beginner, they will give you a taste of the riches that await you if you choose to study Media at A Level. For those of you already in Year 12, they will add real depth to your knowledge about the subject, while giving you fresh ideas about ways in which to approach it.

All of the materials are based around articles from the English and Media Centre's magazine for A Level students of Media Studies and Film Studies, *MediaMagazine*. The tasks linked to each article use the following format:

1. Read the article.
2. Answer questions about it – this will help you to make sure that you fully understand the content, ideas and concepts associated with a particular aspect of media study.
3. Complete various tasks and activities that use the article as a springboard.

Some of the activities ask you to step back and think about what it means to study media, while others encourage you to try out some different ways of approaching your learning – often these require you to produce a media product of your own, a key element of successful media study.

Some of the activities are short, others might take a longer time to complete. There is no set order to them, so begin simply by picking an article that seems particularly interesting to you. As you work your way through the pack you should start to see what a varied, interesting and intellectually challenging subject Media Studies is!

The articles in this resource all come from *MediaMagazine*, the English and Media Centre's magazine for A Level Media Studies and Film Studies students.



Your school probably already has a *MediaMagazine* web subscription. If so, make sure to ask your teacher for your school's unique username and password, which gives you ongoing access at home to the latest edition, plus all past editions and articles. That way, you can continue to explore the riches of the subject when you have finished this pack.

If your schools does not have a subscription, then ask your teacher to take one out by visiting <https://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/media-magazine/>.

# Task 1

## Deconstructing a Newspaper Front Page: Ownership and Bias

The article for this task is taken from *MediaMagazine* 69



**‘March 29th, 2019: The Day Brexit Didn’t Happen’**

## Exploring the article

■ Read **March 29th, 2019: The Day Brexit Didn't Happen** (MM69), by Jonathan Nunns.

■ Answer the following questions, drawing on the article for information and ideas.

1. What are some of the insights that you can get about a particular news event by studying a front page? How does these apply specifically to Brexit?
2. The article talks about 'deconstructing' a front page. What do you understand by deconstructing? Use a dictionary to help you if need be. In what ways does deconstructing a text differ from analysing a text?
3. What are the different regulatory systems that govern broadcast and print news? What are the consequences of the different systems in terms of what newspapers are able to do and their influence? What are your own thoughts about the pros and cons of these different systems?
4. The article mentions four tabloid and mid-range newspapers: *The Sun*, *The Daily Mirror*, *The Daily Express* and *The Daily Mail*. Based on what the article says, what do you understand to be the key differences and similarities between these publications. You should consider:
  - » Their ownership
  - » Their stance towards Brexit
  - » Their broader political affiliations
  - » Their readership
5. What are the agendas of the two broadsheet newspapers referred to: *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Guardian*. Are they different in any significant way to the tabloids and mid-range papers?
6. The article ends with a quotation from Umberto Eco: 'It's not the news that makes the newspaper, but the newspaper that makes the news.' To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement? You might consider where you get your own news from, and how reliable, biased or politically motivated it might be.



## Selecting two newspapers to study

The BBC publishes all of the UK's leading newspapers' front pages every day at [https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs/the\\_papers](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs/the_papers).

- Visit the web site and select two newspaper front pages that particularly interest you.
- Before you begin to deconstruct the front pages, you are going to research each publication. (Searching your newspaper on Wikipedia should give you a good overview of this information.) You need to make a factfile on each that includes the following:
  - » Is it a tabloid or a broadsheet, or somewhere in between (a mid-range newspaper)? Is the distinction to do with the size of the publication (the tabloid format is smaller than the broadsheet one), or is it to do with a typically tabloid or broadsheet approach to news?
  - » Political leanings – is the paper broadly left or right wing? Do they give support to a particular political party? Do they express strong views about particular issues? Do they campaign for any issues?
  - » Readership – what is the demographic of the newspaper's readership? You might think in terms of age, social class, gender, ethnicity and so on.
  - » Ownership – who and what can you find out about the company or individual who owns this publication? What else do they own? What other interests might they have?

## Comparing coverage

- Now look at the front pages of your chosen newspapers on any given day.
  - » What do you notice about the stories they have decided to cover?
  - » How much space is given to different categories of stories e.g. political, UK, global, health, education, entertainment, celebrities etc.? What might this reveal about how the newspapers might be trying to affect public opinion?

## Look more closely

- How does the language used in the headlines, standfirsts and captions differ across the front pages (this is especially interesting when the same lead story is covered across more than one paper)? What might this reveal about the attitude of the paper towards the subject being covered?
- Look at the images selected – does the headline or caption anchor the meaning; is the meaning possibly just an interpretation of the image? Has the image been deliberately constructed and if so in what ways and with what aims?
- Write a comparison of the two front pages you have studied or, if you're craving some production work, make a vlog sharing what you have learned from your research.





# **MARCH 29TH 2019**

## **THE DAY BREXIT DIDN'T HAPPEN**

In a world of fast-paced news cycles, events and positions can change before the ink on the page is dry. Jonathan Nunns takes a snapshot of a day's reporting and analyses what the papers made of the day Brexit didn't happen.





The coverage of Brexit day was as muddy and unclear as Brexit itself. However, one issue stood out. We may think disinformation is a modern, internet-age phenomenon but newspapers have always expressed strong bias and spun stories to their owners' advantage.

**H**ow to write about Brexit? Amidst the turmoil, anything written, even taking into account all the available facts, could be reversed by midnight, let alone by the time you read this. There have been some writers (and politicians) for whom truth has been dismissed in favour of career and agenda. However, it is more difficult when trying to catch the actual authenticity of something constantly changing. Writing about Brexit is like walking across a crustled lava field. What may appear firm is not, so tread carefully.

One way to circumvent this is to take a snapshot, deconstruct it and see what you learn. Where did things stand on March 29th? This was the day, as the then Prime Minister, Theresa May reminded the nation, Britain was due to leave the EU. How was the big (non) event covered by the newspapers? By this means, it may be possible to provide fruitful analysis that doesn't become outdated before the ink dries.

## News in Context

UK TV and Radio news are different (in more than the obvious ways) from the coverage provided in print. Broadcast media are regulated by OFCOM, (The Office of

Communications) a quango responsible for regulating communications in the UK. They require that broadcasters provide impartial/balanced coverage. No such rules apply to newspapers, which are allowed, as far as libel law will permit, to spin the news as they see fit. They are regulated by IPSO (The Independent Press Standards Organisation), a self-regulatory body criticised by some as toothless since it was set up and is run by the industry it scrutinises. For these reasons, the press acts more as a mouthpiece for the views and agendas of their proprietors than TV news ever does. The CEOs of the UK's news networks may have agendas to push, but their regulator largely prevents them.

For this reason, despite financial losses and declining circulation, newspapers remain much sought after by the rich and powerful. To own a

newspaper is to amplify your voice to a nationwide audience, an example of both hegemony and two step flow. To own a paper is to be an influencer, and influence has value beyond money. Newspapers aim to shape events by influencing the actions of those in power. No democratic government can be oblivious to their representation in the press, so policy may be changed to deliver coverage conducive to the re-election of a politician or party.

## Extra, Extra, Read All About It! The Redtops do Brexit

Rupert Murdoch's *The Sun* stoked the anti-EU campaign that fed Brexit, complaining endlessly about the alleged undermining of Britain by Europe. Unsurprising, since as a proponent of unchecked capitalism, Murdoch had been on a lifelong quest to remove regulations/rights that obstructed his companies gaining maximum influence and profit. This naturally put the bureaucratic EU directly in his way, so Murdoch applied *The Sun's* influence to secure a UK withdrawal. If you doubt this, take a look at the similar agendas of his Trump-supporting American network, Fox News.

*The Sun's* March 29th headline urges MP's to support May in what would become the third failed





Writing about Brexit is like walking across a crustled lava field. What may appear firm is not, so tread carefully.

attempt to get her Brexit deal through parliament. With support hinging on the votes of the Northern Irish DUP, the writers created a characteristically pun-filled front page.

'Come on Arlene' ran the headline, intertextually referencing the 80's hit, Come on Eileen, by Dexy's Midnight Runners. The nod is one of the primary indicators of the readership. Few under forty-five would recognise a song seldom heard today but huge in the 80s. To emphasise the link, the pre-heading played on the band's name to add topicality, punning with 'Brexy's Midnight Runners'.

With an older C2 to E demographic, *The Sun's* pro-Brexit stance was culturally on message and consistent with the ideology of their earlier splashes such as 'EU dirty rats' and 'See EU Later!'.

Compared to the pro-Conservative *Sun*, the Labour-supporting, anti-Brexit *Daily Mirror* is a rarity in a UK press dominated by Brexit-supporting, right-of-centre titles. On Brexit day, the paper took a muted tone. The cover featured only brief reference to Brexit/May's stalled deal, running instead with a royal story and a splash on an old story, the unsolved murder years earlier of the presenter, Jill Dando. The writers may have anticipated Brexit-fatigue in their demographic and avoided leading on it. There are questions about *The*

*Mirror's* anti-Brexit stance. Their owners, the renamed Reach Group, purchased Richard Desmond's right-wing *Express* titles months before, leaving the group with both the pro-Labour/anti-Brexit *Mirror* titles and the enthusiastically Conservative/UKIP/pro-Brexit *Express* titles. Which begs the question as to what the political stance of the group actually is? Currently it is shouting at itself, supporting both sides of Brexit from within the same stable.

### Shock Horror! How the Mid-market Tabloids Handled Brexit Disappointment

Reach's *Daily Express* ran with 'Darkest Hour For Democracy' superimposed across an image of Parliament overshadowed by storm clouds. Reversing the coverage by its *Mirror* stablemate, *The Express* ran with Brexit as the splash and the Dando story in support, reflecting the differing political orientations within a demographic otherwise similar to that of *The Mirror*.

*The Daily Mail* had been renowned for its contempt for Europe under the stewardship of veteran editor,

Conservative and Brexiteer, Paul Dacre. That positioning had been successful for the owner, the 4th Viscount Rothermere, whilst Brexit could be spun as a success. Once political deadlock set in, Dacre's position became untenable and Georgie Greig from the *Mail on Sunday* was rotated in as a more moderate voice to replace him. Hence the *Mail's* coverage was not what might have been expected. Instead of 'no deal' and 'hard-Brexit', the paper ran with 'One Last Chance', a reference to its newly-minted support for May and a slightly softer Brexit. The splash ran over a low-angle of Big Ben showing 11pm, the moment Brexit was meant to happen. The softened position reflected the proprietor and editor's thinking that a hard-Brexit stance was no longer as effective in retaining their readership of older C1s and C2s as awareness grew that Brexit was going badly wrong.

### Press Ganged! The Broadsheets and the Non-event

The anti-Brexit, centre-left *The Guardian*, the only independently owned national UK title, ran with coverage that reflected a title that did not have to obey the demands of a proprietor. Brexit was indirectly mentioned in 'May Tries To Buy Time As Ministers Say: Go Now', a reflection of their view that the



To own a newspaper is to amplify your voice to a nationwide audience, an example of both hegemony and two step flow. To own a paper is to be an influencer and influence has value beyond money.

PM was weakened by the failure to deliver Brexit. The core demographic of educated, public sector, B and C1s might be expected to sympathise with the anti-Conservative/anti-Brexit position. The nuancing of the cover allowed the title to appear impartial in its coverage whilst speculating on the race for the PM's job.

It was left to the pro-Conservative/pro-Brexit *The Daily Telegraph* to headline with genuine disappointment and disillusionment with the Brexit non-event. Running with both a splash and op-ed on the cover, *The Telegraph* ran with the polysemic 'Day of Reckoning', over a shot of stereotypically older, white Brexiters assembling for a pro-leave march.

Beneath, for the op-ed, ran a more sinister heading 'Champagne celebrations have been replaced by the bitter taste of betrayal': the first steps towards a narrative that blames not the concept of Brexit for the failure but politicians who can be made responsible for 'dropping the ball' on the 'otherwise

excellent' Brexit project? This outlook reflects the agenda of the proprietors, the billionaire Barclay brothers, who are arch deregulators, running their businesses from a helipad-equipped castle on their own private island.

### Scoop?

The coverage of Brexit day was as muddy and unclear as Brexit itself. However, one issue stood out. We may think disinformation is a modern, internet age phenomenon but newspapers have always expressed strong bias and spun stories to their owners' advantage. As the Italian postmodernist Umberto Eco commented. 'It's not the news that makes the newspaper, but the newspaper that makes the news.'

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





# Task 2

## Charting the History of British Music Video

The article for this task is taken from *MediaMagazine* 66



‘Charting the History of British Music Video’

## Exploring the article

■ Read **Charting the History of British Music Video** (*MM66*), by Emily Caston.

■ Answer the following questions, drawing on the article for information and ideas.

1. According to the article's writer, Emily Caston, how significant was MTV in the development of British music video production?
2. What criteria did Emily Caston and her team use for selecting music videos for their 6-DVD box set? What are your thoughts about the criteria? What music videos do you know that you would include in such a selection?
3. Bohemian Rhapsody is often quoted as being the first British music video. The article argues otherwise. Why is that? Why was 'Bo-Rhap' not included in the box set?
4. The box set is made up of six different categories: performance; concept; dance; stories; wit; portraits. If you were putting together a selection of videos, what categories would you choose to use?
5. The article ends by noting that videos are now consumed by millions globally, 'uncurated on mobile platforms'. What might be the significance of a curated collection in light of these consumption patterns?

## Curating your own collection

Imagine that you have been given the chance to curate a selection of music videos to represent your experience of secondary school, from the moment you joined until the end of Year 11.

- Select five videos that you want to include in your selection.
- Outline in writing what is significant about each video, both as an art form in its own right, and in relation to your time at secondary school.



## Music video and experimentation

In her article Emily Caston talks about how the music video is an innovative and experimental form. Many a successful film director has either made their name as a music video director or still uses the form to experiment with editing, photography and post production effects.

- Watch the following two videos by British film directors: [Radiohead's 'Street Spirit'](#) (Jonathan Glazer, 1995) and [FKA Twigs' 'tw-ache'](#) (Tom Beard, 2014).

- » What are your thoughts about both videos? In what ways might they be seen as experimental (as well as weird, intriguing and exciting)?
- » How do they create an impact? How do they complement or challenge the music?
- » Who is the audience for each video? (It can be useful to read the comments on YouTube to get a sense of people's reactions to them but don't do this if you're sensitive to bad language!)
- » Is there anything distinctly 'British' about either or both of them? (Think about what the article says about the history of music video in the UK.)

## Comparing a director's video and film output

Jonathan Glazer directed Radiohead's 'Street Spirit' just a few years before directing his first feature, the brilliant *Sexy Beast* (2000), starring Ben Kingsley and Ray Winston.

He is widely praised for his film work. But is his music video work also worthy of artistic recognition?

- Watch the following videos and trailers by Glazer:

- » Video for U.N.K.L.E's '[Rabbit in the Headlights](#)'
- » Trailer for [Sexy Beast \(2000\)](#)
- » Trailer for [Under the Skin \(2013\)](#) – a set text for A level Film Studies – seems to draw on ideas from 'Rabbit in Your Headlights'.

- What connections can you find between Glazer's music videos and his feature films? You should think about:

- » Recurring motifs and images
- » Use of cuts and particular shots
- » Use of sound (is there any sound in the videos beyond the music itself, for example?)
- » Use of colour
- » Use of special effects.

# CHARTING THE HISTORY OF BRITISH MUSIC VIDEO

Some say it all began with MTV, others with 'Bohemian Rhapsody'. In 2015 the University of West London started a project to find out the truth. The result is a 6-disc DVD box-set that features 200 landmark British music videos going back as far as the mid-Sixties. Here we unpack the box-set, define 'landmark' and explain why 'Bo-Rhap' is not even included.



Firstly, about MTV. If you set out to study music video – and why not? – you soon notice that writers are fixated on MTV. Keith Negus (1992) is not alone in proposing that 'it was the launch of Music Television (MTV) ... which provided the momentum for the establishment of music video as an integral part of the pop process'. And you only have to read the titles of some books to get their sense of history: *MTV Ruled the World: The early years of music video* by Greg Prato (2010), or *I Want My MTV: The Uncensored Story of the Music Video Revolution* (2012).

Now that the age of MTV is past we can put it in perspective. Yes, it was a major international showcase for music video (kick-started, incidentally, by the second 'British invasion' of early 1980s synth-pop acts like Duran Duran and Wham!) that normalised music video as essential to promoting any new release. But

British labels started to commission videos well before this; between 1975 and 1980, when European release dates were being harmonised in order to prevent audiocassette piracy, labels needed footage of their bands to send out to European TV stations in lieu of a live TV performance. It was this shift that saw the commissioning of iconic videos such as Queen's 'Bohemian Rhapsody' (1975), M's 'Pop Muzik' (1979), and the Boomtown Rats' 'I Don't Like Mondays' (1979). MTV Europe wasn't launched until 1987 (6 years after its American parent) and even then most UK households couldn't access cable/satellite services. So, in Britain we came up with our own answer: *The Chart Show* (Channel 4, 1986-8, ITV, 1989-98). It was *The Chart Show*, rather than MTV, that galvanised the British music video industry with the rapid growth of key production companies like Oil Factory (set up to promote the Eurythmics),



FKA Twigs in concert at Sonar Festival, 2015 in Barcelona

MGMM (behind many of the biggest names in British pop in the 80s), Black Dog (founded by director Ridley Scott), and later Warp (who traded on the 1990s popularity of electronic music). This infrastructure enabled the emergence of some notable music video directors: Brian Grant, David Mallet, Russell Mulcahy, Sophie Muller, Godley & Crème, Tim Pope, Richard Heslop, Chris Cunningham, Garth Jennings. And directors who are now better known for their feature film work – Bernard Rose, Derek Jarman, John Maybury, Jonathan Glazer and Julien Temple – have all made significant interventions in the field of music video. Examples of some of their work are featured on the box-set. So how did we choose?

## The Hit List

We set about asking the people who made the videos what we should include. We deliberately didn't want to create a 'best of British music video' list and we weren't interested in merely representing the changing trends in British pop music over the last half-century. So, we asked our industry panel about works they considered to be landmarks in the development of the form of music video in the UK, both technically and creatively. And we worked with specific focus groups on the topics of dance, animation, editing and authorship. This enabled us to create a longlist. But then we had to clear the rights to use these videos with the artists and their record labels. Everyone was hugely supportive of our project for two reasons. Firstly, although music video seems to be everywhere, and we all remember a great video, its status as an artform has been undervalued; to many it's just another form of advertising. We wanted to challenge that assumption and demonstrate what an influential and innovative form of short film music video is, and most artists and

We asked our industry panel about works they considered to be landmarks in the development of the form of music video in the UK, both technically and creatively.

The iconic floating heads of 'Bohemian Rhapsody' have been parodied by everyone from *Wayne's World* to *The Muppets*



Public Domain



It highlights the influence of the art school tradition in Britain that has informed ground-breaking photography, editing, animation and post-production effects

film-makers were keen to help. Secondly, the industry was supportive of our aim to create an educational resource that can be used by students to inform their studies and to inspire the next generation of musicians and film-makers.

### **'Bo-Rhap'**

But we couldn't include everything – e.g. 'Bohemian Rhapsody'. It's ironic, but the video that many consider to be a UK first, Queen wouldn't let us use unless we put it first on the box-set – and we didn't agree. How did it get this status? Keith Negus calls it 'the first conscious use of music video to promote a pop single' (Negus 1992: 93). But it was not the first British music video. Only the year before Michael Lindsay-Hogg had directed a video of the Rolling Stones' single 'It's Only Rock 'n' Roll (But I Like It)' in which the Stones, dressed in sailor uniforms, strut their stuff in an inflatable tent which slowly fills with foam until they're entirely engulfed by

bubbles. This is in the collection. And in 1972-3 Mick Rock directed David Bowie videos for 'John, I'm Only Dancing', 'The Jean Genie' and 'Life on Mars'. But Bruce Gowers' video of 'Bohemian Rhapsody' captured the public imagination and lodged there, because it was (unusually) a single of over six minutes' duration, it occupied the No.1 position in the UK charts for nine weeks (and was thus shown weekly on Top of the Pops because the band declined to appear in person at the BBC studios), and it combined performance footage with a couple of (then) novel in-camera special effects. The prismatic lens shots of the band-members' heads were based on publicity photographs and the album artwork for *A Night At The Opera* (on which 'Bohemian Rhapsody' featured), thus reinforcing the group's brand image. And the colour-spectrum vision 'feedback' technique appeared to mimic, visually, the layered 'choral' effect on Freddie Mercury's vocal arpeggio. In these respects, non-performance, conceptual elements of the video served both to promote the band itself, and to present a visual corollary of the music. But if such stylistic flourishes are now widely familiar in the filmic vocabulary of music video, they are also to be found in some enterprising 'promotional clips' made back in the 1960s.

### **Forgotten Gems**

One of the great things this project has allowed us to do is to rediscover and re-present forgotten gems. Since 1992, British music video





## References

Power to the People: British Music Videos 1966-2016. Available to purchase from Amazon for £35.99

maestro WIZ had carefully kept the 16mm print of Flowered Up's 'Weekender' in his loft. Sony Music UK and our project research grant invested the funds to digitise the rushes so that an eye-match edit and a grade could be done, to produce a new work, presented for the first time in this collection. Also, we found out that John Crome, a director who worked in TV commercials in the 1960s, had lodged a 16mm print of a performance video he made in 1968 for Manfred Mann's 'The Mighty Quinn' at the BFI's National Archive. Under the supervision of the director, we had the print digitised and regraded. The restoration, included in the box-set, shows the band performing on the steps of Osterley Park (an eighteenth-century mansion in West London), but incorporates a wealth of visual ideas (including a roving suitcase emblazoned with the title), uses a variety of coloured gels for psychedelic effect, and features in-camera optical techniques (fish-eye lens shots and superimposition). Crome had trained at Hydrant Films as a sound editor and, above all, knew about editing images to sound in a coherent, visually dynamic way. 'The Mighty Quinn' video is way ahead of its time.

This collection is presented across six themed discs: performance videos, concept videos, dance videos, stories, wit and portraits. It not only showcases some of the most innovative music videos made in the UK, from Joy Division's 'Love Will Tear Us Apart' (1980) to Daniel Wolfe's epic trilogy for Plan B (2010), and from Kate Bush's 'Running Up That Hill' (1985) to FKA Twigs' 'Tw-ache' (2014), it highlights the influence of the art school tradition in Britain that has informed

ground-breaking photography, editing, animation and post-production effects in music video that have had a considerable impact on contemporary Hollywood film-making. It also draws attention to the distinctive practices in British choreography that have made British dance videos unique. Finally, from The Who's 'Happy Jack' (1966), through Queen's 'I Want To Break Free' (1984), to the Moonlandingz's 'The Strangle of Anna' (2017), it's got a great British sense of humour.

Whatever your starting point, this is a powerful body of work and as music video is now enjoyed by many more consumers globally, uncured on mobile platforms, it's a great time to look back in wonder at how we got here.

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**Emily Caston is Professor of Screen Industries at the University of West London. She will be appearing at the *MediaMagazine* Student Conference on January 24th at the BFI Southbank.**





# Task 3

## *Teen Vogue's Cross Platform Strategy*

The article for this task is taken from *MediaMagazine* 70



**'Teen Vogue: Three Ways the Magazine Slayed the Move from Print to Online'**

## Exploring the article

■ Read *Teen Vogue: Three Ways the Magazine Slayed the Move from Print to Online* (MM70), by Georgia Platman.

■ Answer the following questions, drawing on the article for information and ideas.

1. How does *Teen Vogue* differ in digital form from how it was launched as a print publication in 2003?
2. What was at the heart the magazine's strategy to boost its reach and readership after switching to digital?
3. What tone of voice does the magazine use? How is this likely to appeal to its target audience?
4. In what ways does *Teen Vogue* achieve its aim of 'disrupting the conversation'? What examples does the article draw on?
5. What is *Teen Vogue's* approach to diversity and sub-cultures? How does this fit in with its overall strategy?
6. What is the magazine's aesthetic (its look)? Which element of design do you think is most important to this aesthetic? Colour? Typeface? Logos? Images?

## Teen Vogue's social media platforms

*Teen Vogue* uses each of its social media platforms – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter – in different ways.

- Read the coverage from each platform over the past 24 hours.
  - » <https://twitter.com/TeenVogue>
  - » <https://www.instagram.com/teenvogue/>
  - » <https://en-gb.facebook.com/teenvogue/>
- What different techniques do writers use on each platform to encourage clicks? You should think about:
  - » How the same story is presented across different platforms
  - » How readers interact (shares, likes, etc.)
  - » How each platform uses language – how much, tone, formality etc.
  - » How each platform uses images
  - » Any other techniques that are platform specific.
- Now look at the [Teen Vogue website](#). What do you notice about how it is laid out, the order in which it lists articles, the way it uses headlines, its use of images, and so on? You should focus on the homepage to do this.
- Finally, think about other online magazines or newspapers you may have studied or read. Do they use social media platforms to present their information in different ways? A good example would be how [The Guardian newspaper uses Instagram to share its news stories](#).

## Sharing on social media

- Choose a story from *Teen Vogue* that has only recently been published. Imagine you have been given the task of spreading the story across the magazine's multiple online platforms.
- Design and write the copy for a series of posts for Facebook, Twitter and Instagram (or TikTok and Snapchat if you're looking for an extra challenge). Use the techniques you identified earlier in this task.

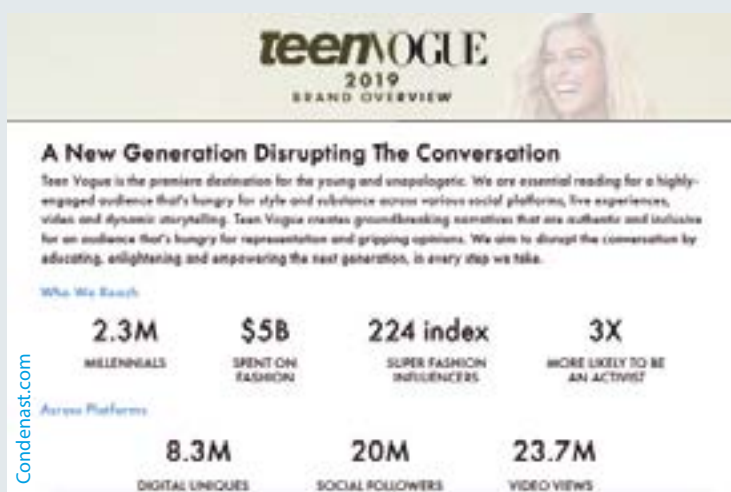
## Researching branded content and brand identity

- If your school has access to the *MediaMagazine* subscription site, then read Delphine Chui being interviewed for the Careers Download feature. She creates digital branded content for several magazine titles published by Hearst (*MM70*, p.64). You can do this activity without this feature, but it will add to your ideas.
- Look at [Teen Vogue's video page](#) and the content it shares on social media. Identify examples of branded content?
- Look for videos or series that are entertaining but also selling or promoting products and think about how effective they are at promoting both the product being advertised but also the magazine's brand identity.

# teenVOGUE

Georgia Platman  
analyses the  
success of this teen  
magazine brand.

## 3 Ways the Magazine Slayed the Move from Print to Online



**T**een Vogue magazine was never meant to ruffle feathers. It was launched in 2003 in the United States as the younger sister of the internationally famous fashion magazine *Vogue* (see page 36) and it offered pretty generic fodder for young women: what to wear to prom; how to get the perfect nails; anti-aging beauty regimes; celebrity red carpet looks. But as the publication moved deeper into digital, it welcomed younger writers and editors who gradually shifted the brand's voice, turning it into a rather different beast. The strategy was wildly successful and it has since become, as per its own tagline, 'The young person's guide to conquering (and saving) the world', with a far broader audience than teenage girls. Indeed the magazine claims to have over 8 million unique users across its many platforms each month. Here are a few ways it achieved online domination Teen Vogue-style.

### Find Your Platforms

*Teen Vogue*, the magazine, wound down its print operations over a number of years, going from monthly to quarterly and then online only in 2018. The publishing industry has long struggled to navigate a profitable way to keep print magazines and newspapers alive in the face of digitalisation and the proliferation of online news. Those at the helm of *Teen Vogue* saw that teenagers were increasingly getting all their news from their phones – more specifically, social media – and decided to throw its weight behind online publishing instead.

However, going exclusively online had its risks; essentially it was becoming a 'free' product for its users and would have to rely even more on advertising to maintain itself and to retain

Since it has been online-only, articles have been written by and about almost every subculture and ethnic minority imaginable. The magazine uses shorthand for various communities, making the assumption that its audience needs no explanation for LGBTQ, Latinx, POC, WOC, QPOC, because they too are progressive Americans on the side of social justice.



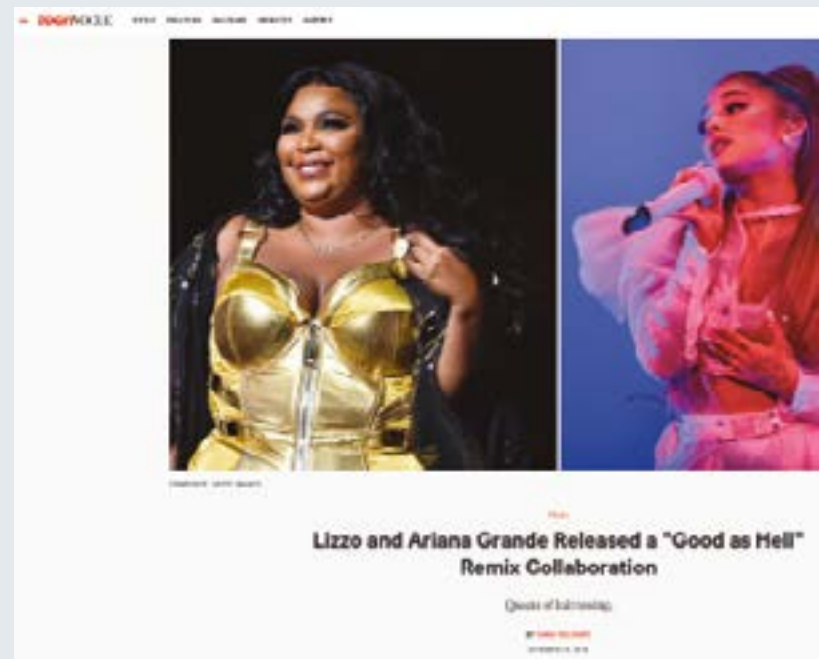
advertisers; a website has to retain and grow its readership. Luckily for *Teen Vogue*, its savvy young digital team knew exactly how to do that. They upped their social media game, making sure they were present on more platforms, creating more shareable video content and devising headlines and teasers that proved irresistible. The strategy worked and it got them the clicks they needed to pull in advertisers and survive in the competitive digital landscape.

## Find Your Voice

*Teen Vogue* strives to be 'the premiere destination for the young and unapologetic' and uses a direct mode of address: it speaks directly to its readers like a friend. Its tone is gossipy yet political, opinionated and alert to social injustices or 'woke' in the parlance of its readership. The magazine sees itself 'disrupting the conversation' and having its voice heard in the very adult world of current affairs, opinion-makers and commentators.

The most famous example – the moment when the magazine broke out of its niche mould and made the world sit up and take notice of its new strategy – was with the article, 'Donald Trump Is Gaslighting America'. It came out at just the right time to go viral, after the 2016 presidential election but before Trump was inaugurated. It received 30,000 shares on Twitter and helped the magazine get millions more social media followers: from 2.7 million unique visitors in 2016 to more than 9.2 million in 2017!

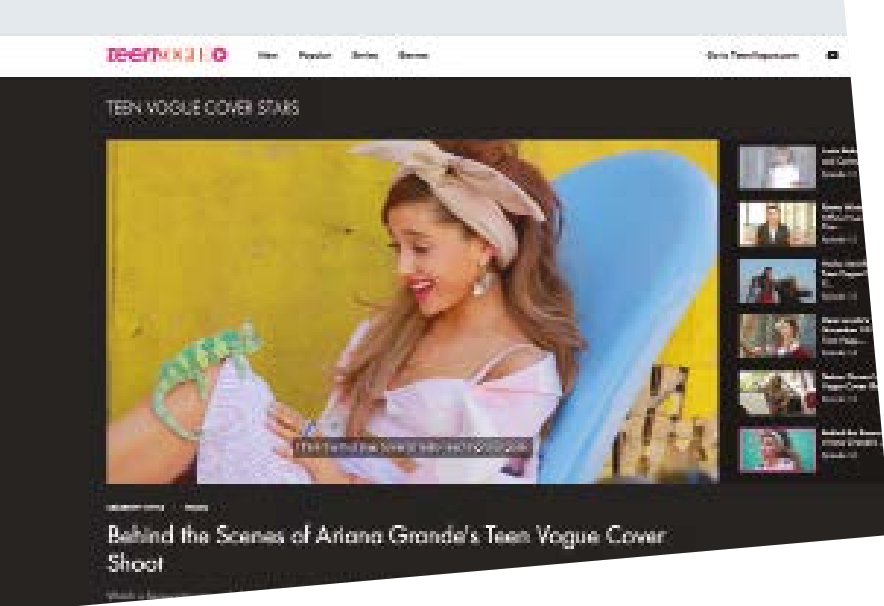
Unlike other news outlets, which strive for neutrality, *Teen Vogue* has no qualms about saying what it believes. Recent headlines have included: 'It's Okay to Have a Crush, but Dating Your Teacher Is Wrong', and, 'AOC Is Right: Climate Change 'Hits Vulnerable Communities First''. Why does this work in terms of getting our attention? Imagine if those headlines were more traditional: 'Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez: Climate Change 'Hits Vulnerable Communities First''. *Teen Vogue's* version lays its



Its tone is gossipy yet political, opinionated and alert to social injustices, or 'woke' in the parlance of its readership.



The two words together create the idea that youth and style are inseparable, but also that reading *Teen Vogue* will teach you how to be ready for the sophistication and style of the adult world.



cards on the table and makes assumptions about its readers: it assumes we know the nickname for the young senator whose strong opinions regularly make waves in US politics, it assumes we care about climate change and it assumes we care about vulnerable people. Because it makes such a strong statement, 'AOC is right', it provokes a strong reaction in its readers: we are more likely to click or share in solidarity, or in disgust.

Pronouns have become powerful tools in *Teen Vogue's* vocabulary, with I, you, and we becoming key to talking to their audience. Whether it's used

to make you want to read a personal exposé – 'When I Started Dating Women I Thought Misogyny Would Be Gone. I Was Wrong' – make you feel part of the in crowd – 'Rihanna's Only Airport Luggage Was a Mini Bag, and We Need Her Packing Secrets' – or make you feel like the website is giving you something exclusive – 'Here's Your First Look at Dollface, Kat Dennings' New Comedy About Friendships' – the personal pronouns certainly encourage engagement.

While other magazines have used slang and new language before, *Teen Vogue* has made its readers understand that it is not only talking the talk, it is walking the walk when it comes to diversity of voices. Since it has been online-only, articles have been written by and about almost every subculture and ethnic minority imaginable. The magazine uses shorthand for various communities, making the assumption that its audience needs no explanation for LGBTQ, Latinx, POC, WOC, QPOC, because they too are progressive Americans on the side of social justice. This audacity has seen *Teen Vogue* prosper with young people (who do not need to be patronised) where other, more traditional women's magazines have failed. With pride, it constantly challenges stereotypical representations and champions diverse voices and looks.

## Find Your Style

*Teen Vogue's* aesthetic is deceptively simple, but a brief analysis of the media language it uses tell us a lot about the brand and how it wants to present itself. One way the brand is unconventional is in terms of gender expectations and the use of colour. Girls' magazines traditionally used a lot of 'girly' colours: soft pastels and a lot of pink. *Teen Vogue* could not be further from that. The logos for the website and the brand's social media pages use a simple



## How to annotate a webpage

It's useful to know lots of website terminology so that when you're writing about online content, you can be specific. (Tip: When analysing a website, make sure you have any ad blockers turned off so you can see all the content!)

- *Teen Vogue* follows standard website codes and conventions.
- The home page consists of a header, body and footer.
- The header contains the magazine's logo and the main menu, as well as a collapsible menu bar (which contains the four main sections of the website plus social links) and a search bar.
- The body contains five featured stories followed by a highlighted content bar with the most-read 'trending' stories, and next comes every story the magazine publishes in reverse chronological order in a simple list. There are plenty of banner ads and internal links.
- The website's footer has social links, a copyright and date stamp, and some extra links to video content, a newsletter signup option, and corporate information. In using a conventional structure for the website, *Teen Vogue* allows its content – that is, its stories – to shine.

HEADER

BODY

FOOTER



**Analysis:** Because readers are not confronted with an unconventional website layout, they can easily navigate to the story they want and the editors can choose featured stories to direct us to. Following web codes and conventions therefore makes the website as accessible as possible to try to capture a broad audience to attract more advertisers to bring in more revenue.

palette of red (with its connotations of passion and love), black (connoting maturity, timeless elegance, Parisian glamour), and white (simplicity, purity). The logo is different on the website compared with TV's social media platforms.

The typefaces used for the logo are also significant. 'Teen' is in a bold, lowercase italicised sans serif font that looks excited and energised, while 'Vogue' is in the same stately, thin serif uppercase font that the grown-up version of the magazine uses. The two words together create the idea that youth and style are inseparable, but also that reading *Teen Vogue* will teach you how to be ready for the sophistication and style of the adult world. On Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, the logo is round, as per the conventions of those platforms. The black has gone and the logo is in white lettering on a red background. The red is slightly pinker than on the website, making it less demanding. The word 'Teen' sits proudly above 'Vogue', giving the idea that when it comes to social media, young people are now on top.

## Here to stay?

With the constantly shifting landscape of the internet, *Teen Vogue's* current status as a publication with its finger on the pulse is far from guaranteed. But what is clear is that, via its forward-thinking move online, its convention-breaking content and aesthetic, and its use of cross-platform convergence to broaden its audience, it has earned its place in magazine history.

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# Task 4

## Audience Research: A Gogglebox-style Research Experiment

The article for this task is taken from *MediaMagazine* 58



‘Watching Me, Watching You’ and ‘Who Watches the Watchers?’

## Exploring the article

- Read **Watching Me, Watching You** (MM58), by Emma Calway, and **Who Watches the Watchers?** (MM58) by Matt Kaufman.
- Answer the following questions, drawing on the article for information and ideas.

### Questions for 'Watching Me, Watching You'

1. What is the intertextual link between the first series of *Gogglebox* and sitcom, *The Royle Family*? How does it bear similarities to 1960s kitchen-sink drama?
2. Why does the article's writer, Emma Calway, think that viewers hold the power when watching *Gogglebox*?
3. How does the show subvert current viewing habits and so reinforce ideas of nostalgia?
4. Why might the responses of participants in the show not be 'authentic'? How did producer, Tania Alexander, try to insure against this?
5. What does the article tell you about Stuart Hall's model of communication? What is your own reading of *Gogglebox*? What do you think leads you to this reading, in terms of how the show presents itself, but also in terms of your existing beliefs, ideas, likes and dislikes, background and so on?
6. In what ways does *Gogglebox*, according to the article, offer a snapshot of modern day life?
7. Mindless reality TV or something more complex? What do you think?

### Questions about 'Who Watches the Watchers?'

1. Based on what the article says, try to write down your own brief definition of postmodernism.
2. How does *Gogglesprogs* (and *Gogglebox*) distort notions of time and space?
3. Based on the article, what do you understand to be the difference between parody and pastiche? Which category do *Gogglesprogs* and *Gogglebox* fall into?
4. What do you understand by the terms coined by Jean Baudrillard: *simulacra* and *hyper-reality*? In what ways are *Gogglesprogs* and *Gogglebox* examples of these terms?

## Conduct your own Gogglebox-style research experiment

You are going to conduct your own *Gogglebox*-style research experiment. Your aim is to explore how different people respond to, and talk about, online texts.

- Create a playlist of five clips, easily found on YouTube, which you feel reflect a diverse range of interests and styles – anything from cats to music to news or political items to comedy clips.
- Send the playlist to a selected group of family or friends on a video conferencing platform recommended and validated by your school for shared activities. Try and invite a range of age groups.
- Ask them to talk about each clip, while you record or take notes about their comments. You could also film these discussions to include the body language and facial expressions of your participants (but make sure they know you are filming!).
- Analyse your findings, considering the following:
  - » What differences do you notice in people's reactions to different genres of clip in terms of age, gender, familiarity with digital formats etc.?
  - » Are there any particular features which distinguish an online clip from the TV extracts you see in *Gogglebox*??
  - » Are they interchangeable, or do you find your group discussing online material in a different way from film or TV clips?
  - » Were you surprised by any reactions?
- Discuss with your participants the experience of watching in a group the sorts of texts they would normally watch alone on their phones or tablets. Do the clips gain or lose when watched collectively or as part of an 'event'?
- Write a summary of your findings. You might like to do this in the style of a blogpost about viewing habits. Are you able to draw any conclusions from the experiment?





# WATCHING ME,

**In two linked articles, Emma Calway explores the enduring popularity of *Gogglebox* with its audiences, while Matt Kaufman considers what *Gogglebox* and *Gogglesprogs* can teach us about the slippery concept of postmodernism.**

**G**ogglebox features a concept that could only have been realised in the 21st century, a cross between an Orwellian nightmare and a real version of *The Royle Family* (the late Caroline Aherne, screenwriter and actress from the sitcom, first provided the tongue-in-cheek narration for *Gogglebox*, followed by her co-star Craig Cash). This series gets us watching other viewers on their own sofas in their own living rooms, who watch the same TV that we will have watched that week. Is it, then, mindless reality TV that we can switch on when we want to switch off, or is it a study of something more complex, something symptomatic of our isolated, modern culture?

*Gogglebox*'s hit ratings (it's currently in its seventh series) hint at its unique character: it's not part of the tired reality talent TV formula adhered to by *Strictly*, *X Factor*, or *The Voice*, where contestant is set against contestant, instead somehow managing to create feelings of togetherness in a disconnected, fragmented society. It has similarities with 1960s soap operas

that portrayed kitchen sink drama with nitty-gritty realism, albeit it in a safe environment. We can check our own thoughts, fears and hopes against a safe paradigm, where we can judge others but don't get judged ourselves. In this respect, we hold the power.

This safety net is structured around a familiar recurring cast who we get to know over time; families, couples and friends from all over the UK watch British TV that spans all genres. We can watch them watching it, comfortable in the fact that what we see won't be gruesome or shocking. We are screened from shocking content, aware of the cast's reaction before we see the actual scene in question, providing us with a protective prism but also with a useful way to get the lowdown on the week's TV. We can choose what to watch and what to avoid, based on the reactions of the *Gogglebox* cast.

The show is also traditional in the way it places the living room and the TV set as the focal point for families, looking back to a time when the moving image really was consumed in this way. This is of course, completely at odds with evidence of the younger generation's viewing habits; many prefer to watch/stream box sets on services like Netflix and view on devices such as tablets, laptops and smart phones, or TV catch-up, rather than watching it live on the box with the rest of the family.



# WATCHING YOU

In this way *Gogglebox* is nostalgic and reinforces the theme of togetherness and family values. This can also create much hilarity as we see how different generations view the same event. We watch TV differently, not just in format but also because of who we are watching it with.

Airing on Channel 4 at 9pm, the Bafta-winning show shows warts-and-all reactions: tears, anger, swearing, shock and laughter – it manages to span all aspects of the human spirit, elements that unite us all. Farah Ramzan Golant, the boss of TV distribution company, All3Media, commented in the *Evening Standard* that:

**Everyone loves watching TV and talking about TV. But the show isn't really about TV. The show is about people's lives, their relationships, their living rooms and the way children and parents talk about TV.**

One of the major attractions of *Gogglebox* is that its cast is accessible. During transmission, you can tweet the cast of the show. Newcastle's Scarlett Moffat is a particularly active participant who frequently interacts with us, the viewers.

It's a fascinating study of human behaviour – we like to see the houses of the cast, what's changed in comparison

to the previous week, and every now and then, a new family, couple or trio of friends. There will be features we recognise from the previous week: Steph and Dom invariably quaff an alcoholic beverage while the Moffats have cups of tea and the Malones usually have an array of sweet treats.

However, can the cast's reactions really be completely authentic? After all, like *Big Brother*, the cast know not only that they are being watched, but that they might be prime-time TV gold. They may be particularly careful about what they say because they are conscious of public perception; alternatively, they may deliberately say shocking, outlandish things to ensure more screen time for themselves. After all, the posh Sandwich duo, Steph and Dom Parker, have gone on to make further programmes with Nigel Farage, while another family was dropped when the father tried to run as a UKIP MP. Inevitably some participants may crave the spotlight, and rather than an authentic study of human behaviour, the experiment thus becomes skewed. Tania Alexander, Executive Producer, stated in the *Radio Times*,

**I knew from the off that I didn't want to put people on television who wanted to be on television.**

While this may have been true at the outset, the cast are now





relatively famous, and several have already exploited their notoriety with appearances on talk shows and reality programmes. Scarlett Moffat, a particularly popular pundit, has now joined the 2016 series of *I'm a Celebrity*.

## Agency and Effects

Stuart Hall's model of communication of the 1980s and 1990s challenged the view that the media have the power to directly cause a certain behaviour in an individual (the so-called hypodermic needle model), while at the same time exploring the role of media as an agenda-setting function. Hall's model put forward three central premises:

1. the same event can be encoded in more than one way;
2. a message contains more than one possible reading; and
3. understanding a message can be a problematic process, regardless of how natural it may seem.

Hall argued that the dominant ideology is typically inscribed as the 'preferred reading' in a media text, but that this is not automatically adopted by readers. 'Dominant' readings are produced by those whose social situation favours the preferred reading.

The differing social situations and experiences of readers/viewers/listeners may lead them to adopt different stances.

*Gogglebox* offers a fascinating insight into how Hall's theory can work in practice. In watching the different reactions from different individuals and families to the same footage, we see that an event can indeed be encoded in more than one way, that it contains

a range of potential meanings and that understanding a message can be problematic. The *Gogglebox* cast consists of a mix of races, sexualities, ages and genders and they react differently on many major themes. To take just one example, an episode in Series 7 focused on coverage of the Tata Steel crisis: the majority of the cast was outraged by what was happening, for a range of different reasons. The Michael family in Brighton, for example, were worried about the hundreds of people who would lose their jobs. Steph and Dom, in contrast, concluded that the steel industry was finished – why are we still supporting this industry when foreigners can do it cheaper, they argued?

*Gogglebox* offers a snapshot (albeit a contrived one) of modern, everyday life. Watching, we see how certain events can bring the majority of people together as one, regardless of religion, gender, background, or race. Often, it seems, the most shocking events do this. They seem to make us recognise our shared values, while others allow us to celebrate our differences. There is nothing, it seems, more interesting than the sociology of human beings and this in part, explains the enduring popularity of *Gogglebox*.

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Emma Calway works as a content writer for Ad Rank.





# WHO WATCHES THE WATCHERS

Matt Kaufman offers a postmodern reading of *Gogglebox* and *Gogglesprogs*.

Postmodernism is an extensive and often challenging concept, which you will need to engage with regardless of which examination specification you're following. This article will discuss a small number of key postmodern features in relation to case studies of *Gogglebox* and its junior incarnation, *Gogglesprogs*, which aired in 2015. It follows the same format as its parent show, except that the participants are children aged between 5-12. At the height of their popularity both shows have pulled audience figures in excess of 4 million.

## What is Postmodernism?

Many comparisons have been made between the era of modernism (arguably from the mid-19th century to the mid-1950s) which reflected a sense of the world through rational approaches that included science and academia, reason and logic, and the newer thinking of the late 20th century, broadly described as postmodernism. A postmodern perspective argues that previous approaches which drew on the rational certainties of modernism are no longer viable in our media-

saturated Western culture. Together with huge global geo-political developments, the exponential rise of the media and digital communication means that an abundance of voices now suggest a range of alternative models which are more relevant to modern day life. Whereas in the past identifiable paradigms such as Feminism, Marxism or others allowed us to form a coherent understanding of the world, such absolutes are now no longer viable. In a postmodern world there

are no longer any strict rules to be adhered to, and everything is in a state of flux. This is reflected in our art and our architecture, our communications and our media products.

## Recognising Some Postmodern Features: Confusion Over Space and Time

In our modern day world we have numerous examples of how time and space are compressed and can become confusing and incoherent. Clear geographical distances and time scales have become jumbled and undermined. Rapid flows of culture, money and information lead to a feeling of distortion. We no longer hold a firm grasp on the concepts of time and space because we can learn about any number of far removed cultures and lands at the touch of a button, can send emails and texts as well as Skype and Facetime people across the world, speaking to them instantly despite what may be thousands of miles or hours of difference in time zones.

When watching *Gogglesprogs* we note how time and space seem distorted. For starters the segments of programming such as *Britain's Got Talent* or *The Voice* used within

Modernism	Postmodernism
Grand narrative of progress achieved though following science and technology	Scepticism of progress, ambivalence towards technology reactions, neo-Luddism; emerging new age religions
Sense of unified and centred self; 'individualism', a unified, stable identity	Feelings of disconnection and a decentred self; multiple, fluid and sometimes conflicting identities e.g. online personalities
Hierarchy, order, centralised control	Subverted order, loss of centralised control, fragmentation
Easily recognisable and identifiable styles, conventions and genres	Blending of conventions and genres, mixture of styles



the programme may have already been watched by you beforehand, possibly weeks earlier. But now you are watching it again, this time alongside people watching it for the very first time. These people are sat in their front rooms but as we join them we could move between following participants in parts of London or Manchester, over to those sat in homes in Wales or Scotland, and then back again.

## Parody or Pastiche?

Another of the features of a postmodern society is to recognise that we now have an abundance of **style over substance**, meaning that there is far too much importance placed on the surface of things – the way products look and present themselves – as opposed to an exploration of any deeper meaning found within. We value the appearance and simplicity of things over any complex insights or depth. For example take any number of celebrities who are famous not so much for their great talents or abilities, but more for simply being attractive or famous for being famous. Reality television, the genre that *Gogglebox* and *Gogglesprogs* belongs, is well known for producing (C list) celebrities who actually have little talent to back up their found fame-for example Joey Essex.

Fredrick Jameson, a political theorist, takes the idea of style over substance and discusses it in terms of **pastiche**. To understand what a pastiche is, it should be viewed as the opposite of a parody. When something is parodied, a number of things are happening:

something is copied and mimicked, easily recognisable conventions are repeated but there is also a level of analysis taking place, often through humour, which seeks to pick holes in the original. Parody by definition implies a critique which highlights any issues present. This is effectively illustrated in the short news report segments performed by Jonathan Pie, who mimics news items but then breaks with convention to make various satirical comments about biased news coverage and political and social issues.

How pastiche differs is that whilst it may involve the use of conventions from existing products and genres, often with satirical intent, criticism is secondary to entertainment and humour. This is why pastiche has been termed as 'blank parody'. For example, how many music videos of boy bands have you seen set on a beach or in an urban location where the performers all sing into camera? All of these videos generically reference each other, yet there is little political comment. When Busted, Take That or 1-D recycle boy band conventions, they rarely draw attention to these continually repeated formulae.

*Gogglebox* uses many conventions from reality television shows, including cheap settings and locations, unknown participants and 'natural' reactions to events that unfold – but does little to try and criticise or discuss any of the issues found within this type of programme, such as issues of representation or the contemporary acceptance of high levels of media consumption within a family setting.

Looking at *Gogglesprogs* we see that whilst child participants may provide an added incentive for some viewers, it means that the level of critical discussion is limited and we now also have further points to consider: media consumption levels amongst the young, passive and susceptible audiences and the missed opportunities by programmes such as these that have not only failed to challenge the culture of television viewing among children, but instead have celebrated and glorified it.

## Where is the Reality?

Described in the *Radio Times*, *Gogglesprogs* is...

**The people-watching-TV-watching-people-watching-TV show (which) returns for a seasonal special where children, not adults are the subjects on the sofa.**

French cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard argues that we now live in a heavily media-saturated world, where we find ourselves surrounded by images and representations, which we actually use to help us form meaning and understanding. However because of this, we have lost the ability to distinguish between what is real and what is a **simulation** of reality. Baudrillard makes use of the term **simulacra** to describe how there is a never-ending procession of symbols and representations all around us, which themselves have no origin and are therefore just copies of copies, or





representations of representations. Being surrounded by simulacra means we live in a **hyper-real**: where the lines that distinguish reality from the simulation of reality have begun to blur. In a postmodern world where the majority of our experiences are filtered through the mass media, how can we tell if what we are thinking and feeling is actually genuine?

Let's take the simulacrum of New York as an example. We have seen countless onscreen representations of its giant skyscrapers, yellow cabs and the instantly recognisable Statue of Liberty. Being there in real time as a tourist, our first-hand experience of the reality may arguably become blurred and distorted due to our expectations and the iconography of New York we have already experienced countless times over through the mass media. It is all very confusing.

Applying this to *Gogglebox* or *Gogglesprogs* we can easily see a blurring between what is real and

what is not: we sit in our front rooms watching other people sit in their front rooms enjoying someone on a talent show or a bake-off programme which in itself is not a real experience because it is being mediated. We watch their responses to these programmes and then we respond to their responses. In all of that process how much of what is happening can actually be described as a 'real' experience? If the emotions we are feeling are based on the emotions of someone else, who themselves are not experiencing a real event, how far removed are we from any real meaning and understanding?

Getting to grips with these (and other) postmodern features should be the aim of all Media students so that you can begin to apply them to your own found examples in the future (that is – if the future really exists?!).

**Matt Kaufman is a Multimedia and English Lecturer at Heart of Worcestershire College.**







# Task 5

## Long Form TV Drama: Genre, Character and Narrative

The article for this task is taken from *MediaMagazine 67*



‘Neale: Genre Repertoires’

## Exploring the article

- Read the theory drop article **Neale: Genre Repertoires** (MM67), by Nick Lacey.
- Answer the following questions, drawing on the article for information and ideas.
  1. Which came first, the genre (chicken) or the text (the egg it lays)? How does the article use *Superman* as an example to explain how complicated this concept is?
  2. How do theorist Steve Neale's ideas try to explain the complexity of understanding genres and how they work?
  3. In what ways is *Jessica Jones* a hybrid of different genres?
  4. In what ways does *Jessica Jones* subvert the genres it draws on?
  5. 'Jessica Jones is hardboiled' – what does this mean?
  6. In what ways does 'genre fluidity' enable Jessica Jones to transcend the conventions of the genres it draws on most?

## Exploring genre and genre hybridity

- Choose a TV drama you enjoy or one you're interested in and watch the first episode.
- As you're watching, make a list of all the genres that might be applicable to the episode. For example, if you're studying *Stranger Things* you might have sci-fi, high school, action adventure, buddy movie, romance to name but a few.
- Brainstorm as many of the conventions of the different genres as you can think of. You should end up with a pretty massive list of tropes, conventions, typical images, iconographies etc.

## Characterisation

To get a more nuanced picture of how genre is used, and how it intersects with characterisation, do the following task:

- Choose a character from the show you analysed and decide which of the features of all the different genres apply to them in your set episode. For example, Steve from *Stranger Things* predominantly exists within the romance or high school movie genre – we see him flirting by the lockers, sneaking in through the window of his girlfriend's house after dark, kissing in the toilets, he has 'cool' hair and the latest fashions, all tropes of many high school related films and TV shows.

Sometimes in long form TV dramas, characters often seem one dimensional in the first episode and adhere more strictly to a set of genre expectations. However, as characters develop, or as the plot evolves, the use of genre is more dynamic and hybridity increases. Steve eventually gets sucked into the narrative of Mike, Eleven and the gang and becomes more like an older brother character in an action adventure movie (like Brand in *Goonies*).

- If you are familiar with subsequent episodes of your chosen show, think about how your character develops over time. Do their characteristics move beyond simply genre conventions, or do they stay the same?

## Narrative

You can also use genre repertoires to analyse key scenes from your TV drama episode to understand how genre and narrative interlink.

- Look at a 'status quo' moment, where the scene is being set and characters are being introduced and compare it with a moment of disruption or a dramatic climax, then go back to your genre brainstorm from the first task.
- Are the creators using genre repertoires to signpost events in the plot or to heighten the drama or give viewers a false sense of security?

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# Neale: Genre Repertoires

Nick Lacey gets to grips with hybridity and genre repertoires in the hard-boiled detective/super hero series, *Jessica Jones*.

Which came first, the chicken or the egg? Believe it or not this philosophical question is relevant to genre because we can ask the question, 'what comes first, the genre (the chicken) or the text it lays?' The answer may seem obvious: it must be the text because without texts there are no genres; but it's not that simple. Take the first 'superhero', Superman, who appeared in Action Comics in 1938. At the time the *Superman* comic strip wasn't considered to be an example of the 'superhero' genre but part of the tradition of 'masked heroes' that included *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1903) (okay Superman doesn't have a mask but you get the idea). The success of *Superman* spawned *Captain Marvel* and *The Flash* a year later and it was only then, when there was a number of different texts that audiences, and critics, recognised as having similar elements, that the 'superhero' genre was born. Only retrospectively could it be seen that *Superman* also belonged to the genre. So the answer to the chicken-egg question is 'both'; while the *Superman* text came first it wasn't identified as belonging to the superhero genre until after the genre had been recognised.

Fortunately you are not studying for a philosophy exam but it is

important to understand that genre is not a straightforward concept. Steve Neale, in *Genre and Hollywood* (1988), investigated the complexity of defining genres: we may know a horror movie when we see it but being able to define it accurately in a way that includes all horror texts is exceptionally difficult. Despite the fact that many genres have a distinct repertoire of elements, – particular narratives, iconography, characters and settings – Neale showed these are always changing and the boundaries between genres can be very vague. Here we are going to focus on two of his conclusions:

**'Generic repertoires themselves can be at least partly compatible: mad-doctor films combine some of the elements of horror and some of the elements of science fiction... In this way, hybrid films, cycles and genres are formed...'**

**'The repertoire of generic conventions available at any one point in time is always in play rather than simply being replayed...'**

To examine Neale's ideas we shall consider the first season of *Jessica Jones* (2015), a Marvel series available on Netflix.





Illustration by Tom Zaino

## Genre Hybrids

The Marvel logo at the start of *Jessica Jones* ensures that audiences understand that the programme belongs to the superhero genre. However the visual style and iconography of the title sequence, supplemented with a jazz inflected score, signifies film noir. *Jessica Jones* is a hybrid of 'superhero' and the 'hardboiled detective' trope typical of film noir.

The television series *Jessica Jones* is not the first text to mix the dark expressionism of noir with superheroes. Such comics have been a staple hybrid subgenre for some time; for example *Alias* (2001) in which Jones first appeared as a civilian after being the superhero Jewel.

Despite this, the genre hybrid is likely to have more of an impact in a television series than in comics because the latter is a decidedly niche market. In 2017 *The Punisher* was released on Netflix and it's likely that Jones' success gave the producers confidence that there was a market for dark superhero narratives. The darker elements are typical of noir narratives and this bleaker Marvel product is more likely to be seen on non-network television, though *Deadpool* (2016) is an exception.

In noir (and superhero) narratives the protagonist is usually male so having a female detective walking 'mean' urban streets is a play on the gender expectations of the genres. Although voiceover narration is used, there are fewer typical 'wise cracking' lines associated with male detectives. Jones is a traumatised victim of rape and childhood tragedy and so her humour is mostly acerbic.

The Marvel logo at the start of *Jessica Jones* ensures that audiences understand that the programme belongs to the superhero genre. However the visual style and iconography of the title sequence, supplemented with a jazz inflected score, signifies film noir. *Jessica Jones* is a hybrid of 'superhero' and the 'hardboiled detective' trope typical of film noir.

“What the hell is a genre repertoire?” Krysten Ritter as the eponymous *Jessica Jones*



David Giesbrecht, Netflix

In noir (and superhero) narratives the protagonist is usually male so having a female detective walking 'mean' urban streets is a play on the gender expectations of the genres.

Kilgrave,  
however, has no  
desire for world  
domination and  
is basically a  
pathetic man  
who represents  
white, male  
privilege.

When she is talking to the mother of her adopted sister (Trish) she says:

'I wish there was a mother of the year' award and then I could bludgeon you with it.'

The first episode opens with a knowing reference to the dark city of noir when she says: 'New York may be a city that never sleeps...' The noir genre predominates in the episode as there are only a few superhero moments: seven minutes in when she jumps unfeasibly high onto a fire escape, and ten minutes later, when she is lifting a car. Both of these events are not actually shown but implied. It's not until the fourth episode, when she superhumanly trashes a room in anger, that we clearly see her super powers.

Jones is a hard boiled – meaning she is cynical – private detective who, like the protagonists of 'classic' noirs, such as Mike Hammer in *Kiss Me Deadly* (1956), is not entirely mentally stable (the back story of her trauma is revealed during the series). The logo of the programme's title is cracked, like her psyche, and she is also the 'lone wolf' hero of noir as she has few friends. The cynicism of noir is evident in her voiceover: 'She's either an idiot in love or being conned. Which pretty much amounts to the same thing.' The visual style of film noir drew upon German expressionism of 1920s cinema and there are a few heavily stylised camera set-ups: for example the overhead shot that emphasises her shadow on the sidewalk.

The repertoire of elements of most 'superhero' texts will require the titular characters, wearing spandex, to save the world (narrative) from nefarious villains (character) using special effects driven powers and advanced technology (both iconography). Settings are recognisably our own, but are also an 'alternative world' (the Marvel Cinematic Universe in this case) where superpowers are real.

Of these elements *Jessica Jones* retains only the superpowers and setting. The villain, Kilgrave, who can make people do what he wants simply by speaking to them, is played (as if often the case in American texts) by a British actor, David Tennant. Kilgrave, however, has no desire for world domination and is basically a pathetic man who represents white, male privilege. His petulance when his attempt to seduce Jones (by buying her childhood home, hoping she would love him) fails, shows his childishness when he doesn't get his way.

As Neale shows, it is the fluidity of genre that allows these variations and can change the way we regard the noir and superhero genres. However simply identifying generic variations in a text is not enough in itself as we also need to consider the effect these changes have: in other words, what is this hybrid text about?

There isn't space to answer that question in detail here but Charlotte Andrews' suggestion is a good starting place:

**'[Jessica Jones is] a scalpel-sharp dissection of patriarchy at its most abhorrent, a harrowing examination of power, control, abuse and trauma – and the superhuman strength required to survive all that.' (2016)**

So the noir narrative about surviving trauma, caused by white, male arrogance, uses superhero powers as a metaphor to explain the (superhuman) personal qualities required to recover from the abuse. Kilgrave gets what he wants simply by asking for it and this reflects the privileged position that white, middle class males have in western society. The sexual abuse that the #MeToo

'movement' campaigns against is an example of male arrogance and evil in action. Jessica Jones is a damaged individual, often misanthropic, but nevertheless tries to do the right thing and she won't give up fighting.

If this hybrid, superhero-noir leads to more audiovisual texts (as it already exists in comics) of this subgenre then there will be a new cycle of texts. Typically, if a text with a significant generic variation is successful then others will follow until their popularity fades.

Whether *Jessica Jones* is a harbinger of this cycle or not, it has made a considerable impact in its critique of male misogyny in a gripping narrative.

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Nick Lacey is a freelance Film and Media Studies teacher, textbook author and regular contributor to MediaMag. His study guides on *Do The Right Thing*, *Pan's Labyrinth* and *Vertigo* are available on Kindle.

## Further reading

Charlotte Richardson Andrews (2016) 'Jessica Jones: the antihero we need', British film institute, available at: <http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/reviews-recommendations/tv/jessica-jones-antihero-we-need>

Daniel Murphy (2016) 'Jessica Jones' and Gendered Forms of Seeing', Popmatters, available at: <https://www.popmatters.com/jessica-jones-and-gendered-forms-of-seeing-2495451026.html>





# Task 6

## Theory: Gender Performativity

The article for this task is taken from *MediaMagazine* 69



‘Gender Performativity’

## Exploring the article

Read the theory drop article **Gender Performativity** (MM69), by Claire Pollard.

■ Answer the following questions, drawing on the article for information and ideas.

1. What does 'performative' mean in the context of this article? What different aspects of your identity do you perform on a regular basis?
2. Why does theorist Judith Butler argue that we have little or no control over how we perform 'gender'?
3. How does Claire Pollard draw a link between children's clothing and the future 'performance' of gender by men and women?
4. What does 'trouble' refer to in the title of Judith Butler's book, *Gender Trouble*? How have the ideas it explores developed in the 30 years since its publication?
5. The article claims that the mainstream media still rely to a large extent on gender stereotypes? Do you agree with this? If so, what examples can you think of? What examples can you think of that challenge these stereotypes?

## Performing gender – your own identity

As well as reading Claire Pollard's article, you should also read the cartoon, by Tom Zaino.

- Although the cartoon is making a humorous point, how far do you agree that girls and boys are conditioned to 'perform' gender roles from a very young age?
- Write down your ideas about your own 'performance' of gender. How do you identify (if you consciously do so at all)? How is your 'performance' similar or different to that of your friends? How do you perform gender differently in different contexts? Do you have a problem with stereotypical notions of gender?

## Social media

- Have a look at what people are posting on Instagram or Twitter under the hashtag #LetToysBeToys or #smashingstereotypes.
- Make a collection of images and accounts that are either documenting the ways that gender stereotyping is pervasive in our culture or examples of people pushing back against binary gender stereotypes. You might find examples like this image from a magazine that the article's writer Claire Pollard's three-year-old daughter was given.
- Write an analysis of what you find out – exploring differences between representations of male and female performativity.



## Online shopping

- Go onto the website of any big clothing store or department store (e.g. John Lewis, Next). Children's' clothes are a great place to look for examples of gender conditioning so look at t-shirts or pyjamas for boys and girls and see how you feel about them. Consider how alienating this might be for children who don't 'feel' particularly like a girl or a boy. Think about how this might affect, encourage or permit certain behaviours.
- Now think about how similar patterns apply to the adult world. Visit a gift shop website like Not on the High Street or Clintons and look for 'gifts for him/dads' and 'gifts for her/mums'. It would be a good idea to write a list of predictions of what you expect to find before you go online and see how accurate you are.
- Gather images from both the activities above, and further research, that reinforce negative gender stereotypes and put them into a collage in Photoshop or PowerPoint.
- If possible share them with your teacher and the rest of the class via learning platforms identified and validated by your school.

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

# Gender Performativity

**Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* is a difficult read even for University students. Here, Claire Pollard simplifies the central idea of gender performativity which, she argues, is easy for A Level media students to grasp.**

All of us are 'performative' at times in our own lives. Maybe your teacher spots you talking during some group work so you 'perform' good student – you know, when you seamlessly switch to talking to the subject at hand, lean in, point at the worksheet and furrow your brow. The model learner. An Oscar-worthy performance.

We all do it. We perform our identities and we adapt our performances for different situations. I know I perform mother, teacher, grown up and, when I'm out with my friends, revert back to being the cynical sarcastic teenager I was at school. None of these identities are the real me, but they all are.

Although we all perform our gender to a greater or lesser extent, the issue Butler identifies is that we don't have control over our gender performance.

She argues that gender is a social construction: it is taught to us by external influences and it's ingrained at such a young age that we often mistake it as 'nature' rather than 'nurture'. In short, having male genitalia has no bearing on whether or not you like cars, nor does having a womb make you obsessed with unicorns and mermaids.

## Gendering Children

Children are taught to perform their gender from early on so that they align themselves with certain tastes and behaviours befitting their gender category. This is never more noticeable to me than when ironing (on the rare occasions I perform 'good

housewife') my children's t-shirts.

My son – 'Mummy's little monster' – has permission to be a scallywag, to be disruptive and chaotic – monstrous, even – and the main woman in his life will never disown him.

My daughter – 'Dancing with my friends makes the sun shine' – has a duty to be nothing more than agreeable, pleasant and pretty in order to make the world a better, sunnier place.

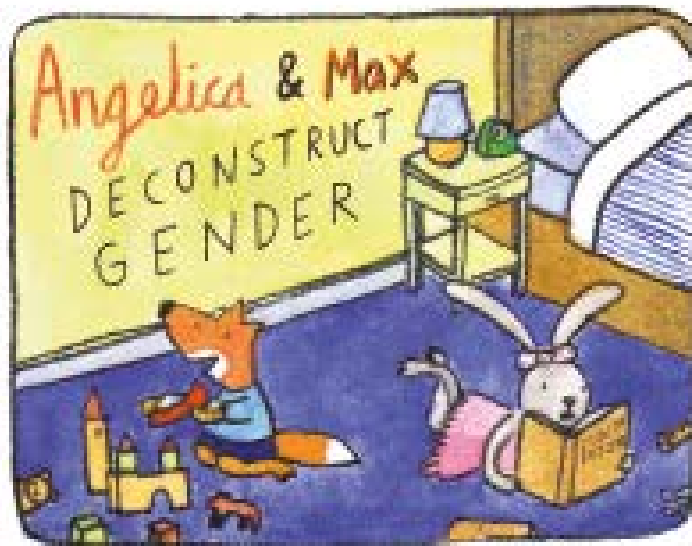
If you shopped entirely at Primark or Mothercare (the worst places for these #everydaysexism clothing slogans) you'd be teaching girls to be passive, caring, responsible for the happiness of others, and boys to do what the hell they like because it's cute, attractive and roguish. Fast forward 30 years and you can possibly trace a line between these early messages and the startling number of women who suffer abusive relationships.

## Multiple Genders

*Gender Trouble* was written in 1990 and at the time it was a criticism of the current wave of feminism that saw 'men' as the oppressive enemy to 'women'. Butler would argue that this particular feminist perspective perpetuates the idea that masculinity and femininity

Gender is a social construction, it is taught to us by external influences and it's ingrained at such a young age that we often mistake it as 'nature' rather than 'nurture'.







# Task 7

## Theory: Identifying the Features of Postmodernism

The article for this task is taken from *MediaMagazine* 66



‘Theory Drop – Postmodernism’

## Exploring the article

- Read the theory drop article **Postmodernism** (MM66), by Giles Gough.
- Answer the following questions, drawing on the article for information and ideas.
  1. What does the article identify as some of the key features of **modernism**? What about **postmodernism**? What does it identify as the difference between the two?
  2. What key challenge did Roland Barthes' 'Death of the Author' bring to traditional ideas about texts, particularly in terms of the reader/viewer?
  3. How does the article identify **metatextuality**? What aspects of metatextuality does it identify in the film, *I, Tonya*?
  4. What is metatextuality's significance for postmodernism, particularly in relation to ideas found in Jean Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*?
  5. The article mentions three films that explore postmodern anxieties about what is 'real' and what is not: *The Truman Show*; *The Matrix*; *Inception*. If you have seen any of these films, think about what they have to say about the nature of reality. Do they seem particularly relevant films for the age we live in?

## Exploring postmodernism further

The article states that 'Postmodernism is a cultural movement that distrusts all established philosophies and frequently experiments with the medium it is presented in.'

- Think about a postmodern text you have studied in your class if you are already doing A Level. If you haven't started your course yet, a few texts that you might have heard of are the films *Deadpool*, *The Truman Show* or *Scott Pilgrim vs. The World*, or the TV shows *Community*, *Family Guy* or *Gogglebox*.
- Break down the quotation from the article into two parts and find evidence for each in a postmodern text that you have seen:
  1. How the text distrusts established philosophies
  2. How the texts frequently experiments with the medium it is presented in.



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# Postmodernism

.....  
**If you ask an academic the question 'what is postmodernism?' you will most likely come away with an answer you'll only understand with the aid of a dictionary and a reading list as long as your arm. This article aims to give you a basic understanding of the concept, and give you some pointers on where to look if you want to research it further.**  
.....

**F**irst, let's look at the slightly contradictory title. Postmodern-ism. How can we have a cultural movement that is 'after now'? To understand this, you need to have a brief understanding of its precursor, modernism. If postmodernism is the irreverent teenager, then modernism is the parent having the mid-life crisis.

Modernism as a movement came to popularity in the early part of the twentieth century and it can be characterised by a loss of belief in the things where we once placed our trust – be it God, society, personal relationships etc. While its inception can't be traced back to one particular event, it would not be too much of a stretch to assume that the First World War had something to do with this sense of disillusionment. It could also be linked in with Friedrich Nietzsche's belief that 'God is dead' and Marx's criticism of capitalist society becoming more widespread. The feelings related to this shift in perspective tend to involve disappointment and a sense of betrayal, or even rebellion, against many of the establishments that hold

society together. As a style, modernism aimed to move away from classical and traditional forms. In literature, for example, it resulted in works such as *Dubliners* by James Joyce, a series of short stories that focus on characters getting their hopes up and then having their dreams shattered and ending in disappointment. In poetry, it resulted in a rejection of existing poetic forms, such as T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*, a sprawling, free-wheeling epic poem that railed against the futility of existence and refused to be governed by any of the traditional rules of poetry.

If modernism is beginning to question authority, then postmodernism is making fun of authority to its face. Postmodernism takes this concept of questioning traditional structures, representations and expectations and pushes things a step further. In 1967 the French literary critic Roland Barthes released his essay *The Death of the Author*. In it, he challenged tradition when he said that a writer's opinions, intentions or interpretation of their own work are no more valid than anyone else's. To give a simple example, this means



Repeat after me:  
'postmodernism is  
a cultural movement  
that distrusts  
all established  
philosophies  
and frequently  
experiments with  
the medium it is  
presented in'. You  
will sound really  
smart, I promise.

that just because Ridley Scott thinks Deckard is a replicant, doesn't mean that you, the viewer, have to think this if you don't want to. Readers are free to interpret a work however they choose, irrespective of what the creator thinks. *The Death of the Author* is the next step after Nietzsche's 'God is dead' statement and with it comes a need to test the boundaries of what a text is. Like modernism, postmodernism can be found in literature, architecture and art. But for the purposes of this article, we're just going to focus on postmodernism in film and its closest cousin, television. It's also no good if we don't try to identify at least some of the aspects commonly associated with it. Here are just two to get you started:

## Metatextuality

Metatextuality is where a text draws attention to the fact that it is a text. It points to the process of its own creation. Let's take an example from a fairly recent film, *I, Tonya*. At various different points throughout the film, characters comment on the mechanics of the film as they're happening by addressing the audience directly. In the trailer, Margot Robbie in the titular role explicitly rejects the idea of an objective truth. 'The haters always say:

Tonya, tell the truth. There's no such thing as truth. Everyone has their own truth'. The film then goes on to show events as told by the different parties, each of them disputing the veracity of those events as they happen. At one point, Robbie's Tonya chases a man out of a house, while firing a shot-gun at him. While changing cartridges, Tonya looks straight at the camera, breaking the 4th wall, saying: 'I NEVER did this'. This is a brilliant example of metatextuality. The character in the story is disagreeing with the story as it happens. This links very closely with the 'death of the author' by making us question the reliability of the narrator. We, as an audience, need to trust the story-tellers in films or else we run the risk of rejecting the whole thing.

Other examples are where texts play with the narrative conventions we take for granted in films. In the hugely underrated 2006 film *Stranger Than Fiction*, we start with Emma Thompson narrating the life of Will Ferrell's character, Harold Crick. In a shot where we see Harold brushing his teeth, Thompson's voiceover says 'when other's minds would fantasise about their upcoming day, Harold just counted brush strokes'. Harold then stops brushing, spits the toothpaste

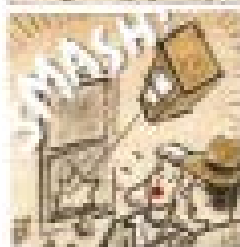
out and says, 'alright who just said 'Harold just counted brushstrokes'?'. In this story, we have a character who breaks narrative film conventions by showing his awareness of the omniscient narrator. The film then goes on to follow Harold as he tries to find the apparent 'author' of his life and persuade her to change the ending! It's a film that is metatextual because it lets the protagonist know he is in a story and draws attention to the potential absurdity of non-diegetic voiceover. As you can see, metatextuality forces the audience to examine, and in some cases question the very form of filmmaking and the assumptions it brings with it. But what happens when these questions go beyond the style of the filmmaking, and start to influence the content of the narrative?

## The Nature of Reality

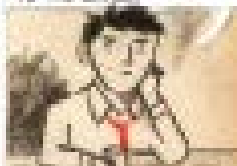
This is a frequent preoccupation in the content of postmodern narratives. As stated earlier, postmodernism tends to reject most aspects of authority, meaning, as Jean Francois Lyotard put it in *The Postmodern Condition*, 'the grand narrative has lost its credibility'. It is easy to see how some institutions are being questioned. Religion, specifically 'the church', as an institution has lost



Report after the:  
"postmodernism is a  
returning movement that  
restores all forgotten  
philosophy and literary  
experiments" (with the notion  
it is promised to  
be well used philosophy,  
it promises).



GET LOST! LOST! LOST!  
THAT'S IT! THE LOST! LOST!  
LOST! LOST! LOST! LOST!  
LOST! LOST! LOST! LOST!  
LOST! LOST! LOST! LOST!



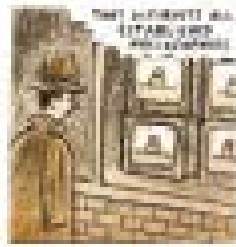
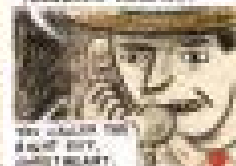
"WASH! LOST! LOST!  
LOST! LOST! LOST! LOST!  
LOST! LOST! LOST! LOST!  
LOST! LOST! LOST! LOST!"



WE'VE FOUND LOST! LOST!  
LOST! LOST! LOST! LOST!  
LOST! LOST! LOST! LOST!



YOU WANT THE LOST! LOST!  
LOST! LOST! LOST! LOST!  
LOST! LOST! LOST! LOST!



I PROMISE IT'S BE LOST  
LOST! LOST! LOST! LOST!

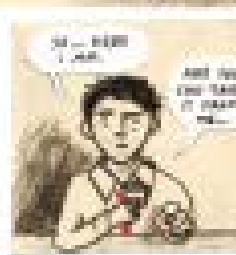
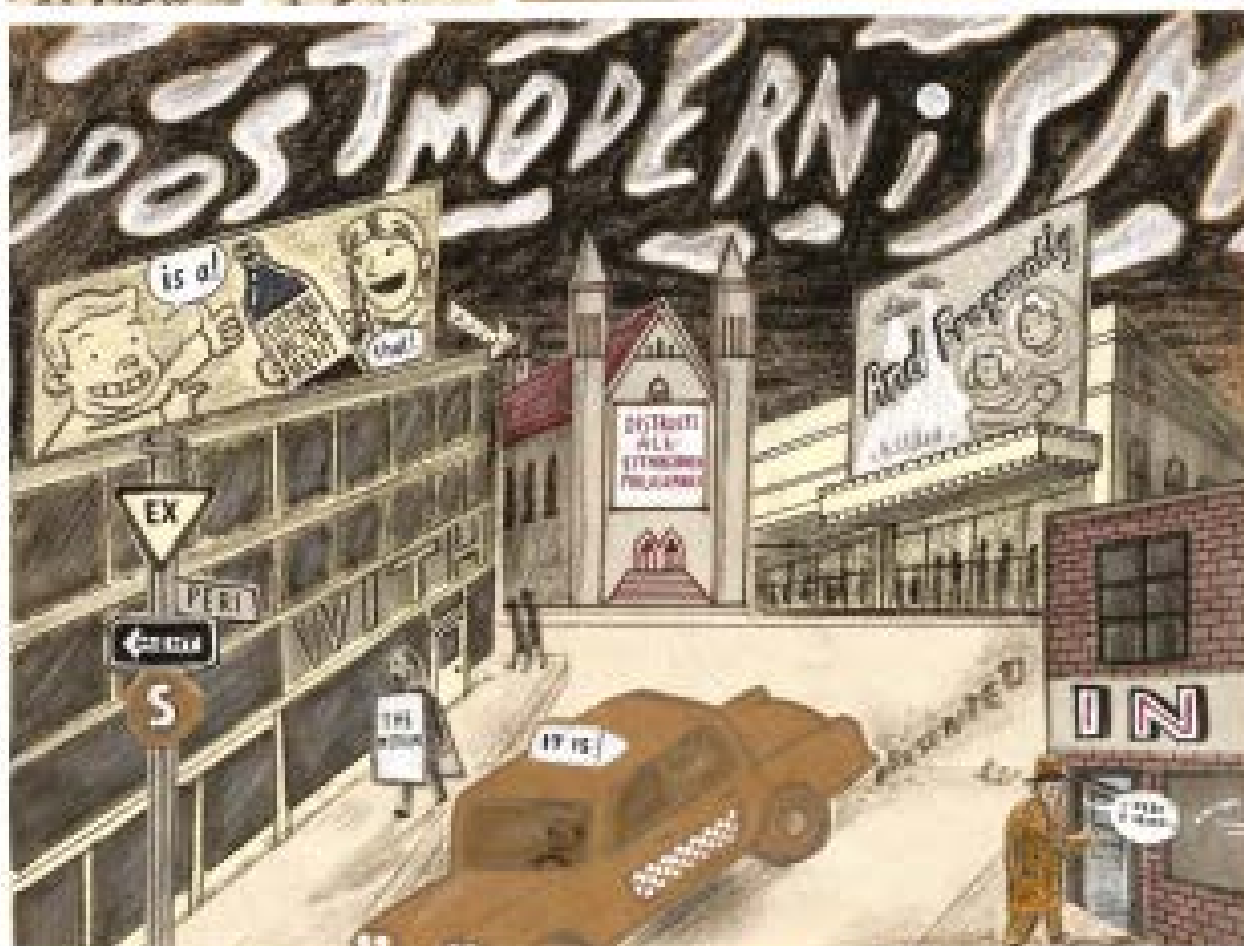


Illustration by Tom Zaino





# Task 8

## Magazines: Recreating Men's Health for a Non-binary Audience

The article for this task is taken from *MediaMagazine* 72



**'Fighting Fit or Bad Medicine: Men's Health'**

## Exploring the article

■ Read **Fighting Fit or Bad Medicine: *Men's Health*** (MM72), by Georgia Platman.

■ Answer the following questions, drawing on the article for information and ideas.

1. How does the writer have what theorist Stuart Hall called an 'oppositional reading' to *Men's Health* when she first looked at it?
2. What are the differences between the three readings identified by Hall: preferred, oppositional, negotiated?
3. What is semiosis, or semiology? How does the writer apply semiosis to the colour palette used on the front page of *Men's Health*?
4. What linguistic strategies does the writer identify on the front page of *Men's Health*?
5. Why do the theories of Albert Bandura and George Gerbner suggest that the messages on the front cover of *Men's Health* will be effective?
6. How do David Gauntlett's ideas about media and identity provide a more sophisticated view of the potential impact of *Men's Health* on readers?
7. How does the writer use Judith Butler's ideas about gender identity to help her understand her own reaction to *Men's Health*?
8. Do you agree with the writer's overall impression that *Men's Health* offers an unhealthy representation of masculinity for its readers?

## Re-creating *Men's Health*: Sweding, and the commutation test

This activity will help you get to grips with the conventions of *Men's Health* and other gendered lifestyle magazines, but will also help you to develop some Photoshop skills to prepare you for print coursework.

It combines two really useful re-creative processes: **sweding**, and the **commutation test**.

The term swede comes from Michel Gondry's film *Be Kind Rewind* ([watch the trailer here](#)). It refers to a homemade copy of a film – or in this case, a magazine cover.

The remaking or changing of one or more elements of an image or text to create new or challenging representations is an interesting way of exploring values and representation of the original, and this is sometimes called the commutation test.

You are going to construct a sweded version of the *Men's Health* cover referred to in the article. This means recreating as closely as possible the exact details of the cover (see page 63), using the image manipulation software at your disposal. BUT here's the twist: your sweded version is for a cover of a new magazine called *Our Health*, which targets young non-binary people, so you will need to substitute different images and text, which creates a commutation or change to the meaning of the cover.

- Take the format, design and conventions of the original cover, and populate it with images and text of your own, while keeping the overall layout as close to the original as possible. You will need to think about:
  - » Colour scheme, style and connotations of chosen fonts
  - » Your central image and what it should represent
  - » The content and wording of your cover lines, and the associations they suggest.

Depending on how far you've mastered the technology, you should be able to come up with some interesting, practical ways of discovering just how each changed element of your cover will alter the meaning and appeal to its intended audience.

And if you can't access the technology, or are new to Photoshop, a hand-drawn version will do (nearly) as well.

Grrrrr...unlock your  
inner beast with  
*Men's Health*

**Fighting Fit or  
Bad Medicine?**

# Men's Health

.....  
Sharply-defined muscles, hard stares  
and intimidating abs: are these what  
constitute an ideal image of masculine  
vitality? Georgia Platman scratches  
below the glossy surface of the UK's  
best-selling men's magazine with an  
in-depth textual analysis.  
.....



**I**t is the first time I have ever read, let alone bought *Men's Health* magazine. Everything about it seems foreign to me: I have never been to a gym; my diet is abundant in all those things that we're told are bad for us (carbs, refined sugar, processed foods, fat); plus, I am a woman (i.e. not the target audience); oh, and to top it off, I'm not even familiar with its cover star, Henry Cavill.

I take it in, horrified by all the imperatives being SHOUTED AT ME in bold and often capitalised text in various typefaces, with plenty of exclamation marks: 'FIGHT FAT & WIN!'; 'Bin Your Booze Gut'; 'Get Back In Shape!'; 'ADD 10CM TO YOUR ARMS'. Cavill looks down his nose sternly at the camera, arms crossed: I feel like I've already failed before I've even opened the magazine. But I compose myself. I must complete my task: a textual analysis of this front cover. I need to get over my initial culture shock, put my Media Studies goggles on and start again. Here in front of me is a rich text, full of meaning, symbolism, and words to unpick. I dive in...

I realise that my strong aversion to this magazine was in fact what theorist Stuart Hall called an *oppositional* reading, meaning I interpreted it the opposite way (or at least extremely differently) than its producers intended. Hall believed that those who make media products encode them with various meanings, but that we as individuals decode them and create our own meanings based on our upbringing, culture, and background, which is why some people might have a very different reaction from me. Some might decode this magazine in a way that leaves them feeling positive, connected to the content, or motivated, which would be the *preferred* reading; the one the producers hope to provoke in order to sell magazines. If, on the other hand, you think the article about life-changing apps looks interesting, but that the magazine's bold claims about how it can improve your life ('INSTANT SUCCESS GUARANTEED') might be a bit farfetched, you would be doing what Hall classifies as a *negotiated* reading of the text; weighing up its pros and cons before deciding to buy into it.

## Sex Symbols

Part of the way we come up with our reading of the text is down to semiosis – how signs and symbols produce meaning. One of the most famous semioticians, Roland Barthes (1915–1980), said that not only do signs have straightforward meanings (a red rose is a type of flower), but we find other connotations in the signs depending on our background (in our culture, red roses connote love and romance). Before turning to the



His pose is strong, with his arms folded across his chest and legs hip-width apart; his gaze is cool, a hard stare down his nose straight into the camera.

The disapproving stare of Henry Cavill, a real-life Superman

main image on the cover, we can apply semiology to the colour palette, composition, and the size and placement of the text. For example, the main colours used are red, black, grey and navy blue: strong, dark, and traditionally masculine colours. Furthermore, red also evokes blood and meat, which, via associations with strength, hunting and protein, are also associated with ancestral male roles. Navy blue, meanwhile, is literally named after one arm of the military and is a colour used in other institutional uniforms, such as the police. Not only do these institutions convey strength, discipline, and power, but both are traditionally male-orientated professions.

Another connotation that came to my mind, thanks to the little splashes of yellow, is Superman (a role Cavill has portrayed before) whose costume is red, yellow and blue.

Believe it or not, the magazine has certainly boosted my sense of identity, but not in the way its producers might hope: it has made me clearer than ever that I am a feminist who believes that gender is (for the most part) a social construct.



A double page spread from the January issue of the magazine

The superhuman connotations are further anchored by the text for the feature on Henry Cavill: 'On Going Full Beast Mode' as well as Cavill himself. His pose is strong, with his arms folded across his chest and legs hip-width apart; his gaze is cool, a hard stare down his nose straight into the camera; and his position on the cover, with his head covering the 'H' of Health in the magazine's title, suggests that he is the embodiment of health, a real-life super-man.

### Speaking to the Reader

The letters and punctuation used on the cover create connotations too. The word FAT is not only in uppercase lettering, but the fact it has been made the largest word on the entire page, turning it into a persuasive and grotesquely disproportionate symbol that demands our attention. It screams at us: ARE YOU FAT? YOU PROBABLY ARE. DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT. LIKE BUY THIS MAGAZINE. The cover employs other linguistic devices in order to persuade readers to buy the magazine. There's alliteration ('Fight Fat', 'Bin Your Booze Gut'), direct mode of address ('Add 10cm To **Your** Arms', '27 Apps To Change **Your** Life') and the use of verbs conjuring up war and combat (win, beat, fight, rip), and the words that let you know that *Men's Health* has the answers (smart, simple, instant, success).

But would anyone really fall for all that? Psychologist Albert Bandura might say so. His famous Bobo doll experiment seemed to prove that the media can directly influence us. Indeed, academic George Gerbner said that the more messages are repeated in the media, the more we are likely to accept and internalise them (and boy are there a lot of messages on this cover about body image). I reassure myself that both these theories have been largely discredited

by contemporary media academics and that we're wiser to the ways of the media these days. Yet I can't shake the feeling that this barrage of messages will make men fall prey to feeling bad about themselves; that any man looking at this cover would be made to feel bad by these cover lines encouraging them to shape up.

But perhaps I'm being too negative: this immensely popular magazine must appeal to many men. What am I missing? I grasp for other theorists who might be able to help me analyse in a more cool-headed way. Thankfully, I come across David Gauntlett's ideas around the media and identity. Gauntlett argues that the media helps us develop our sense of who we are. We might come across ideas or ways of living or points of view in the media that we identify with (or indeed oppose), and this can strengthen our core ideas and beliefs about ourselves and the world, allowing us to speak with more confidence. So, in the case of *Men's Health* front covers, it could be argued that the myriad messages on the front cover could actually help the magazine appeal to a wider audience, as each one could catch someone's eye and forge a connection. For example, 'FIGHT FAT & WIN!' might appeal to someone who is already feeling fat, while 'Beat Any New Year Goal!' is vague enough to appeal to anyone who made a new year resolution and is worried about breaking it. Similarly, the personalities the magazine promotes will appeal to different types of men. The mainstream aspirational prowess of Henry Cavill will make some pick up the magazine, while the mention of the sardonic journalist Will Self will appeal to others. So, in providing a wide array of messages, the magazine might grab the attention of more readers than simply those interested in their health or fitness alone.



## Performing Gender Identities

Believe it or not, the magazine has certainly boosted my sense of identity, but not in the way its producers might hope: it has made me clearer than ever that I am a feminist who believes that gender is (for the most part) a social construct. My beliefs are in line with theorist Judith Butler, who believes that gender (masculinity and femininity) is performative and something we learn via nurture (as opposed to something in our natures). This representation of modern masculinity as portrayed by *Men's Health* could thus contribute to men feeling that muscles will make you more manly. Butler's contemporary, Liesbet van Zoonen might agree, but would also point out that our gender expectations can change over time. For proof, one need look no further than Henry Cavill himself, who makes a remarkably beefier Superman than those in decades past. Simply Google 'Superman through the years' to see how men's bodies have been subjected to increasingly more aggressive intervention over the past century.

I sit back and look at this cover again. Have I been too harsh? Is *Men's Health* simply a positive, aspirational and motivational celebration of fitness? One thing's for sure: it's not in any way for me. Growing up in the 1990s, when women's magazines were at their most aggressive when it came to perpetuating punishing beauty ideals (heroin chic, anyone?), I learnt the hard way that we must read media products for what they usually are: vehicles to sell things. I learnt to blinker myself to the constant messages to women that they should be thinner, blonder, whiter, or more tanned, depending on the season. So, I can only hope young men growing up now take solace in the array of different multimedia products and representations out there, rather than subscribe to the unattainable body and beauty standards being touted here as something to do with health.

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Georgia Platman is a writer, copy editor, filmmaker and teacher based in London.



I take it in, horrified by all the imperatives being SHOUTED AT ME in bold and often capitalised text in various typefaces.

*Men's Health* readers aspire to masculine perfection, whatever that means







# Task 9

## Charity Advertising: a New Approach

The article for this task is taken from *MediaMagazine* 66



**‘Treasure Taken For Granted’**

## Exploring the article

- Before reading the article **Treasure Taken For Granted** (MM66), by Jonathan Nunns, watch the two WaterAid campaign adverts it references:

- » 'No Choice' at <https://vimeo.com/225097594>
- » 'Claudia Sings' at <https://vimeo.com/225099048>

- Read the article.

- Answer the following questions, drawing on the article for information and ideas.

1. According to the article, in what ways does WaterAid's 'No Choice' campaign perpetuate the 'established stereotype of third world charity advertising'?
2. What does the article see as some of the limitations of this traditional approach?
3. What are the key differences between a traditional approach, like for the 'No Choice' campaign and the approach taken in the 'Claudia Sings' campaign?
4. What issues about representation in 'Claudia Sings' does the article identify as still being problematic? What is your opinion about whether or not charities should seek to avoid such representations altogether in campaigns to support projects in developing countries?

## Devise an ad campaign

Drawing on what you have learned about advertising campaigns in the article, you are going to devise one of your own.

According to the charity Centrepoin, homelessness is on the rise. 103,000 young people presented to their local council as being homeless or at risk of homelessness in 2017/18, and the figure is likely to have risen since then.

You can find out more about homelessness by watching a recent BBC documentary, presented by Stacey Dooley. This investigates the 'hidden homeless', young people of no fixed abode, who sleep rough or 'sofa surf' because they have nowhere else to go: [The Young and Homeless](#).

- Devise an ad campaign for homeless teens that carries a positive message. Come up with a narrative or concept that is going to make the audience feel good about donating rather than using emotive and upsetting images which, according to the WaterAid article, are no longer effective.
- As a starting point have a look at some of the content on CentrepoinUK's YouTube channel. Watch: [Young, Homeless and Desperate. Do you swipe right?](#) as an interesting starting point.
- Once you've come up with a narrative or concept, analyse the way charity ads are put together. Look at the types of music used, the use of statistics, the typical camera shots and edits.
- Finally storyboard or make your video.



# TREASURE TAKEN FOR GRANTED

As audiences become desensitised to images of poverty and suffering, a new wave of positive charity adverts are emerging. Jonathan Nunns analyses this approach in the Water Aid 'Claudia Sings' campaign.

'Charity begins at home'. So goes the saying, suggesting our responsibility is to care for those directly around us. The original meaning was that a humane outlook to those nearest would develop a humane outlook to the wider world. The phrase has since been re-purposed, to morally justify prioritising ourselves and to de-prioritise and 'other' the needs of people in, to paraphrase, 'faraway countries of which we know little'. In short, a justification for never being charitable, ever.

However the UK is, on paper at least, a charitable nation. In 2016, about 0.7% of national income was spent on overseas aid, amounting to some £13 billion pounds that year. Some would see that as a wealthy country fulfilling its responsibility to share with the poor and destitute. But it could also be argued that it is in the UK's interests to promote wealth and stability in the rest of the world. A stable world means a safer environment for the UK; poverty and disease leads to violence, instability and the flight of the desperate towards places with better prospects.

Nevertheless, there remain many who argue that any aid should be spent at home on pressing needs close at hand, such as the NHS and social care. However, whilst the UK may be surrounded by sea, it is not on another planet. This is not the nineteenth century; in an

interconnected world, we are directly affected by events elsewhere and should not pretend otherwise.

## Sweet Charity?

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) or charities for short, receive funding from the UK government's foreign aid budget. They rely on public donations for the rest of their income. The established stereotype of third world charity advertising can be seen in the WaterAid 'No Choice' appeal (see link at the end of the article) with its direct mode of address and images of malnourished children and adults drinking stagnant water in countries afflicted by drought and disease. It invites audiences to compare their own circumstances to the agony onscreen and to feel morally compelled to act. Such images became a staple of charity advertising after the Live-Aid drought relief concert in 1985 and have continued to the present (see the still shocking video set to The Cars' track 'Drive', screened at the original concert). However, even such powerful images have their limitations. These repeated images led to victim stereotypes in which whole continents (especially Africa) came to be seen as massive poverty-stricken refugee camps (an image, rightly or wrongly entirely unseen in *Black Panther's*

In the ad, Africa remains an undifferentiated mono-cultural mass, conforming to stereotypes about poverty and lacking technological development. The ad was actually shot in Zambia but there is nothing within it to indicate this.

African setting, Wakanda). But perhaps more significantly, these repeated emotive images of suffering arguably have a desensitising effect. Western audiences unintentionally read the texts against their intent and feeling overwhelmed, do nothing, lapsing into helplessness, demoralised by the scale of the problem. Hence the arrival of the term 'compassion fatigue'.

### Starting Over

It was for these reasons that WaterAid, a charity for whom the name says it all, changed course, commissioning the advertising agency Atomic in 2016 to create a campaign with a fresh perspective and approach.

Claudia Sings was shot by RSA (Ridley Scott Associates), the production company owned by the Hollywood director Ridley Scott. The premise, designed by Atomic and shot by RSA, is simple but very different to the style of charity advertising that audiences have come to expect.

'Claudia Sings' opens with a shallow focus mid shot. Mise-en-scène establishes a middle-class home. A DAB radio plays in mid shot, screen left. Screen right, a pot plant and centre, in shallow focus, a double-glazed window, beyond which we can see the greenery of a large British garden. On the soundtrack, the patter



Images Courtesy of Atomic, London





Images Courtesy of Atomic, London

of rain and the middle class British RP accent of the weather announcer, forecasting further rain. The shot is hand held and a possible POV shot (point of view), orientating the UK middle-class demographic within relatable and familiar circumstances. A focus pull matches with the word 'showers' on the soundtrack and the shifting focus emphasises riverlets streaming down the glass.

Having established the scenario, the advert provides a visual binary via a straight cut. The desaturated green cuts to burnt orange. On the soundtrack, rain fades to the buzz of cicadas; this setting is stereotypical Africa. In a slow motion close up the camera follows the progress of two feet walking in pink flat shoes, then cuts to the a profile close up of a young black woman's face. She carries a bucket. On the diegetic soundtrack, she hums the opening of 'Sunshine on a Rainy Day', her shoes crunching on the dirt road.

Having established the protagonist, Claudia, the audience can enter her world, one very different to that of the assumed reader. The colours reflect dust not damp, sun not rain. Stereotypes of 'Britain' and 'Africa' are used to shorthand effect. Standard frame rate shots alternate with Claudia's slow motion POV of her journey, encouraging identification with her as a relatable, likable, protagonist. The water bucket is a common signifier of Africa, a sharply contrasting binary with the earlier British home where clean, safe water is literally 'on tap'.

Claudia's close-up shows light scarring on her face, an enigma code nodding towards the toughness of her life. However, her clothes are clean and her body language projects happiness and health. As she walks, a group of similar women pass by, buckets expertly balanced on their heads. In the fields, farmers are at work, tilling the soil. These are not victims, these are people confronting the challenges of their lived environment. Other POVs feature a boy running with a windmill toy and a laughing girl, playing on a swing. This is not the Africa of the earlier ads. This community is alive, it's people happy, well and purposeful. But why?

## The Best Medicine

As Claudia reaches her destination the reveal is that she is just one amongst many young arrivals. At the village standpipe, beautiful clean drinking water pours, flashing and sparkling in the sun. The message is clear. The standpipe has brought health and hope to the village, empowering Claudia and others like her to take control of their lives and environment, allowing them to create a life and build for a brighter future. At the standpipe, the others join in the final hopeful chorus of Claudia's song. It is not just Claudia's life which is being transformed by clean water, it is that of the entire village and every other village to which fresh water delivers health and empowerment. The advert ends with an onscreen message, '650 million people still don't have access to clean drinking water' and details how audiences can text donate £3.00 to the cause.

The differences to the stereotypical style of charity advertising are obvious. Hope not helplessness, empowerment not despair. The advert shows how a small and affordable donation can make substantial change, giving people power over their own lives. Read as intended, it leaves the audience uplifted not depressed.

## Resisting Labels

However, amongst the positivity, there remain some significant issues of representation. In the ad, Africa remains an undifferentiated mono-cultural mass, conforming to stereotypes about poverty and lacking technological development. The ad was actually shot in Zambia but there is nothing within it to indicate this.

Does Claudia actually lack agency? Is her future decided by the audience or by her?

Making Claudia a relatable female protagonist plays against traditional representations of Africa as a place of patriarchy. However, clear gender roles remain in place, the women do the laundry, the men till the fields.

At a time when NGOs have suffered negative press (Google the Oxfam sexual abuse scandal of 2018 for an

example) the ability to fundraise is fundamental to being able to continue to bring positive change. Claudia Sings is not a perfect example of this message and includes some dated tropes of ads past. However, to signal that Africa (Zambia!) is fixable and repairable through simple, deliverable means is a step forward. Instead of overwhelming audiences with images of despair, this advert may be a point of transition towards seeing foreign aid as a partnership, from which all can benefit.

Home should be a place which nurtures, allowing us to grow and develop. For the human race, that place is this planet. We are all citizens of this world, responsible to and for each other. To complete the quote, 'charity begins at home, but shouldn't end there'.

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



These repeated emotive images of suffering arguably have a desensitising effect. Western audiences unintentionally read the texts against their intent and feeling overwhelmed, do nothing, lapsing into helplessness, demoralised by the scale of the problem. Hence the arrival of the term 'compassion fatigue'

# Task 10

## Theory: The Impact of Hegemony on the Media you Consume

The article for this task is taken from *MediaMagazine* 65



‘Hegemony’

## Exploring the article

■ Read the theory drop article, **Hegemony** (MM65), by Claire Pollard.

■ Answer the following questions, drawing on the article for information and ideas.

1. According to the article, what is hegemony? What are its consequences for Western society? Why does the article's writer find it such an interesting concept to apply to media texts?
2. Which two 'behaviourist' models for analysing the effect of the media does the article identify? Why does it find these models inadequate for explaining the effect of the media?
3. The 'uses and gratification' model of media effects is in binary opposition to behaviourist models. What does the article identify as the problem with either of these binary models?
4. How is hegemony perpetuated in the media? What are its consequences for representation?
5. What is 'pluralism'? Why does it offer a meaningful challenge to hegemony. Do you think that pluralism is both desirable and possible?
6. The article ends by referencing the 'Legally Black' campaign, in which activists replaced images of white actors in film posters with black actors. Some examples are displayed alongside the article. What do you think about the posters? In what way might they challenge hegemony?



## Researching hegemony

- Take a close look at the main Tom Zaino illustration in the article. It uses a classic Hollywood genre to highlight how much of the media we consume is conceived, produced and controlled by white, middle-class males. (Notice how women and BAME people are present but marginalised.)
- Choose a film or TV show that you know well and that you think shows hegemony in action (so representation replicates power structures in society at large). Use Zaino's structure to draw a diagram of who has shaped this media or film text. You should research its production details online, beginning with its conception:
  - » Whose idea was it?
  - » Who wrote the script or original storyline?
  - » If necessary, do further research online (Wikipedia is generally a very good source) to see if you can find out the gender, ethnicity and social class of the people you have identified. You might be able to find out about their education to help you: did they attend a grammar or private school? Were they university educated? If so, did they attend a Russell Group university? Did they attend before the 1990s, when fewer people went to university? What were their parents' jobs?
  - » Do the same research into the director and, if you can find it out, the commissioner at the channel.
- Finally, look again at the text itself.
  - » Does it show the dominant group (white, middle class, male) to be more powerful or even just more visible in the texts?
  - » How are women depicted?
  - » Are there plural representations of gender, class and race or do they rely on stereotypes that could cultivate negative ideas about different social groups over time?

## Further reading

- For further reading, have a look at this profile of Donald Glover – aka Childish Gambino – in the [New Yorker](#). He says 'blackness is always seen through the lens of whiteness – the lens of how white people can profit from that moment'. He relates this to *12 Years a Slave* which is the story of black slaves, made by black people but in a white system with a white paying audience in mind.
- Glover's comedy drama series, *Atlanta*, is created by black people for a black audience. Try and track down a few episodes and watch them. Are the representations in *Atlanta* more positive or plural as a result? Do you think the fact that it was made for FX (a subsidiary of Fox in the U.S.) affects the content?

The Theory Drop  
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# Hegemony

## What is Hegemony?

Hegemony is basically the idea that the media continually reproduces images of a dominant group as superior or powerful. In Western society, the dominant group is middle class white males and because the media are predominantly produced by middle class white males, they tend to represent middle class white males as superior. And the rest of society – working class, BAME, LGBT, disabled, female – as less powerful or inferior. But the key point about hegemony is that it is so subtle that arguably the white guys making the media don't even realise they are doing it, and nobody challenges it; and thus the established hierarchies in society that are constantly reflected back to us in the media become the accepted norm. This is what theorists such as Antonio Gramsci and later, Noam Chomsky, meant by saying the media 'manufactures consent'.

I like to teach Hegemony because in the messy relationship between the media and society, it's the theory I most agree with. I always see it as offering

a chance to think about the current *status quo* – where we are now – in terms of how audiences interact with or are influenced by the media. It can also be seen as part of a continuum: a long line of developments in audience theory that stretch back to the beginnings of mass media.

## Behaviourism: The 'Original' Audience Theory

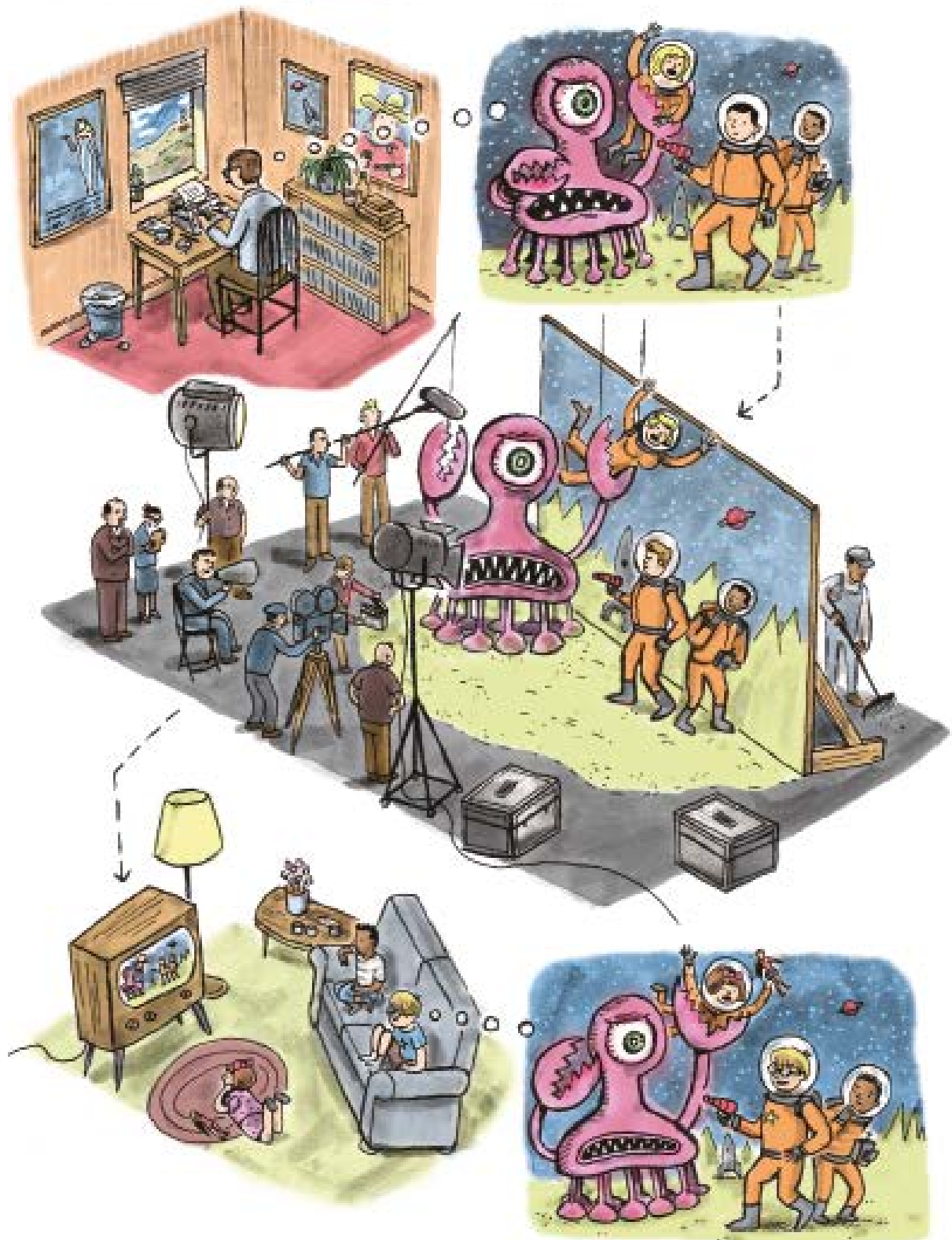
With every new form of media comes a wave of panic about the 'effects' it will have on the individual and society. Many of you will be familiar with the Magic Bullet theory – certainly it's a fave with my own students from GCSE to A2. It's the very simple idea that the media fires messages into our brains; that we are passive consumers of the media who believe everything we are told. Similar to this is the Hypodermic Needle theory; that media messages are injected into our bloodstream. Both of these ideas are 'Behaviourist' or 'passive audience' theories – simply put, the media have a direct impact on our behaviour. Most of us would probably agree that this idea of media

consumers as almost lobotomised zombie-people reacting to or copying what we see in the media is both patronising and utterly ridiculous; and yet it's still pulled out from time to time to deflect from more serious issues in society. For example, Donald Trump this year insisted that violent video games and films were to blame for the high school shooting in Florida, rather than acknowledge that the problem might be with the America gun laws. This tragedy subsequently inspired the March For Our Lives movement where thousands of high school students marched in Washington DC to call for gun reform. So not quite the passive, docile consumers that gun-loving Trump would have us believe.

## Uses and Gratifications

As the media became more commonplace, 'active audience' theories developed. Many of you will have studied Maslow's Needs and Motivation theory, but the GCSE Media big-hitter is Uses and Gratifications. Mostly attributed to Blumler and Katz (although, as the media evolves, so

# HEGEMONY







# Task 11

## Video Production: Making and Breaking the 180-degree Rule

The article for this task is taken from *MediaMagazine* 64



'Star Wars and the 180-degree Rule'

## Exploring the article

- Read *Star Wars and the 180-degree Rule* (MM64), by Giles Gough.
- Answer the following questions, drawing on the article for information and ideas.
  1. What does the article mean by a film's 'grammar'?
  2. What is the 180-degree rule in filming and why was it necessary to implement from a practical point of view?
  3. What is distinctive about the use of the 180-degree rule in *Star Wars* to show the relationship between Rey and Kylo Ren?
  4. What other stylistic choices are consistently used in *Star Wars* films?
  5. What impact does the writer feel that the purchase of the *Star Wars* franchise by Disney will have on the way the films are made?

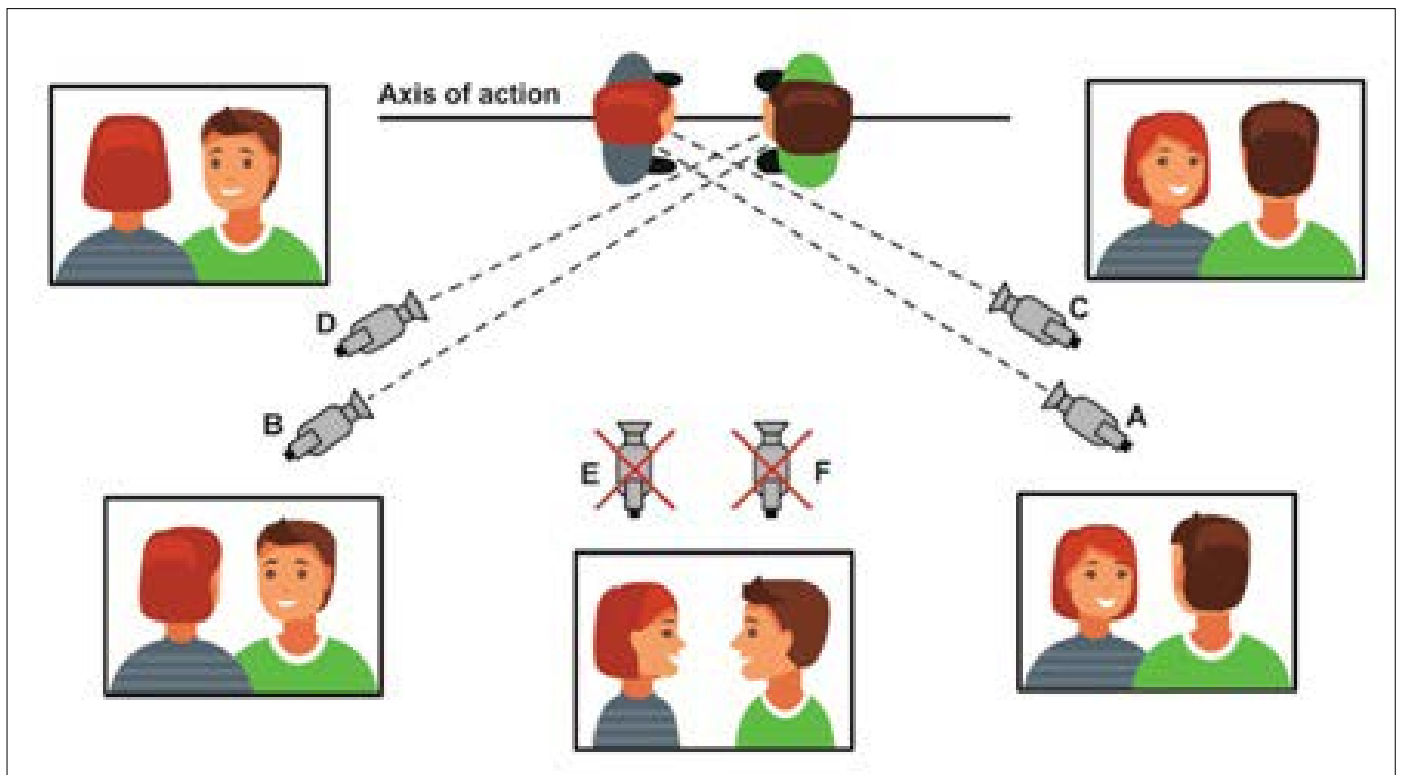
## Break the continuity rules

We're so used to the conventions of continuity editing that we only notice their impact when they are broken. So, see what happens when you break the rules deliberately.

Here's a familiar scenario which you can experiment with using storyboards, a stills camera, or video, depending on what's available.

- » Character A opens a door, crosses a room and sits down opposite character B.
- » They have a brief exchange.
- » Character B flounces out of the room.
- In no longer than 15 minutes, create a storyboard, still or moving image sequence for this scenario which demonstrates match on action, shot/ reverse shot and sticking to the 180-degree rule. Ask your family to be the characters or use toys, figurines or tin cans with faces drawn on them.
- Next, recreate your sequence, consciously disrupting the conventions by crossing the 180-degree line, framing your shots differently, or changing the camera's point of view.
- Compare your two sequences. What impact is created by the rule-breaking? What does it add to the meaning, genre or mood of the sequence?

## The 180-degree rule



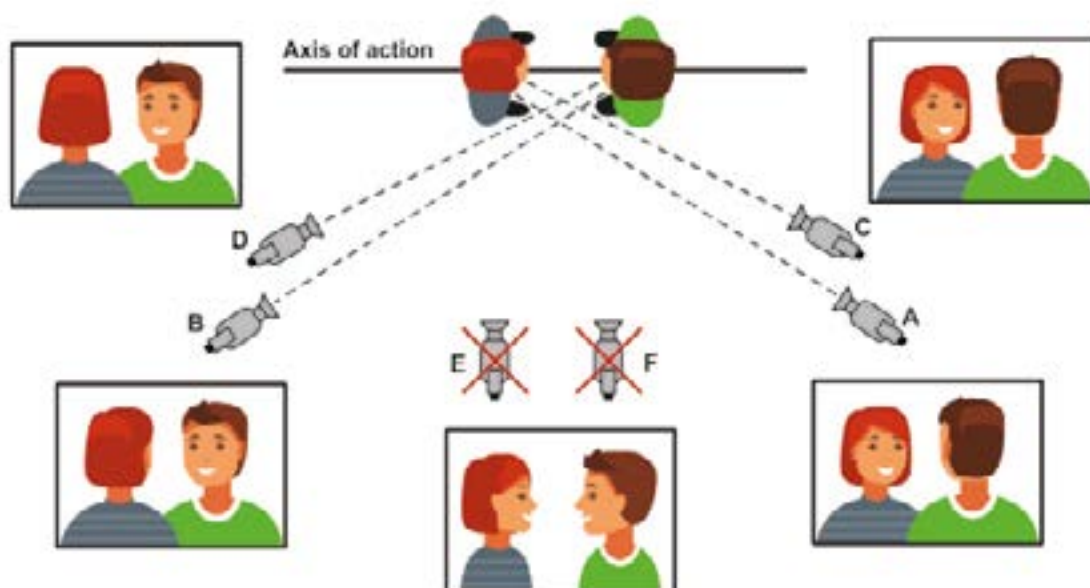
# STAR WARS

## AND THE 180° RULE



How does the 'grammar' of a film determine the way its story is told? Giles Gough takes the familiar convention of the 180° rule, and explains how it can be used to create new meanings.





**S**tar Wars: *The Last Jedi* has attracted no shortage of attention since its release in December 2017. Yet one area that has been largely ignored is the film's grammar; the stylistic choices that make up the look of the film. This article will examine the use of the 180° rule to change a certain narrative trope, and the implications of that change. It's important to mention that this article will contain mild spoilers. However, if you haven't seen the film by this point, you are probably not the kind of person who will be bothered by them!

Let's start with a quick introduction to the concept of the 180° rule. When films moved from being simply one continuous shot to many shots from different angles being cut and pasted together, film editing was conceived and with it, a growing number of rules. In conjunction with the cinematographer, film is constructed by shooting footage from a number of angles, which the editor then cuts together in a consistent style. As Bordwell and Thompson put it in *Film Art: An Introduction*:

**'The basic purpose of the continuity system is to create a smooth flow from shot to shot.'**

In simple terms, when shooting a scene, a filmmaker using the continuity editing style will make sure the colour and lighting is consistent from shot to shot, events will occur sequentially from action to reaction, and that the main action on screen will be framed within the centre of the shot. One slightly more complicated element of continuity editing is the 180° rule.

## The 180° rule

The 180° rule (or as it is sometimes called, 'the axis of action' or the 'centre line') is something you will have seen all the time but are rarely conscious of. According to Bordwell and Thompson:

**'The scene's action, a person walking, two people conversing, a car racing along a road is assumed to take place along a discernible, predictable line.'**

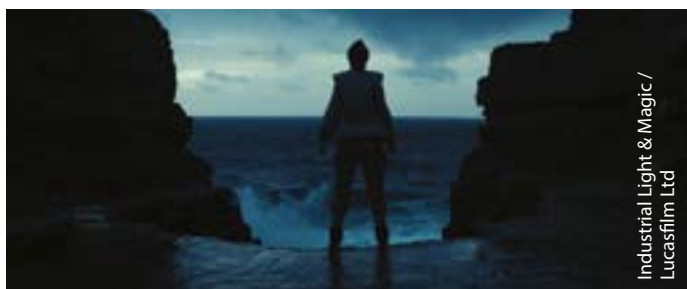
The 180° rule means that the camera can only be put on one side of this line. Let's take the example of a boy and a girl talking whilst facing each other. If we draw an imaginary line between those two people, it doesn't really matter which side of that line we place camera so long as we stay on that side for the whole scene. This is so that when filming them, their positions remain consistent in relation to each other. If we imagine the girl on the left and the boy on the right, the camera angles need to reflect that, with the girl appearing on the left hand side of the screen and the boy appearing on the right. If we were to break this rule with the angle on one of them, we could end up with both of them being on the same side of the screen, which is spatially confusing for an audience. This technique has been used so many times that most viewers will not even be aware of it; and yet the 180° rule is used quite conspicuously in *The Last Jedi*.

The idea of a 'psychic rapport', that is, a telepathic connection between two individuals is a staple trope of the sci-fi and fantasy genres. It is used between Arwen and Aragorn in *Lord of The Rings*, between Jean Grey and Professor Xavier

We are completely sold on the concept of two people having a conversation across space because a traditional technique is being used in a novel way.



Image courtesy of Disney Studios



Industrial Light & Magic /  
Lucasfilm Ltd



Industrial Light & Magic /  
Lucasfilm Ltd

to heart-breaking effect at the end of *X-men 2* and it is also a part of the *Star Wars* universe.

### The rule and the *Star Wars* franchise

Distinct from telepathy, where the character is able to read anyone's mind, a psychic rapport in *Star Wars* is called a Force Bond – where two force-sensitive people are capable of sensing each other's presence, thoughts or emotional pain. This is exhibited between Luke & Leia towards the end of *Empire Strikes Back*. Luke hangs in jeopardy upside down from an antenna beneath cloud city. He is in the centre of the frame, he closes his eyes and whilst facing to the left and whispers 'Leia'. We then cut away to the cockpit of the Millennium Falcon, where Leia is sitting. She is in the centre of the frame, looking into the middle distance, slightly to the right. There is no attempt by the director to suggest there's a spatial relationship between the two. This is not the case in *The Last Jedi*.

Within the first hour of the film, we see the

first evidence of a psychic rapport between Rey and Kylo Ren, but it is not like anything we have seen before. The director, Rian Johnson, aims to show us that the two of them can actually physically see each other. Sometimes this is reflected in the dialogue, such as when Rey asks Kylo if he can put a shirt on, but it is predominantly shown through the angles and the editing. Johnson creates an invisible line between the two characters, even though they are not even on the same planet, and he then slavishly sticks to the 180° rule. Rey is consistently shown as being on the right hand side of the screen looking left and Kylo Ren is always shown as being on the left looking right. When Rey begins to move away from him, moving further to the right, Kylo follows her. Sightlines are also consistent throughout, with Rey always looking slightly up and to the left, to account for the fact that Kylo is taller than her. The only time this is reversed is when Rey has run up the entry ramp to the Millennium Falcon, and Kylo, again



**Kylo Ren and Rey communicating using their Force Bond**

in a separate location, is looking up at her.

So why is this interesting? Well, what's fascinating about this stylistic choice is that by using the 180° rule with two characters that are not actually in the same place, Johnson is drawing attention to its artificiality. It is a technique that most audiences would not be aware of under normal circumstances, and here it's highlighted. We know that the filmmakers have had to work harder here to recreate this effect because these two scenes will have been filmed weeks or months apart. We are completely sold on the concept of two people having a conversation across space because a traditional technique is being used in a novel way. The sheer novelty of this change in style is worthy of comment as well.

## Stylistic changes

A film's stylistic choices can become as memorable and beloved as what we actually see on-screen. One example is the way the films, to some extent or other, use wipe transitions as a way of moving from one scene to the next. Another stylistic choice is the *Star Wars* way of representing a psychic connection; characters typically stare intently off into the middle distance and softly whisper each other's names. This is a technique we see used in both the original and the prequel trilogy. The interesting thing here is how, like poetry, a film's style can reflect its content. We have seen an example of how a psychic rapport works between Luke and

Leia, whereas Kylo and Rey's connection shows us a variation on this trope. What is communicated between the two characters in this film is more clear and articulate, possibly suggesting that Kylo and Rey, two otherwise unconnected individuals, have a strong connection – one much stronger than the Skywalker twins. This stylistic change is indicative of a broader sea-change within the *Star Wars* franchise.

This change has been brought about through necessity. Disney bought the *Star Wars* franchise from George Lucas in 2012 for an eye-watering 4.05 billion dollars. If there is going to be a new *Star Wars* film released every year, which one imagines is what Disney are hoping for, then we will have to reconsider what constitutes a *Star Wars* film. We have begun to see this with the introduction of *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, which made the stylistic choice to abandon the franchise's iconic opening text-crawl as a means to deliver exposition. With Rian Johnson being given the green light to start developing his own trilogy of films set in the *Star Wars* galaxy but separate to the *Skywalker* saga, we can expect to see even more narrative and stylistic changes: a thought that fills fans' hearts with joy and terror in roughly equal measure.

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Rey is consistently shown as being on the right hand side of the screen looking left and Kylo Ren is always shown as being on the left looking right.