Lenny Henry meets Ade Adepitan to talk accessibility and the academy | Professor Danny Dorling on Seven Up! and social mobility | Migrant Rights & the Summer Riots | Act Local, Think Global: community media from the Glasgow Bell, London Centric & Bradford Community Broadcasting | Is DEI DEAD? Miranda Wayland of the Creative Diversity Network offers her thoughts | Shirley J Thompson's classical compositions, Children's TV, Unmuted research, Artificial Intelligence, Annie Ernaux, Simon Albury, Lamorna Ash and more

RE PRESENT OLOGY

The Journal of Media and Diversity

Issue 07
Spring 2025

REPRESENTOLOGY

The Journal of Media and Diversity

Editorial Mission Statement

Welcome to Representology, a journal dedicated to research and best-practice perspectives on how to make the media more representative of all sections of society.

A starting point for effective representation are the "protected characteristics" defined by the Equality Act 2010 including, but not limited to, race, gender, sexuality, and disability, as well as their intersections. We recognise that definitions of diversity and representation are dynamic and constantly evolving and our content will aim to reflect this.

Representology is a forum where academic researchers and media industry professionals can come together to pool expertise and experience. We seek to create a better understanding of the current barriers to media participation as well as examine and promote the most effective ways to overcome such barriers. We hope the journal will influence policy and practice in the media industry through a rigorous, evidence-based approach.

Our belief is that a more representative media workforce will enrich and improve media output, enabling media organisations to better serve their audiences, and encourage a more pluralistic and inclusive public discourse. This is vital for a healthy society and well-functioning democracy. We look forward to working with everyone who shares this vision.

BIRMINGHAM CITY University

CARDIFF UNIVERSITY
PRIFYSGOL CAERDYDD

Representology is a collaboration between Birmingham City University and Cardiff University

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

Welcome to Issue Seven of Representology: The Journal of Media & Diversity.

2025 began with big events having a huge effect on media across the globe - from Murdoch-controlled NGN's settlement with Prince Harry; through an uneasy ceasefire in Gaza, the site of so many reporters' deaths; to a new American president seemingly over-reliant on the support of tech billionaires.

At a time when trust in traditional journalism has never been so low, we shine a spotlight on some of the community initiatives attempting to build better relationships with their audiences in Britain. We explore how press and broadcasting reflect the realities of inequality and racism, and feature conversations about representation in front of the camera and behind it with leading lights in British cultural production - discussing everything from the death of DEI to the birth pangs of AI. We include in these pages an obituary for the much loved Simon Albury, who dedicated his later career to vigorously tackling discrimination in the television industry and wished to see this journal thrive.

As ever, if you have any ideas for article for future issues, please drop us an email:
Representology@bcu.ac.uk

K Biswas
Editor

GREAT REPLACEMENT

Sir Lenny Henry meets Ade Adepitan - fellow TV star and his successor as Chancellor of Birmingham City University - to discuss backstories, basketball and breaking into broadcasting.

Lenny:

Ade, you're a legend, and you've just taken over as Chancellor of BCU . . .

Ade:

. . . from another legend!

Lenny:

What appealed to you about leading a university at such a challenging time and explain what the challenges might be.

Ade:

It's a good question. I think, initially, it didn't appeal to me - one, because I didn't go to university myself. So, what's my connection with university? I actually felt a little bit embarrassed. Oh man, shouldn't they be asking someone who's a bit more academic to be doing this? Secondly, because I don't come from Birmingham, you know? And I was thinking, they're gonna think that I'm some outsider. Some Londoner, coming up there, and telling us what to do - coming to 'the ends', man, what's going on bruv, and all of that. So, there were a lot of things that I was just apprehensive about but there was also some positive stuff. You know, the fact that you were the current Chancellor at the time, I was like, wow! Lenny, someone who I've always looked up to, and I've seen the work that you've done.

Lenny:

What tipped you over?

Ade:

One, that a lot more of the students come from lower socio-economic backgrounds than at most universities, and that really spoke to me. Also, the fact that students are from all over the world, not just from Birmingham, but then there was also the idea that I could do something bigger. I could have some sort of influence, make some sort of change. I've always been this guy who has got lots on my mind.

There's lots of things that I want to do, lots of social injustices out there that I feel need to be changed. You know, for people with disabilities, people from black and ethnic minority groups, and people from lower socio-economic backgrounds Suddenly, I was being told that you have this massive university with a lot of influence and power. As a black guy coming from a working class background, when these things come along, rather than immediately saying, 'Yes, this is an opportunity', I'm always very cautious. I'm thinking, Why me? What can I do?

Lenny:

When I was asked to be Chancellor of Birmingham City University, I had exactly those feelings. I come from Dudley, and my parents are working class, Jamaican, and I didn't do any Uni until much later. The thing is, it's what you represent. I mean, this magazine is called Representology. It's what you represent now, as a human being and as a grown up. How you see the world and what you've done in the world.

I have to give you huge respect. When I found out you had taken up this chance, I was so chuffed. I was so pleased for you and for the university, actually, because I've been there and I've represented one aspect of this, but now here's someone else. You come along with your dreadlocks and in your wheelchair, you're presenting something completely different and I love that. Tell me about your background, about your upbringing, because it seems to me that here's a guy with a disability who doesn't let the disability define him and I love that about you. I love that they always say he just got out of the car, got in the chair, went back.

Ade:

Do you know a funny thing on that? It is when I used to go on Twitter - now it's called X. I don't spend much time on there anymore, because it's so brutal. I remember, after I'd done a series about Africa - there's four episodes and I went to eleven countries in Africa, telling the story of modern day Africa. Then I did another one about climate change, traveling the world and someone posted on Twitter: are the BBC trying to kill Ade Adepitan, because every time we see him, he's halfway up a mountain, and I don't know how he bloody hell got up there?!

As kids, when we grow up, or when we're, you know, in our early stages, we don't have those labels. We don't have those preconceptions about what it is to be black or brown, to be female or to be disabled. You just see yourself as someone else, as another one of the group, or you try to fit in with the group. It's only later in life that all our adult sort of negativity - the things that hold us back - that's what we pass on to the next generation. My disability was never something that I wanted to define me as a child - fortunately, I've been able to hold on to that mindset.

When you come over as an immigrant, there's so many barriers that you face. One is trying to fit in with the indigenous population. Then, once you get in and you overcome that, there's a battle between you and the other immigrant communities.

Lenny:

You were born in Lagos, right?

Ade:

Yeah, I was born in Lagos. Nigeria.

Lenny:

But you ended up going to school in East London?

Ade:

Yeah. So, as you say, I was born in Lagos, Nigeria. My older sister - she has Down Syndrome. Then, I came along, just over a year later, and then contracted polio when I was 15 months old. Suddenly, my parents had two young kids with disabilities.

Lenny:

How did it affect them?

Ade:

Ah, hugely, because they realised very quickly that it was going to be very, very difficult for us in Nigeria. For a non-disabled person, in Nigeria, full stop, back in the 70s, it was tough, but life expectancy for children with disabilities was so low.

You know, there was no infrastructure. There was no education infrastructure set up for us, none of it was set up for us. And my parents realised that if we were going to have the best opportunities in life, or if we were going to survive, they needed to take us out of the country. So they borrowed money from their friends and family. Luckily, my mum's sister was in the UK studying and she had a council place, and they made the decision to up sticks and move.

A bigger problem for them was, initially, that they couldn't afford to bring us both over, and they had to choose between the two of us. That was an agonising decision.

Lenny:

A massive choice.

Ade:

And they chose me because of my needs, because they were physical. I couldn't walk around. I was crawling around on the floor. My mum said to me that she saw the way I was crawling and moving and she just thought that I was not gonna survive - the floor was so dirty out on the streets, I would probably catch some disease. So, yeah, my mum's sister was in East London. That's where we ended up living. I grew up in the 70s and 80s in East London.

Lenny:

Was that really difficult, because not only are you a kid with a disability, but also you're black, you're from Nigeria. Tell me what that was like.

Ade:

Absolutely. It was mad, Lenny. I wrote a kid's book about it. This is something I think people don't actually really know about. When you come over as an immigrant, there's so many barriers that you face. One is trying to fit in with the indigenous population.Then, once you get in and you overcome that, there's a battle between you and the other immigrant communities. They've made it this crazy world where you're all battling against each other, even though we're all in the same boat.

So, initially, we got prejudice from white people, we got prejudice from Asian people but we also got prejudice from the West Indian community, the Jamaican community. We overcame that because my nannies - the two women who I respect so much, who brought me up when I was a kid, Nanny Rees and Mrs Fidel - they looked after me from when I was about five to when I was 11. After school, I'd go to their house.

Lenny:

Because your parents were both working?

Ade:

Yeah, my parents were working and going to college, so straight after school, I'd go and stay in their house, and they'd cook for me, and I'd eat all the ackee and saltfish.

Lenny:

So Jamaican people?

Ade:

Yes. Caribbean people. So, I was brought up by them, but I do initially remember people saying stuff about me coming from Africa, you know, calling me a 'monkey'. I had a strong Nigerian accent. English wasn't my first language. I learned English at school, so I used to always speak like this. [Puts on Nigerian accent] "Hello, Lenny, how are you? Why are you looking at me like this? Ah, come on. Come on, Lenny!"

Lenny:

So, you had to learn how to integrate and immerse yourself in the indigenous culture, otherwise you were not going to survive.

Ade:

You had to skip from culture to culture.

Lenny:
Code switch

Ade:
Yeah. So, when I was with my white friends, I was a certain way. Then, when I got to Mrs Rees's house, I was another way. Then, when I got home with my parents, that was another way. It was mad. My brain was sort of twisted every day.

Lenny:
There's quite a lot of people who don't understand having to switch codes wherever you are. If you're a person of colour or if you're an immigrant, you learn the indigenous culture and catchphrases and jokes otherwise it's a fight. Your parents were religious, right?

Ade:
My parents were super religious.

Lenny:
Were they Pentecostal? Baptist?

Ade:
Being No, not Baptist. It was not Pentecostal. It's the other one, I'm so rubbish. It changed, actually, my mum went to the whole evangelical side later on in life. Was the most boring one. The one when you're in church thinking, I would rather pluck my eyeballs out.

For them, religion was everything. I used to have quite deep conversations with my dad and my mum. They didn't really like me challenging them and their religion. [Puts on Nigerian accent] "You have to show respect. What is the matter with you? Why are you always talking like this?"

I would just challenge them about religion and their faith. Now, my dad's dad actually converted to Islam, but before, my dad's dad's dad, my great granddad, he was Animistic. So they believed in the spirits of air, wind, the land, the sun and the sea. Nature, you know. And a lot of Africans were like that. And it wasn't until the Europeans came over and colonised Africa and started bringing in Christianity that they changed. So, our kind of Christianity mixes in those old ways with the ways of the British and the colonisers who came in.

And so I was always constantly questioning my parents about this. I was also worried that it was giving them false hope. I see some of the upsides of religion, and one of them is that when people are really struggling and there are so many questions they want to ask, which they don't understand - why am I in this position? Why are things so hard for me? Why have I been given two kids with a disability - all of those things, religion can give people an answer.

Lenny:
My mum had great faith, but things were still tough. Did people ever try and say we can pray this away, your disability?

Ade:
Yeah, all the time. I used to wear these things called calipers. These braces around my legs, it'd go all the way up my left leg, and it'll go all the way up to my hips, like in Forrest Gump, if you have ever seen that sequence.

Lenny:
Run Forrest!

Ade:
Look, I couldn't run like that. And if they had broken off, I would have collapsed on the floor but my parents always wanted me to walk without them. My mum would buy these ointments and she would pray. She even went to Jerusalem, and she bought these ointments from probably some snake oil salesman, came back and would, like, pray on my leg every day and say things like: you will be better, you will heal.

And I used to do the Lord's Prayer every morning - doing 'Our Father' and all of that. Then, I suddenly realised it felt to me that people were saying the reason why I had a disability was because I wasn't worthy, because I may have done something evil in my last life. It just really made me feel like it was my fault and that I had to pray for repentance - to thank someone in order to be worthy again. I just thought, that's not right. How can I, as an eight year old child, have to carry this burden? Why are my parents putting this on me?

Lenny:
Because they loved you.

Ade:
Yes.

Lenny:
And they were trying to give you a structure.

Ade:
It took me a while to understand that.

Lenny:
Yeah, but listen, man, you represented Team GB in wheelchair basketball in the Paralympics. I mean, listen, from what they were saying to you about, you know, we're gonna pray this away. Actually, what happened is that you … you kind of just did something yourself and that must have made you feel extraordinary. You won a medal at Athens 2004. How did that journey begin, the sport journey?

Ade:
So look, as much as I have said stuff about my parents and the way they looked at my disability in a negative way, I think I learned so much from them in terms of hard work, in terms of self-belief, in terms of respect. Funnily enough, the reason why we butted heads a lot is because I was so similar to them.

Lenny:
Oh, you were a very smart kid. So you were challenging them with actually quite reasonable arguments.

Ade:
Just like they challenged the status quo to try to push and improve their lives and the livelihoods of their children. I did the same with them, and my way of challenging them was to get into sport.

You're running around everywhere, doing everything, and I couldn't keep up with them. So we just thought, you know what? Look at that shopping trolley, Ade can jump in the shopping trolley. And we're just racing . . .

Lenny:
Which sport? Was it always basketball, or were there other attempts before?

Ade:
Football. I went to a school which was a non-uniform school, so you could wear whatever you wanted. My mum took me to a market in East London, a famous market called Petticoat Lane Market, and she bought me a pink checkered flared suit, right?

So I had this big pink checkered jacket, checkered flared trousers, pink as well! She got this frilly shirt with this sort of cravat type thing on it, combed my head into a big, massive Afro with a massive side parting the size of the Blackwall tunnel, innit!

Lenny:
Haha!

Ade:
I went to school dressed like that on my first day! And I remember just absolutely sweating, just thinking: "these kids are going to destroy me, especially when they hear my accent". Then I saw a group of kids playing football. Luckily for me, and I don't know how or why, I had really good hand eye coordination, good upper body strength, and football was something that just connected with me.

I remember going and asking the boys if I could join in. They didn't want me to play because they looked at me, like, how is he going to even be able to play? Look at the way he's dressed. Look at this yout' dressed like that! After moaning and nagging at them all day, they stuck me in goal. Within the first five minutes of being in goal, the best footballer in our school, a guy whose name I still remember - I bumped into him years' later - named Stuart Harvey, and he breaks loose.

He's one-on-one against me, and I'm in goal, with my pink checkered flares. I had a parka coat. Remember the parka coat with fur around the hood, and the mittens? My mittens were attached to the strings and all that. Man blasts the ball. Luckily for me, it went to my right hand side, which is my stronger side, and I managed to save this ball, right, save this ball. And all these kids surrounded me. Big kid … the biggest kid in the school, a guy called Spencer Greenfield, came up to me, and said, "Ade, or wherever they effing call you. If anyone says anything to you about your dodgy leg, your dodgy name, your dodgy clothes, come to me and I'll sort them out!"

It was – it was amazing, because I could play sport and it suddenly erased all of that negativity that people had - all those perceptions about me, all the kids were suddenly saying: this guy's a legend. This guy's a legend

Lenny:
You transcended what they thought about you, it becomes a badge of honour.

Ade:
Exactly. So I was obsessed with football - I was a goalie until the kids suddenly realised that, yes, he could jump from side to side, but he can't jump up. And they started chipping the ball. Kids are cold, innit? They're cold, bruv, they're cold!

So, then I started getting frustrated, and needed to find a way of playing on a level playing field. Then I was lucky enough to bump into some physiotherapists who were based in East London and they'd set up a junior wheelchair basketball team and they spotted me. It was just so lucky that they lived, literally, a mile away from me, and they worked at a school called the Elizabeth Fry School in Canning Town. Danny Dyer territory. And they spotted me as I was being raced through the streets in a Tesco shopping trolley . . .

Lenny:
Hang on, back up. Wheel up! Your mates put you in a shopping trolly?

Ade:
You must have done this as kids? You're running around everywhere, doing everything, and I couldn't keep up with them. So we just thought, you know what? Look at that shopping trolley, Ade can jump in the shopping trolley. And we're just racing - the amount of collisions we had in there, because shopping trolleys are not easy, you know?

Lenny:
Especially when you get that wobbly leg . . .

Ade:
. . . and the divots in the road and everything, but we would be flying through the streets. Anyway, these guys, they pulled over, because I was so easily recognisable. I became the guy that was in the shopping trolley. They pulled over in their bus and they had just dropped some kids off from a basketball match. They'd read about me because I was in a local newspaper because I tried to do a sponsored walk from my school over all the bridges, and I was in the Newham Recorder, and they wanted me to join their team.

Pulled over. One of them was called Owen, the other one was called Kay. Looked like hippies. They were dressed really funky, and they looked out the window and said: "You're Ade, aren't you?" And I answered. How did they even know who I am? I was quite scared. And then they said: "How would you like to play wheelchair

basketball?" At first I thought they were mad, because this is the '80s. I'd never heard of wheelchair basketball.

Lenny:

You didn't know how it could be. Was there a league?

Ade:

Yeah. The only person I knew who was in a wheelchair was - you're from a similar generation to me - Ironside.

For me, initially, sport was not about winning medals, not about going to the Paralympics. Sport was about independence.

Lenny:

Haha!.

Ade:

I thought, am I gonna be pushed around like I'm some black Ironside? Then occasionally chuck a ball at a basket. And it took them a long time to convince me - it took them months. And eventually they took me to Stoke Mandeville, where they were hosting the junior games. It just so happened that the Great Britain men's team were playing. So I went and saw wheelchair basketball at the elite level and I saw these guys - unbelievable. Blew away all my preconceptions - they had the biggest arms I had ever seen, and they were flying around the court.

What really captured my imagination is that they were talking about excellence. As a disabled person, people always talk to you about what you can't do and about the barriers. These guys weren't talking about barriers. They were talking about being the best in the world. And I was like: This is my tribe! I found my tribe! Lots of people search for years, all their life, to find their tribe and I had found my tribe - I found the people connected to my world.

Training was hard but I loved it. For me, initially, sport was not about winning medals, not about going to the Paralympics. Sport was about independence. I just suddenly thought, if I make myself stronger, if I make myself fitter, then I have to rely on nobody. I mean, I can do my own 'ting. I was quite a proud young kid. I also realised that the moment I walked into a room, people were going to judge me because of being in the chair and I had to disprove all their preconceptions, literally in the first second. That's why I initially got fit and tried to get stronger, so when I started playing wheelchair basketball at a high level, the training was easy for me. I thought: this is what I do.

Lenny:

What was your first big TV break?

Ade:

Do you remember an advert, a Sony PlayStation advert? It was their first ever advert, and it was a really dramatic one. I was in one section - at Warwick Avenue Station, spinning around in my wheelchair. I didn't know this advert was going to be so big. A mate of mine just told me to go up for the audition. I needed the money at the time. They gave me eight or nine hundred quid, which was a lot of money back then.

I was properly broke, so I took the money - didn't think nothing about it. Suddenly, I was told that when the advert came out it was going to be worldwide. I remember I was going out on a date with this girl that I really fancied. I went to the cinema, and the adverts that come on before the film came on, and suddenly – me! I came up on the big screen, full advert, there's me spinning around in my wheelchair, and I had a really decent chunk of this advert. She looked at me and she said:, "What I didn't know is this is how you roll". When I was coming out, everyone in the cinema was pointing at me and stuff like that. It was crazy.

I did another iconic advert. I did the BBC One ident. It was only on for about two years, maybe less than that. But people still think it's on now, right? Iconic, but on for one year. It was, I think, 45,000 times that it was shown. If they had paid me royalties, I'd be rich now. That advert changed the game. So I would say the PlayStation advert and the BBC One ident suddenly launched me out there.

Lenny:

The first time I said hello to you, I said: "You're that guy in the BBC ident. Nice to meet you, man".

Ade:

Lenny, when it came out, I didn't realise it was gonna be so big. I didn't know much about TV and my agent had said to me: "Oh, they want to do this thing. It's an ident". I don't even know what an ident is. Later, I found out that we were replacing the air balloon. Anyway, they wanted everyday people in the UK, dressed in red, doing something that was their skill, and they didn't want to use me, because I'd done a bit of TV before. So they came to my agent, and they said: "You know, maybe Ade can help us find these people. We want someone who can do some sort of wheelchair, hip hop dancing. Do you know anyone?" I said: Well, I could show you what I can do. So I did a few moves, and when the guy picked his mouth off the ground, he said: "Do you know anyone else who can do this with you? You're in". So we did it, and I didn't think it was gonna be that big. Then, when it came out, I got a phone call from my sister, and she said to me "You need to go to the shops". I said, "why"? She said: "You need to go to the shops and look at the newspapers". So I got up and went to the shops.

I get into the newsagents, and every paper has us on the front. Daily Mail has me on the front, and it's got something like 'BBC waste taxpayer money on wheelchair hip hop dancing'. I thought, "Oh my God, I'm dead. They're gonna kill me. They're gonna kill me". I was so scared after that but, luckily, it captured the imagination of the public - people really loved it, but at first I thought I was gonna get 'mash up.

Lenny:

You're not scared to take things on, either. You talk very intelligently about politics and all manner of confrontational stuff. I mean, you went to South Africa to do Whites Only: Ade's Extremist Adventure. Tell me about how that was set up, and what that was it like for you? What were the challenges there?

Ade:

The whole standing up and talking for myself - that came from my parents, you know? They always told me: "Never let anyone talk you down". You know, always stand up for yourself. Both my parents, in Nigeria, they were teachers. For them, communication was so important, learning how to communicate. The Whites Only documentary, that came about because I was trying to get a documentary series with Channel Four, and I went out to lunch with Ian Katz, Head of Channel Four.

Lenny:

I hope he picked up the cheque.

Ade:

He certainly did. I wish I'd ordered more, actually.

Lenny:

A bottle of Bolly please, and the dolphin and some sourdough!

Ade:

We were chatting and I told him, "I'd really love to do a series with Channel Four". He said: "You know, I feel like you are one of the nicest people that I've met. What I'd love is to see you meet some of the most awkward and hardcore people in the world. I feel like that combination of you meeting these horrible people would get under their skin and we could learn more about them".

So the idea was to do a three part series meeting controversial groups of people around the world. The first group we were supposed to meet - I was going to do a film with the Proud Boys. Very very right wing, far right wing, you know. They probably wouldn't say this, but they're kind of close to Fascist, hate immigrants and all of that sort of stuff, even though a lot of them are immigrants themselves. Donald Trump very much called on them for the January 6th insurrection at the Capitol building.

Lenny:

So that was gonna be the first one.

Ade:

Yeah, that was gonna be the first. The leader of the Proud Boys, they told him about me, and he really wanted me to come over and spend time with him. I was quite confused, but, apparently, they said his nephew was in a wheelchair and he was desperate for me to meet his nephew, and for me to kind

of try to inspire his nephew and stuff. How surreal is this?

You've got this guy, who's the leader of this racist group, who wants me, a black guy to come over.

But there was a load of things, in terms of money, difficulties, so that didn't get off the ground, but we were so close, and I was gutted. Then another one was that I was supposed to go to India and meet a group of ultra nationalist Hindus who want India to have only Hindus in it, and everyone else would be taken out of it. But there was trouble with that as well. I mean, I think we would have managed to get all the others in the long run, but there were issues here and there. What we did end up getting was a group in a place called Orania in South Africa.

And Oranians are Afrikaners who have built their own town, their own city. It's pretty vast. They're aiming to try and cut out an area the size of England in South Africa, just for white people. They say it's not just for white people. It's for anyone who's Afrikaans. But you have to, like, pass a test, even though they say it's not just for white people. There were only white people there. You know, the test kind of filtered out everyone else.

Lenny:

A written test or what? You had to run, jump, swim? A citizenship test?

Ade:

Yeah, you do a citizen test. I think it was a series of questions.

Lenny:

About where you're from?

Ade:

All of that stuff. I was the first black journalist that was allowed to stay there.

Lenny:

How long were you there?

Ade:

Well, the plan was for me to stay there for two weeks and to try and understand them, to try and find out where this came from and why they were doing what they were doing. I lasted nine days. They were nine turbulent days,

The straw that broke the camel's back was when I was due to interview the head of their church and I'd had an argument the day before with the wife of one of our contributors. It wasn't meant to even go that way. They were launching their own currency. So they've got their own currency, called the Ora, and I'd been invited to the launch of the Ora. One of our contributors, who was an estate agent. She was actually okay. She was a racist, but . . .

Lenny:

She was a nice racist.

Ade:

I mean, we could converse, and I was there on the table with her and her husband. The only black person there to launch their currency, their Ora. They were doing auctions and people were bidding for it, and Channel Four, in their own mischievous way, said, "Why don't you bid for some of this currency"? So every time I was bidding, obviously, these people were looking around. We don't want this black guy to take our money. I was actually forcing the price of the currency up, because people were bidding against me. Eventually, I got some Ora. I'd said some stuff in Afrikaans, because I'd learned some Afrikaans as part of the show. The people didn't quite know how to take it. They applauded, but I know it just put them off.

. . . he basically started cutting all ties with everyone there, cutting all our interviews. I got escorted out of the church by some men with guns and then we had to leave.

The husband of this woman who's our contributor then went on to have this weird conversation with me and he triggered me. He said stuff that was deep in the trauma of being a black person. Normally, when I'm doing my job as a journalist, I have a mask and have to be quite neutral. I have to try and get to the root of things without allowing who I am to interfere with this.

He started trying to almost equate their struggle with the struggle of black people in America, and I think he almost said that at least they were doing it in a civilised way - setting up their own Township, unlike us who were going out and rioting when George Floyd got murdered. Then he went on about BLM, Black Lives Matter, basically calling them these thugs that were out there fighting and they weren't civilised like them.

Lenny:

And how did you respond to that stuff?

Ade:

It got a bit fiery. Lenny. They've got it on the show. I'm not completely proud of how I responded. I didn't go over the top. I think I was quite reasonable but part of me feels that I shouldn't have allowed it to get to me. Another part of me thinks I was traumatised by being in that place. I'm surrounded by all these white people who don't like me, who are suspicious of who I am and what I'm about. Then this guy talks about George Floyd, talks about BLM and, boom!

Anyway, he was quite a powerful person in the town, so they wanted us out. So the next day, when I was supposed to interview the head of their church, he basically started cutting all ties with everyone there, cutting all our interviews. I got escorted out of the church by some men with guns and then we had to leave.

Lenny:

I mean, that's an extraordinary journey you had there. I remember Trevor McDonald when he went to South Africa, he was effectively treated as an honorary white person…

Ade:

So he was there during apartheid times?

Lenny:

If I remember correctly, the only way you could be a black journalist there was to have a pass that allowed you, a person they saw as an honorary white person, to go to all areas.

Now, you founded a production company, in part, to bring disabled talent into mainstream broadcasting. Do you feel the TV industry has been slow to address diversity behind the camera as well as in front of it?

Ade:

I was listening to a radio presenter the other day who was talking about similar things - trying to get people from lower class backgrounds into the media. One of the things he was saying was: "You can't be what you can't see, right?" I think it's true but then I also think: God, how did I get here? Because I never saw anyone like me. No one like me.

I saw you on TV. You were a massive inspiration. Me and my family. Anytime The Lenny Henry Show came on, we were watching it. Tiswas - we were watching it because of what you've done. You know, seeing someone that looked like us just made us feel comfortable. It just made me feel relieved. I suddenly felt like I could breathe. I actually felt like I couldn't breathe until I saw someone like you on TV.

Then, as for disability, very few. Generally, a lot of people who had disabilities cast in TV and dramas tended to be cast as the evil person - the Bond villain or the crook. Historically, people with disabilities have always been seen as evil, so you had that to deal with

Lenny:

Do you feel that you have a responsibility to change that?

Ade:

Yeah, definitely, absolutely. How do we overcome stuff like this? Going back, the first person with a disability I saw on TV - and I didn't even know he had a disability - was Ian Dury. He had polio, right? And he would do Rhythm Stick, Plaistow Patricia and Reasons to be Cheerful. When he performed on stage, he would fall over. I thought it was just because he was on drugs, he was drunk, all of that. He was rock 'n' roll. Then when I found out he had polio and he was a rock star, I burst into tears, Lenny

Lenny:

Really?

Ade:

I burst into tears

Lenny:

Because you thought what?

Ade:

Because I thought: Oh my God, you can have a disability and you could do these amazing things. People could love you and respect you for your talent - I could be a part of society. So ever since then, ever since I started to get an opportunity to get into TV - and I've now been in TV for about 20 years - every day has been a challenge, fighting to get jobs.

Lenny:

I mean, you do a lot of work for the BBC and Channel Four. Do you think public broadcasters have a responsibility to get diversity?

Ade:

Yeah, I think they do. I think all channels do because TV has such a huge impact on society. Massive impact. Look at all these kids. You are kind of the window to a lot of children's dreams. TV gives parents the ability to say to their children: you can be anything. You can be anything. You can see that comedian, that entertainment guru, that journalist, that political leader, and if they reflect who you are, it shows that you can be that person. When we don't do that with TV, we deny massive sections of society a dream. We deny them an opportunity to be the best

Lenny:
I'd say that, over the last few years, I think it's changed a bit. It's certainly not changed as much as I would like it to. We went to Downing Street, remember? When we were trying to get more tax breaks for diversity . . .

Ade:
But here's the thing with that, we had to give them incentives to be diverse. They're not just going to be diverse naturally - by osmosis. We had to say to the government: if you offer these people a tax break because they've got a more diverse production team, then this is going to help them.

Lenny:
In many respects, it was the beginning of the Lenny Henry Centre at Birmingham City University, because we hadn't really done the modeling of how that might work. The Treasury said: Well, have you done modeling? Have you got the figures, have you got an Excel spreadsheet? Now, what's great about the research centre is that we have all of these academic articles and researchers willing to look into these things and model them and say: "well, this could work if you do it like this."

Ade:
Your research centre is another big reason why I thought this would be such a good position to take on, because when I saw what you've done, I thought: "Look at Lenny. Lenny's making real change, proper cut through, you know."

Lenny:
As you recognise, there's more work to do. I hope you're willing to help - the university is very keen that you utilise it as something where you can make social change.

Ade:
Yeah, I would be disappointed with myself if I hadn't done something like that in three years' time. I think, for me, in front of the camera, we are starting to make progress but it's behind the camera, at production level. It's the commissioners. It's the decision makers . . .

Lenny:
Gatekeepers.

Ade:
What would be amazing is if, at some stage, the Head of BBC TV, or the Head of ITV was black, or of Channel Four was black. We need those big bosses to be black or from a BME background, you know that would be a game changer. Being black alone, or being from a B.A.M.E. background alone. is not just the answer. You also have to be someone who's there that's willing to want to make that change.

Lenny:
And also to not just take on the rules and regulations of the organisation they've joined. Often, when people are institutionalised, they stick so close to what the institution demands of them that they don't make any change, because they're scared to make a change. An institution might say: "Well, hang on, we're not doing that."

Ade:
We need brave visionaries

Lenny:
How are you balancing family life with all the ambitious things you want to do?

Ade:
Yeah, it's really, really difficult. Having a child, as you know, changes your perceptions. It changes your mindset completely, because you suddenly realise it's not all about you, and it's not all about you and your missus - you have someone else who you're responsible for. It's a big, big deal.

Now, firstly, my son's named after my dad. Every time I hear people calling him his name, it just fills me with joy, because it feels like my dad is still alive. Secondly, I don't like traveling as much as I used to.

Lenny:
You want to be home.

Ade:
I love being with my family. It makes me so happy. Back in the day, I couldn't wait to get on a plane. I can't wait to be abroad to go on a new adventure. Now, when I'm leaving, leading up to leaving, I have this sense of sadness that starts building up in me. It feels really sad. My son and my wife, they always go to my son's bedroom window and they wave as we're going. And I'm saying to myself: "No man. Stop it you softy. Stop it, you big softy - you're East London. You don't cry."

My son. And now we're expecting another one as well. t I think what I'm trying to do now is to find that nirvana. It is where you have a couple of series in the UK. So you're in that position where you've got two regular jobs. You want a regular gig and maybe a side hustle but you can pick and choose. You can say "no" if you want to. Finding that place, especially for people like us, is hard.

Lenny:
Final question, why would a more diverse media culture and public life be good for Britain?

Ade:
Look, we can't truly call ourselves Great Britain unless we have a diverse media. Everything that's public facing, if it's not diverse, we can't call ourselves great. Great means you utilise and maximise the talent of everyone that surrounds you - everyone. That's what great is about. Great is not about only maximising the talent of one group of people.

Just think of how many potential Einsteins, potential Lennys, potential incredible superstars we've lost because we've just decided to pick from a tiny talent pool. The UK, at the moment, is only just scratching the surface of its talent and the only way it's going to be the best that it can be is when it starts having media that look like the country.

Lenny:
You know what? That was dope

How Seven Up! inspired me

2+2+1+1+1=7

Danny Dorling

I am eight lots of seven years old: fifty-six. My generation grew up with *Seven Up!* – a warning about, and hope for, what we might become. Every seven years, we got to see what had happened to people just a little older than us. Much of our lives, our heartbreaks and hopes, our falls and laugher, were foretold. My book, *Seven Children* was inspired by Michael Apted's landmark documentary *Seven Up!* but it is set more than sixty years later..

The original documentary film, and those that followed every seven years, focused on fourteen children born around 1957, the year when the Prime Minister, Harold MacMillan, told the UK it had 'never had it so good'. In contrast, *Seven Children* looks at life in 2023–24, when many people had never had it so bad. The statistics used to create our seven children were published between when they were born, in 2018, and in 2023, when they turned five.

No one would blame a child for where they are in the pecking order of inequality. They are too young for anyone to see them as skivers. If a new series of *Seven Up!* were to be based on seven children like those in this book, the producers would certainly ensure that the children they chose were cute and camera-friendly, photogenic and perhaps a little cheeky, too. Most importantly, they would need to have parents who were not too fraught, too overprotective, too likely to pull the plug on the filming.

Apted's *Up!* series was intended to follow the lives of youngsters from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds. However, those who were chosen were not at all representative of British society, either then or now. That 1950s project sought out the extremes, not the averages, in its aim to give the public 'the whole picture' of Britain's socioeconomic diversity.

In *Seven Up!*, three boys came from the same private pre-prep school in London, alongside a girl from a similarly posh background. If the documentaries had reflected the reality of the country as a whole, only one of the documentary's fourteen children would have been privately educated. The other three girls in the series attended a state primary school in a poorer part of the capital. Two of the remaining seven boys lived in a charity home, and the others were hardly a random sample.

An evidence-based remake of the *Up!* series should require the children to be representative of the country. An odd number of children would mean that one was the average child (in *Seven Children*, it is "David"). The government measures household income by splitting the population into fifths. Let's call these five equally sized groups poor, modest, average, affluent and rich. (Those five labels are not that accurate, but they often describe a person better than that person might describe themselves. In a more equitable country, we might use the very same labels, but the poor would be less poor and the rich less rich).

No one would blame a child for where they are in the pecking order of inequality

So why not have five child profiles now, one for each of the five income brackets? The reason is that the country's children are not evenly distributed across the five groups. If we divide the UK's 14 million children into groups of 2 million, we get seven children—and, of these children, two would be in the bottom fifth for household income, another two in the next fifth, and then one each in the 'top' three fifths: 2+2+1+1+1=7. If we took only five children, one from each of the five income brackets, that would obscure this skewed weighting. It would not reflect the reality that the majority of British children come from poorer households.

Each one of the children in my book represents a seventh of all the children in the UK today. They are not at the extremes of their seven groups but are drawn — statistically — from the very middle of each. And the groups are sorted by what, above all else, most determines children's life chances in Britain—their parents' income. That was much less the case in the late 1950s. The UK was then becoming a melting pot.

It is demoralising to describe the deeply unequal UK that our seven children have been born into, but to try to understand why their futures look so unequal an example can be taken using housing. Everyone understands the necessity of housing and it is only the extremely rich who do not hold the majority of their wealth in housing.

In 2019, the government calculated from council tax data that there were at least 648,114 empty (unfurnished) homes in England—a 2.2% increase on the previous year—of which at least 225,845 had been empty for over six months. Those empty properties are all someone's assets.

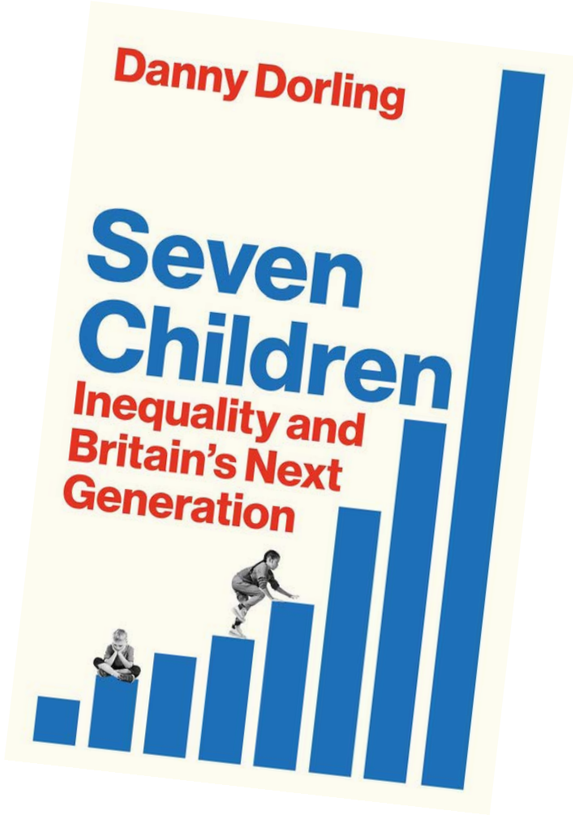
Although the powers existed for them to do so, local authorities rarely did anything to bring vacant dwellings back into use. Some 5.5 million people, or one in nine of all UK adults, owned at least one spare home, worth some £1 trillion in total. Very few of these owners were people with young children. They were almost all richer, older people and amongst these were the 1.9 million adults who were buy-to-let landlords. However, the Resolution Foundation report, in which these statistics appeared, also explained that, although only 37% of adults owned any property by the age of 29 (down from half of all 29-year-olds just two decades earlier), 7% of adults owned multiple properties by that age. Wealth inequalities had risen.

Our seven children's futures are unwritten. Since they are taken from the middle, not the bottom, of each household income group, none of them are living in destitution. In the future, however, one of these children could well become homeless. It happened to one of the boys in Michael Apted's *Seven Up!* documentary series. According to the official statistics for England, in 2018—the year our seven children were born—at any one time, there were 124,000 children living in temporary accommodation provided by a local authority. This number had almost doubled in a decade, and it might well be higher in the future. To be precise, it had increased by 80% since 2010, so by the time the children in my book are aged 7, this year, it may have risen to around 200,000 children who are housed in temporary accommodation at any one time. To that figure you have to add the hidden homeless: 'In 2016–17 there were 92,000 children living in sofa-surfing families. 56,880 or 68% of the families in temporary accommodation are in London.' By the end of June 2023, the total was 82,360 homeless children in London. Far more had been pushed out of the capital and were homeless elsewhere.

The story above shows how statistics can de-humanise, but also reveal when things are getting worse, as they have been doing for some decades. Why have we not been told that the situation is getting worse? This is because those who get to tell the stories of our times invariably now come from privilege. When inequalities widen, as they have relentlessly over the course of the last fifty years, opportunities narrow. We become worse at seeing ourselves. However, eventually, the reality becomes too stark to ignore.

. . . groups are sorted by what, above all else, most determines children's life chances in Britain—their parents' income.

Danny Dorling is Professor of Human Geography at the University of Oxford. *Seven Children: Inequality and Britain's Next Generation* was published in September 2024 by Hurst: https://www.hurstpublishers.com/book/seven-children/



Breaking Barriers: Shirley J. Thompson

Journalist & Broadcaster Marverine Cole profiles the composer, academic and artistic director, widely recognised as the first woman in Europe to have composed and conducted a symphony in over forty years.

She has written for royalty, brought historical figures to life through music and even captured the rhythms of the Windrush generation in opera. When I sat down with Shirley J. Thompson OBE, the acclaimed Black British composer & university professor over Zoom, it was her connection to filmmaking that initially caught my attention.

Introduction

"I was trained as a filmmaker," she reveals, "so I consider that I make films through music." This revelation reframed my understanding of her work. For me, her symphonies, operas and ballets transform into cinematic experiences, rich with visual narratives and emotional depth. Thompson's artistic journey has been anything but conventional. Her background in documentary filmmaking, with its emphasis on factual storytelling and visual communication, infuses her musical compositions with a unique sensibility. "That factual type of documentary is quite unconventional, I would say, in my approach," she explains, "because I have an art college background."

That approach allowed her to break barriers and challenge expectations throughout her career. In 2002, she made history as the first woman in Europe to compose and conduct a symphony in over 40 years. Her groundbreaking work, New Nation Rising, A 21st Century Symphony, was commissioned for the Queen's Golden Jubilee and painted a vibrant musical portrait of London's evolution, from 1066 to the present day. It was performed and recorded by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

From Symphony Hall to Olympic Stadium

Thompson's music has reached far beyond the traditional confines of the concert hall, gracing the grand stage of the Olympic Games. New Nation Rising, fusing orchestral and contemporary influences, caught the attention of Danny Boyle, the director of the 2012 London Olympics' opening ceremony.

"It was an incredible honour to have my work recognised like that," Thompson shares, reflecting on the experience. Boyle was assumed to have drawn inspiration from her symphony for the ceremony's 'Pandemonium' sequence, a dynamic and diverse spectacle showcasing British history and culture.

"Both celebrated the rich tapestry of Great Britain's culture and its history, amalgamating a range of diverse influences and perspectives. It was gratifying to see those themes reflected on such a grand scale," Thompson recalls. "The Olympics' opening ceremony was a celebration of creativity and collaboration, and I was proud to be a part of its legacy, even if only indirectly."

A Royal Request and a Handbag Full of Music

Thompson is entrepreneurial by nature - self-belief is at the heart of all she does. That spirit has led to some unexpected opportunities. She told me about an unforgettable encounter with the then Prince Charles, at Clarence House in 2022, where she was celebrating her inclusion on The Powerlist, which recognises influential Black people working in the UK. "We were chatting about music," she remembers, "and he expressed an interest in hearing my compositions. As luck would have it, I had a CD in my handbag!"

That meeting threw up something special, when the following year, Thompson was commissioned to compose a piece for King Charles' coronation. "It was an incredible honour," she believes. "I tried to approach it with the same dedication and focus as any other project, but it was certainly a special moment in my career."

A Reflection on Recognition

Thompson's array of ground-breaking achievements over the decades have rarely been appreciated, let alone celebrated in British mainstream media when compared to coverage received by her white counterparts. However, she remains pragmatic. My focus has always been on creating meaningful work that resonates with people, whether it's performed in a grand concert hall or heard on BBC Radio 3." Indeed, Thompson has enjoyed a long and fruitful relationship with the radio station, which has championed her music and provided a platform for her to connect with a wider audience. "They've been incredibly supportive throughout my career", she acknowledges.

The Changing Landscape of Television

Our conversation drifts back to her early days in television, where she honed her storytelling skills under the mentorship of the late Simon Albury [obituary, page 70], at Granada Television in the 1980s. "Simon was a brilliant editor - one of a kind," she recalls fondly. "I think he got me an interview for my first job with Granada Reports up in Liverpool. He taught me so much about the art of visual storytelling." When I ask about how television has changed since then, Thompson offers a thoughtful perspective. "The technology has certainly evolved, but the fundamental principles of storytelling remain the same", she notes. "It's all about capturing the audience's attention and taking them on a journey."

From Ballet Stage to Opera House

Thompson's creative spirit refuses to be confined to the concert hall or the television screen. Her passion for storytelling has led her to explore a range of musical genres including ballet and opera. Women of the Windrush was her acclaimed one-act opera, which celebrated the contributions of five female Caribbean immigrants to British society, telling their stories of arriving and settling in the UK - a testament to Thompson's ability to capture the essence of social and cultural movements through music and archive. "It explores themes of migration, identity, and belonging," she explains. "It's a story that resonates deeply with me." In the world of opera, Thompson has broken new ground with Sacred Mountain: Incidents in the Life of Queen Nanny of the Maroons, which (she proudly notes) is the first opera to feature a Black heroine, revealing the story of an 18th-century Jamaican Maroon leader who fought for the freedom of her people.

"It's important to see yourself reflected in the arts", she emphasises. "When young people see someone who looks like them achieving success in the field of classical music, it opens up a world of possibilities." As our interview ends, I am left with a profound sense of admiration. Shirley J. Thompson is a visionary - a composer effortlessly blending music and storytelling to create works that are deeply personal, which resonate in equal measure with a wide audience. This is no mean feat. Her journey, from filmmaker to composer, is testament to the power of creativity to transcend boundaries and connect us all.

"My focus has always been on creating meaningful work that resonates with people, whether it's performed in a grand concert hall or heard on BBC Radio 3."

A Legacy of Inspiration and Inclusion

Throughout our conversation, it's clear that Thompson's impact extends far beyond her compositions. She advocates for diversity and inclusion in the arts, and inspires countless young musicians, particularly women and people of colour, to pursue their dreams. It's difficult to counter her belief that there's often a transformative power in music, dance and the arts which can affect social, cultural and political change.

Find out more about Shirley J. Thompson's upcoming work here: https://shirleythompsonmusic.com/upcoming-events/

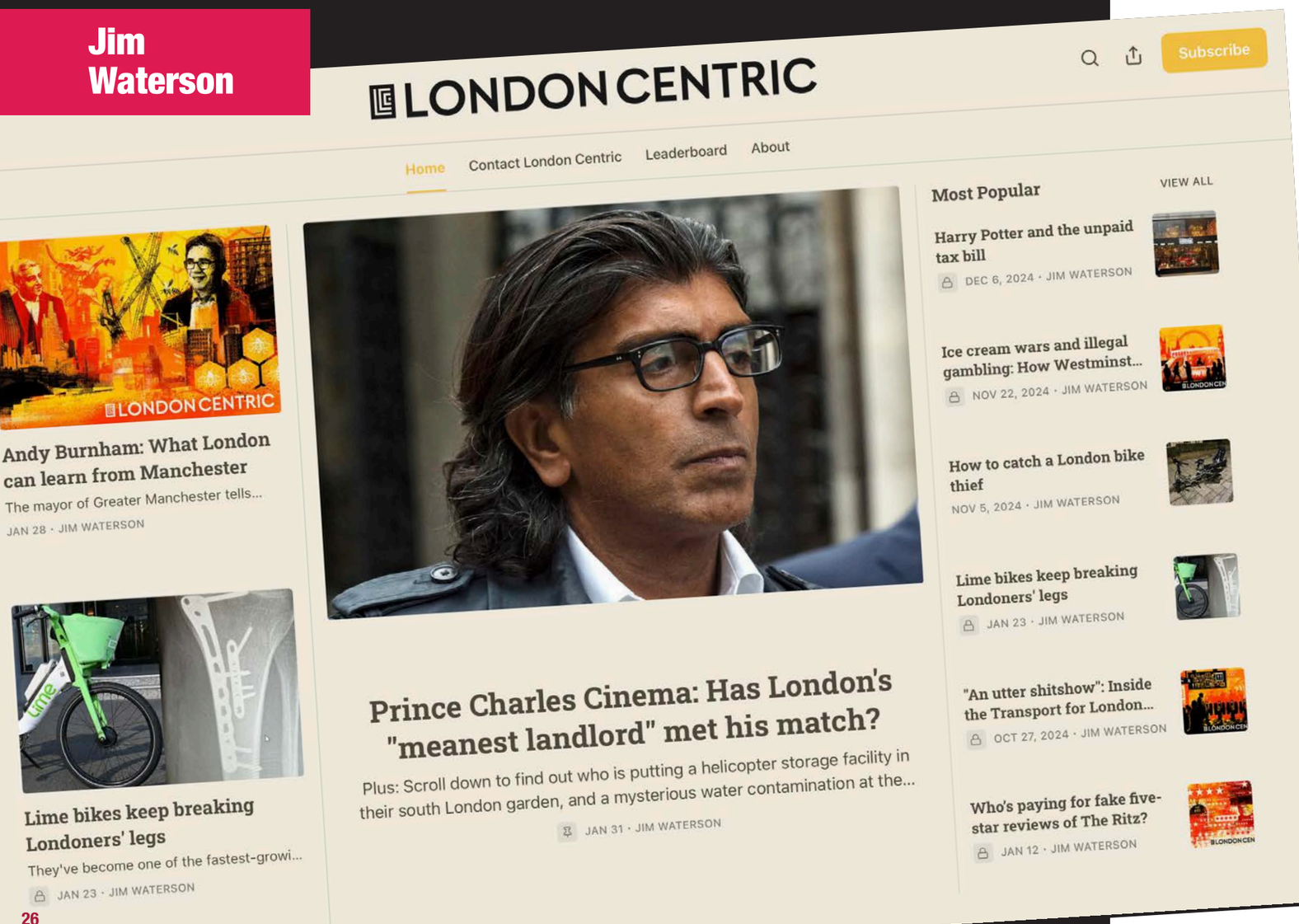
Marverine Cole is an award-winning journalist & broadcaster, mentor and coach, who has served on the board of Representology

ACT LOCAL, THINK GLOBAL

As traditional news outlets experience an elongated crisis of confidence, Representology speaks to dynamic community media from London, Glasgow and Bradford about their attempts to fund quality journalism and build trust with their audiences.

London's Calling

Jim Waterson



The former *Guardian* media editor on why, with the scaling back of print operations at the *Evening Standard*, he decided to launch an online news source for the capital, *London Centric*.

Lord Lebedev, the oligarch owner of the *Evening Standard*, was less-than-delighted when I shoved a camera in his face during the big relaunch of his publication as the *London Standard*. The media baron was heading into the glitzy launch party while trying to put a brave face on the decision to cut London's only city-wide newspaper to one weekly edition, as I started trying to ask him about Saudi ownership of the paper and how he had treated his staff. A week after I published the resulting story, apparently having searched his name on social media, Lebedev found my coverage and publicly declared on X - formerly Twitter - that I was a "prick".

It was the moment I knew *London Centric* would work. I'd successfully got under the skin of a man with the power to summon prime ministers and London's powerbrokers to pay homage at his Tuscan castle. And with no PR budget for my new local news start-up, his insult had delivered priceless attention — dozens of people swiftly signed up.

Until last summer, I was employed as media editor of *The Guardian*, tasked with reporting on the real state of the news business. Some of it was relatively glamorous, like covering the 'Wagatha Christie' trial at the High Court. Some of it showed the industry at its worst, in a death spiral that let down both audiences and journalists.

My inbox was constantly filled with tales from 20-something graduates who had done their journalism training, signed up as a junior journalist on a regional paper with the intention of exposing wrongdoing and delighting readers, only to find they were being asked to do a quick rewrite of the BBC Weather forecast, report what Martin Lewis had just tweeted, or deceive readers with a clickbait headline.

Growing up in the north of England in the late 1990s, there would always be copies of the local papers lying around. It's worth remembering what role these outlets played: My parents would pick up a copy of the *Yorkshire Evening Press* every day, but it wasn't only for the journalism. Yes, there'd be a story about a scandal at the council on the front page, but that was almost a worthy by-product of a business that

I'd successfully got under the skin of a man with the power to summon prime ministers and London's powerbrokers . . .

sold something else. You handed over your money for the cinema listings, the classified adverts, which were the only place to buy and sell goods, and the football results that you couldn't easily find anywhere else.

During this era, owning a big regional paper gave you access to the eyeballs of people in each city, giving you an effective monopoly over all the money that would later flow to Google and Facebook. The regional press employed dozens of reporters and they couldn't (and didn't need to) measure whether anyone was reading the news section. You want to reach everyone in Manchester? Better put an advert in the *Evening News*.

Want to talk to the people of Glasgow? Try *The Record, The Herald*, or one of Scotland's multiple national outlets.

Then the internet came along and blew up the old business model. You could find the cinema listings online. You could buy and sell on eBay, and the football results were available for free on the BBC website. Facebook groups covered the community stuff. All that was left was the news, and it turned out that wasn't enough to sell a local newspaper.

At this point, the industry had two major choices: Start charging for their websites and keep the quality up or indulge in desperate attempts to go viral. A few regional publishers, notably DC Thompson in Dundee, went behind a paywall.

The response from the other big regional newspaper groups was to keep their websites free, try to get as many clicks as possible, then sell adverts on each page. When this didn't deliver enough to keep the lights on, the outlets laid off the more experienced and expensive reporters. When the revenue declined even further, the response was to sell so many ads that the sites crashed people's web browsers, destroying what little trust people had in their local newspapers' websites.

Working as *The Guardian's* media editor, I had to report on this sorry state of affairs, which left many local newsrooms as nothing more than factories where miserable new graduates rewrote tweets as fast as possible. Take the Midlands: the giant *Birmingham Mail* transformed into *BirminghamLive*, owned by listed company Reach, where decent reporters on salaries just above minimum wage are told to write up to eight stories a day, many of which have nothing to do with Birmingham, such as what Piers Morgan has said this week. *The Express & Star* was most notable for recently misidentifying a random man in a curry house as the singer Paul Weller, thus destroying another bond of trust with readers. Walsall, a borough of almost 300,000 people, was left without dedicated reporters - when I visited, in 2019, it was possible to see pigeons roosting in the old newspaper office.

In one memorable example, I exposed how dozens of regional newspapers wrote up a fake tweet that Woolworths was returning to the high street as a fact, despite it being placed as a joke by a sixth form student. At least one editor on a local title openly and candidly explained that they couldn't have waited a few minutes to fact-check the "story" because then the clicks would have gone to a rival.

But there was one place that didn't fit the narrative of "left-behind" towns suffering from a lack of journalism: London. Growing up outside the capital, I understood the feeling that the national media was excessively London-centric. Yet, when I moved here and started a family in the capital, I realised that the national media barely scratched the surface of what was really going on. *The Evening Standard* - the only pan-London local newspaper - was seemingly run for the people who thought London began and ended in Mayfair. One of the most vibrantly diverse cities in the world was portrayed as a maelstrom of champagne receptions, with little coverage of the rich melting pot of London's communities. Its website, which could have been a definitive read on the capital, was full of celebrity trash aimed at an audience on Google who would have been happier browsing the "Sidebar of Shame" on *MailOnline*.

In 2009, the *Evening Standard* had been bought by the family of Evgeny Lebedev, a Russian oligarch's son, whose main priority for the paper appeared to be ensuring that famous people attended his parties and that he could hobnob with the mayor, Boris Johnson. Once Johnson ascended into Downing Street and gave Lebedev a life peerage, his interest in the heavily lossmaking newspaper seemed to subside. After successive rounds of massive cuts, it now reads as a weekly "luxury lifestyle" magazine-style publication.

Somehow, a global city of nine million people had fallen between two stools. On the one hand, it was covered disproportionately and at a surface level by the national papers, annoying readers outside the capital. On the other, there were brilliant hyperlocal outlets and blogs, such as the *Camden New Journal, Enfield Dispatch*, and *Diamond Geezer*, but there was no one with the freedom, means and profile to dig into what was going on behind the scenes on a city-wide level.

So I decided to quit my job at *The Guardian* and set up *London Centric*. It would be unashamedly obsessive about the capital, with back-to-basics, shoe-leather reporting of original stories that exposed something new or interesting. It would be funded by reader subscriptions, meaning that the pressure was on to please them - and not an oligarch owner nor advertisers. It would be fun, while also exposing wrongdoing. It would be primarily delivered as a newsletter, direct to people's inboxes, meaning I didn't have to rely on the whims of social network algorithms. It would reflect the reality of London life - with stories about transport, policing, healthcare, communities and the behaviour of the politicians who decide how things run.

In the opening few months, I've broken stories that have led the national news agenda but which have resonated deeply with Londoners - the NHS hospitals billing patients for using wheelchairs, the secret plan to charge the capital's car drivers by the mile, or the epidemic of bike crime on our streets, and I've been inundated with people coming forward with stories to tell. After years of under-reporting in London, people are keen to talk.

. . . I exposed how dozens of regional newspapers wrote up a fake tweet that Woolworths was returning to the high street as a fact, despite it being placed as a joke by a sixth form student.

When I was at *The Guardian*, my pieces would reach a global audience of hundreds of thousands, or even millions, of people. Now I'm writing for tens of thousands of readers and I know that I need to try and interest every single one of them – as a journalist, that's thrilling, and more than a little scary.

I've also had to consider what local news even means to younger audiences. In some areas, the local WhatsApp group or big-follower Instagram account, such as UB1UB2 in Hounslow, west London, is going to provide you with all the on-the-ground updates and raw video you could want. Too often, the debate about the death of local news focuses on the decline of old-fashioned outlets and ignores how millions of Britons already get their news. What if we instead refocus the remaining local journalism resources on dealing with the more difficult stories, unearthing new facts you can't already find with a quick Google and going beyond rewriting press releases from the local police force?

After just four months more than 18,000 people have joined the free London Centric mailing list, entirely through word-of-mouth, with thousands of them paying for a subscription that enables me to keep doing the journalism that I do. In return, the paying subscribers get access to special investigations and other paywalled articles. I hit my year one readership target after three weeks, my year two target after two months, and my year three target is coming into view. There is an audience for proper journalism about the capital..

So, what have I learned? It's early days but, so far, I am relieved that my hunch that people still want local news was right. People are willing to pay for good journalism, often as much to support the idea as to read the story. Ultimately, the success of local news comes down to trust and relevance: Are you telling me something new about my own area? Do I recognise my city and experience in your storytelling? Do I trust you to tell it properly? Hit those three points and you'll have a loyal audience.

Jim Waterson is the former Media Editor of The Guardian and founder of London Centric - sign up here: https://www.londoncentric.media/

The Bell That Finally Rang

Robbie Armstrong

Launched in late 2024 by the people behind the *Manchester Mill*, *The Bell* aims to bring local news and cultural commentary to the people of Glasgow. Reporter Robbie Armstrong explains the online newspaper's origin story.

At the end of August 2023, Mill Media founder Joshi Herrmann was interviewed in *The Guardian*. The company had just been valued at £1.75m by a group of investors including former *New York Times* boss Mark Thompson. Leeds, Birmingham, Glasgow and Newcastle were among the possible locations for a new publication of their high quality local newsletter model, Jim Waterson, then *Guardian* Media Editor [see previous page], explained in the article.

The word 'Glasgow' may as well have had a flashing neon light lit up around it on my phone screen. I read and re-read the article with intrigue. By Friday morning, I was composing an email to Joshi. I'd been following *The Mill's* dispatches from Manchester with interest and was particularly impressed with Jack Dulhanty's reporting on the Mana restaurant in 2022. For years, I'd been convinced that Glasgow could benefit from exactly this sort of localised in-depth reporting and feature writing. Here was a model of it working in a city, one not dissimilar to my own. A Glasgow version of *The Mill* felt as if it was within the city's grasp.

Not long afterwards, Joshi and I had a quick introductory chat and agreed to keep in touch. Six months later, we were having a beer together at the Ben Nevis bar in Glasgow, huddled around a table with his colleague Daniel Timms and recovering journalist and Mill-supporter Ian Marland. I was fizzing with half-baked ideas. Glasgow, my city – a city which felt like it was punch drunk and on the ropes - needed this model of local journalism.

I don't remember everything we discussed in detail, although I do recall impressing upon Joshi the manifold reasons why Glasgow needed a new publication more than Scotland's capital city. A historic and storied media city, yet one in which the media seemed to have rapidly contracted at exactly the moment when we needed it most.

"Glasgow has a world-class arts scene, alarming levels of child poverty, a highly fragmented transport network, scores of Victorian architectural jewels on the 'buildings at risk' register and some of the most diverse and dense urban communities in the country," I bloviated between slugs of my cask ale.

Glasgow, my city – a city which felt like it was punch drunk and on the ropes - needed this model of local journalism.

I recounted the recent fallout that had arisen from Rory Olcayto's controversial thesis, Welcome to the Shipwreck, and the disagreement and debate it had sparked over the city's past and present, I wagered, reflected a deep desire among its citizens to steer the ship towards a brighter future. I paraphrased one of Rory's points: "Edinburgh is where Scotland celebrates its past. Glasgow is where Scotland dreams about its future."

Fast forward six months or so. Following multiple phone calls and meetings, a trip to Manchester to meet the *Mill* team and, finally, the recruitment of Moya Lothian-McLean and we were finally ready to launch.

Since we hit "send" on our first newsletter at the end of September, it's been a blur. In 2024, we published articles about all manner of things: rethinking our relationship to rain; a sweeping panoramic take on the state of the city; Glasgow's complicated relationship with Brutalist buildings; an in depth look into the finances of the McGill's Buses' tycoons; an office space crisis and a highly serious investigation into how shawarma became the city's predominant portable meat wrap modality.

. . . Without having done so, I'd never have met Mags. Sat at the bar of the Pig & Whistle, she was drinking a diet Irn-Bru and Cointreau at the same pub in which her dad used to drink.

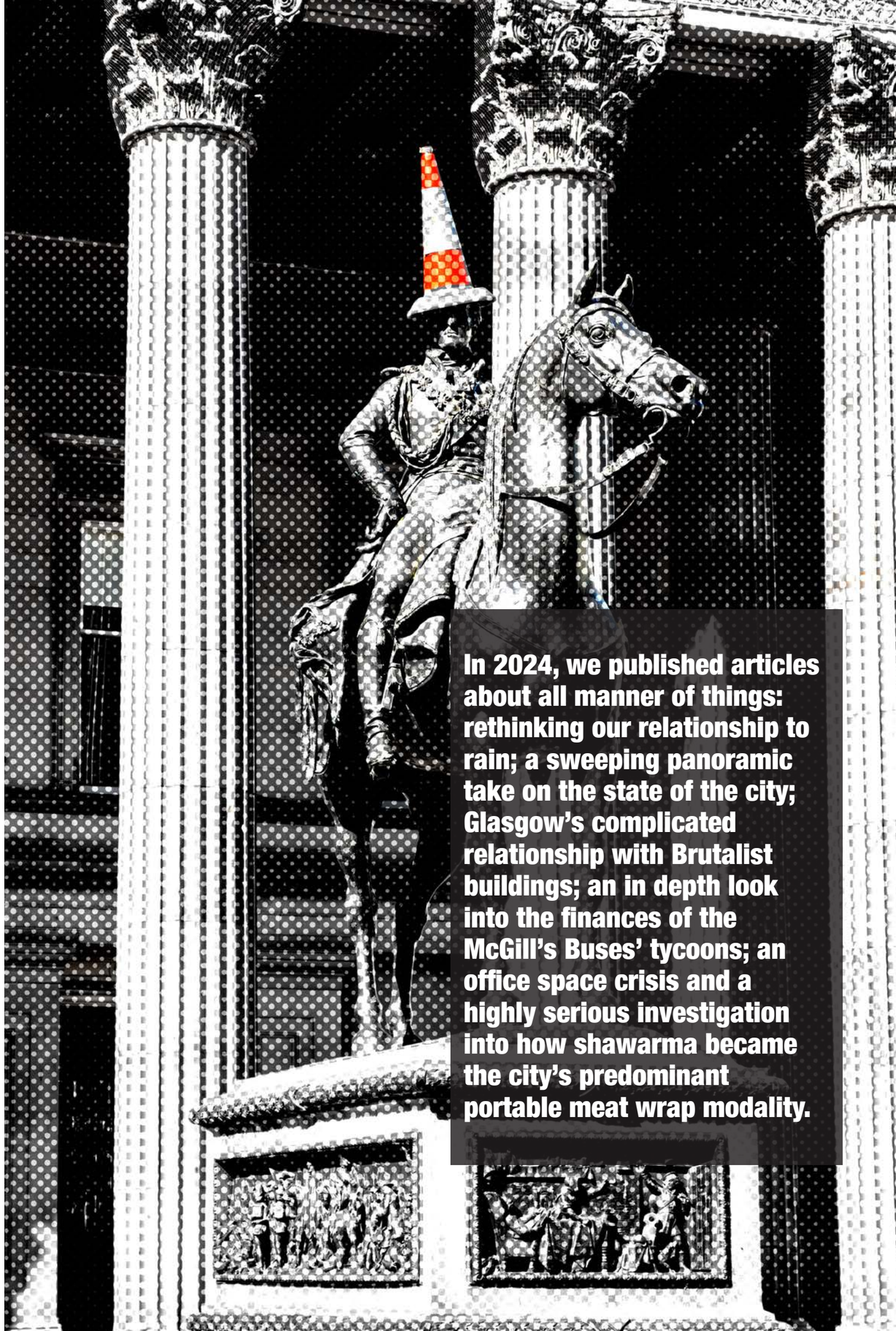
In fewer than thirty days, our newsletter gathered 3,300 subscribers, but I'd be lying if I pretended it was all plain sailing. It's been a graft, with a good few late nights. And what's a new publication without its haters and detractors? Among our legion of followers there is a troll or two – at least one of whom has a rather spicy username that's given the team a good laugh. However, while there has been the odd doubter or naysayer, we've been overwhelmingly bowled over by the response.

Mill Media's local news model is simple. Give journalists the time to report and craft their stories properly and the people will come. Crucially, they will also put their hands in their pockets for local and regional news that matters to them. In short, readers appreciate quality writing and are willing to pay good money for it. This is the essence of the *Manchester Mill's* success as a title and the reason they have successful stablemates in Sheffield, Liverpool, Birmingham, and now Glasgow. Since *The Bell* set sail, we've launched *The Londoner* too. At all these titles, the focus is on regional specificity, on the importance of hyper-local news, and on building community with your readership. We're not reinventing the wheel. Across the stable, you will read stories that uncover the universal in the specific; that find the national in the local, and parse out the global from the regional.

The story of the media's decline is a familiar one now, with something of the fatalistic about it. Today, journalists are frequently forced to bash out articles by the dozen, driven by an unsustainable business model built on clickbait, ads and the economics of 'churnalism'. In focusing on volume and traffic, reporters no longer have the time for 'shoe leather' research. During my first month at *The Bell*, I was afforded the time to wander around the Gorbals, to visit an old pub and chat with locals. Without having done so, I'd never have met Mags. Sat at the bar of the Pig & Whistle, she was drinking a diet Irn-Bru and Cointreau at the same pub in which her dad used to drink. As it turned out, she had lived in three of the Gorbals high flats I was writing about – one long demolished, another about to be flattened and one still standing proudly next to the Clyde. Following that piece, I spent a good few hours eating at the city's best shawarma spots, speaking to chefs, chatting to business owners and hearing from former refugees and meat wrap enthusiasts about Glasgow's increasingly diverse food scene.

We'll turn on paid subscriptions soon. Then the work of convincing subscribers to part with their hard-earned money each month will begin. In return, we hope to deliver a mix of news, features, longreads, investigations and recommendations into their inboxes three or four times a week. We're keen to cover the city in a way that is different from existing coverage – to take a fresh perspective on the things Glaswegians think they already know – making the familiar appear strange to those who understand the city best. We also want to uncover untold stories that reflect the city back to its residents in surprising ways. We're only just getting started.

Robbie Armstrong is a radio producer, writer & broadcast journalist based in Glasgow, Scotland
https://www.robbiearmstrong.com/



The Role of Radio: Bradford Community Broadcasting

Florence Wildblood

Mary Dowson and her community radio station provide a forum for grassroots politics, pointing a way towards building trust in media and enriching local democracy.

Many of the people in Centenary Square had been planning on attending an altogether different event. It was July 7th 2001 and, in response to a proposed National Front march on Bradford, the grand finale of the city's month-long festival had been called off. But a crowd had turned up anyway, to attend a rally coordinated by the Anti-Nazi League and the Trades Union Congress. "Why should we have to cancel our festival because of threats from the far-right?", they were asking. Home Secretary David Blunkett had banned the National Front march, but in the Square and across the city, tensions were high. On the steps of the town hall, people made speeches. Beside them, recording everything, was a small team of volunteer broadcasters.

One of them was Mary Dowson. "We were covering those speeches on the town hall steps and broadcasting live from the studio", she tells me. "And that was at the point when the actual riots started." Dowson is referring to what we now know as the Bradford riots, which saw hundreds of people injured and arrested, and millions of pounds worth of damage caused.

Dowson recalls the moment when "the police forces who were in the square, who we thought were protecting us from the people who were coming into the city, actually turned round and faced us." "We carried on broadcasting throughout the whole of that period", she says, "with people's testimonies, eyewitness [accounts], what was happening, how they felt. And I think that was some excellent broadcasting we did that day."

Mary Dowson is the Director of Bradford Community Broadcasting (BCB 106.6 FM). She helped found it, back at the start of the 90s, when it was set up solely as a means of covering events at the aforementioned festival. Alongside some of her peers, Dowson joined forces with a team who had, not long before, obtained a licence to broadcast the local festivities around Ramadan. Collectively, they hit the airwaves with the first Bradford Festival Radio in 1992. "Right from the start, we were intercultural", she says. "We've always been a radio station for lots of different communities, not for one specific target community. We really wanted to be that umbrella."

"The idea of getting into a car, turning on the radio, and it's somebody you know – 'I know that voice. Blimey!'. . ."

The law had just changed to allow for this – obtaining a licence to broadcast an event – but that was pretty much the limit of what you could do. Access to the airwaves remained the prerogative of a select group of people. Dowson stayed with the station throughout the 90s and into the 2000s, as laws around radio production relaxed further. It's important, she says, to understand how groundbreaking this liberalisation was. "The idea of getting into a car, turning on the radio, and it's somebody you know – 'I know that voice. Blimey! That's so-and-so' – that feeling was just so exciting". In 2005, BCB was one of the first stations to be granted a full-time community radio licence. In 2025, it has a packed programme, 200 active volunteers and tens of thousands of weekly listeners. Ofcom mandates that community radio stations cater to local audiences and provide social gain, on a not-for-profit basis. BCB is one of over 300 organisations in the UK to do this – following neither a commercial nor a public radio model, offering something unique and empowering into the media mix.

Dowson is loath to bring up the case of the riots when I ask about the coverage of which she is most proud. She has spent years working against a 'Bad News Bradford' trope, which she feels to be a one-sided press depiction of her city. "The negative images in the mainstream media have been so distressing for us as a city", she says, "and we have sort of taken them in and believed them to be true, rather than celebrating the really amazing stuff that people at a grassroots level do."

BCB's output includes Radio Venus, the station's International Women's Day initiative, which began in 1995 as a means of getting more women into broadcasting. It continues to this day, with last year's shows spanning *Sisters of Soul* with Maureen and Sandra Rowe to *Independent Women* with Marie Millward. *Hope in Despair*, a refugee radio project, featured conversations with people who had recent experience of the asylum process, while *Senior Moments* programmes for older people. BCB also works with primary schools, establishing internal radio projects to help children develop their skills, gathering stories throughout the week and, on Friday afternoons, broadcasting them to each other. "The school wanted to explore how to help children feel more confident in speaking up, speaking out, forming opinions. So we used radio to do that".

I first came into contact with Dowson and BCB last year at the Media Commons Camp, hosted by Soundart Radio, another full-time community radio station which is located in Totnes, Devon. The decline of local news weighed heavily on the agenda. Dowson spoke of her volunteers' eagerness to engage with the thornier aspects of local democracy, but pointed to a lack of training and thus confidence. To begin to address this, BCB is partnering with the University of Leeds on a new project, *Developing Confidence in Community Broadcasting*. This will be led by Layla Painter at the School of Media and Communication, and will see BCB members participating in a series of skills and knowledge workshops, with a view to bolstering their work around the May 2025 local elections. There is, according to Julie Firmstone, another academic working on the project, no way that volunteers can – or should – "fill the gap left by the masses of newspapers that have closed over the last decade". However, community radio plays "an important role in the local communication ecology" – not least because, by being "embedded", it has access to sources and a deep understanding of the questions that need asking, the information that audiences want and deserve. "I'm really excited to be doing this project and to see where it will go, and how our research and our skills here can be helpful", Firmstone says. "It's really interesting, for my research, to also engage with people in a different way than I'm used to".

With roots in, and a stated responsibility towards, the community it represents, BCB plays its own small part in combating such disconnection. From a tiny studio next to the Oastler shopping centre, it reflects citizens' lives as they are . . .

Firmstone has spent her career interrogating the broader media "ecology". She has looked at news quality, ethics, trust and regulation, for example, through recent research comparing journalistic ethics and standards in European countries, and on the public's perception of journalism and its regulation in the UK. Local news has always been a focus. She says: "I've looked at local journalism, and the changes within local journalism over the last ten to twelve years, and was probably part of the first group of academics who were really sounding the bell about how difficult things were getting – about the loss to public interest journalism from the closure of newspapers, threats from journalism going online, and the changes in the quality of the type of journalism that was being produced".

Although encouraged by early signals from Prime Minister Keir Starmer and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport Lisa Nandy, Firmstone remains concerned about the outlook from here. She points to the impacts of the erosion of local media in America - to her mind, "It's not just about getting information. Local news media is also about seeing your own community and your own world reflected to you. And if you don't see that … you're going to go to alternative sources of information that may not be accurate, and also feel disconnected from your local democracy".

With roots in, and a stated responsibility towards, the community it represents, BCB plays its own small part in combating such disconnection. From a tiny studio next to the Oastler shopping centre, it reflects citizens' lives as they are, just as it did on the Town Hall steps back in July 2001, and it pushes for all that they could be. "For me, having a radio licence is a political act", says Dowson. "I've always felt that – and I feel that with the community radio licence we have now."

Florence Wildblood is a writer and campaigner who is working on her first book

"Several anti-immigration protests have been taking place across England and Northern Ireland over the last week following an incident in Southport"

a BBC News article reported in early August 2024.

A few weeks later, the new Prime Minister gave a speech at the Labour Party Conference, in which he attempted to draw a distinction between those who have **"legitimate concerns"** about immigration, and those who attacked racialised communities, mosques, or tried to set asylum accommodation on fire.

Many wouldn't think much of the comments, or perhaps you may even find yourself agreeing that such a distinction needs to be made. However, to many racialised people who were afraid to leave their homes in the summer of 2024, this analysis of far right violence might be considered offensive. It fails to fully reckon with the years (or decades) of racist rhetoric and policies that set the stage for the violence.

There are numerous threads that have been woven together to create the conditions for the riots but we will draw on two key ones here: the 'invasion' and the 'legitimate concerns about migration' narratives.

Words Matter: Understanding root causes

"The media, beyond the usual tabloids, have a terrible responsibility for having provided a platform to known figures and inflammatory language", a migrant in our network told us, in the midst of the violence, "The fact that what is happening is being labelled in the mainstream as "riots", or that we hear about "legitimate concerns", is part of the problem."

The phrase 'legitimate concerns' highlighted here alludes to a textbook example of how years of scapegoating during times of economic and political instability eventually erupted into violence. 'Legitimate concerns' seems to be the ultimate caveat to a lot of political debates on migration and it is often used interchangeably with the narrative of "it's okay to be worried about migration". However, despite frequency of use (including by some in the not-for-profit sector), this notion often feeds directly into far-right conspiracies. Instead of acknowledging the state's inability to manage increased and emerging housing or health needs, alongside its failures to rein in corporate greed forcing people into poverty, it often deflects blame towards marginalised groups, like migrants or Muslims.

In the years leading up to the riots, anti-migrant racism, including Islamophobia, became more and more mainstream. From the then UKIP leader Nigel Farage (who has subsequently been elected Reform MP for Clacton) unveiling the infamous 'Breaking Point' poster before the 2016 referendum to former Home Secretary Suella Braverman's "invasion" speech of 2022, the lines between far-right dog whistles and contemporary political discourse have become blurred and, arguably, have been adopted into the mainstream.

Let's take the issue of asylum accommodation: over the last few years, asylum accommodation has become a focal point in debates around domestic immigration policy, particularly under the previous Conservative Government. This administration made reducing the provision of asylum accommodation something of a flagship policy and anti-migrant rhetoric soon became woven into the coverage of the subject. In 2023, at a local residents' meeting in Lincolnshire to discuss turning RAF Scampton into asylum accommodation, residents were told it would be occupied by men from Afghanistan, Libya and "them sort of areas". In the immediate run up to last summer's violence, politicians spouted misinformation and made pointed remarks in Parliament about the use of hotels to house people seeking asylum - former Leicester South MP, Jonathan Ashworth, claimed migrants who come to the UK to seek asylum stay in hotels for "the rest of their lives", while Tamworth MP, Sarah Edwards, speaking a week before the arson attack on a local hotel, about how constituents wanted 'their hotel back".

source: The Guardian

The language of concern dilutes anti-migrant sentiment into something passive or acceptable, and devoid of racism. In fact, it amounts to a form of thinly veiled racism. Migrants are being blamed for Government austerity policies, amidst claims that they are 'stealing your job' or 'invading your country'. Parroting the language of 'legitimate concerns' can gaslight people at the sharpest end of hostile policies, racist language and physical violence, falling into the centuries-old trap of scapegoating oppressed people.

The riots were not a blip in the matrix

"Many decades of political and media discourse have vilified the human right to migration," said another member of our community. We don't have to look far to see this clearly in migration coverage. Cast your mind back to the days of the previous Conservative administration, when Suella Braverman was Home Secretary. At the Dispatch Box, having labelled people coming to the UK "an invasion", pushing a "Stop the Boats" policy and reinforcing misinformation about South Asian "grooming gangs" (an issue which has returned to centre-stage in recent months), she was widely, and rightly, condemned.

Ideas of 'invasion', 'swarm', 'influx' and so on have been central to anti-migrant discourse and policies for over a century, for example accompanying the arrival of Jewish refugees in the late 19th and early 20th century, with migrants being labelled as an "alien invasion", "swarm" and "locusts" around the implementation of the 1905 Aliens Act.

For years, politicians and media outlets have pushed the idea of migrants and people with heritage from Muslim-majority countries as a 'threat' to the West. This idea is especially prevalent in the years of the so-called "migrant crisis" and era of "mass migration". The Telegraph, Daily Mail and the Daily Express (to name a few) have made links between migration and Islam as being an explicit 'threat' to the UK and to Europe in general.

This Islamophobia underpinned coverage of racialised communities and their apparent 'failure to integrate', specifically in headlines calling certain areas of the country 'ghettos' or "no-go zones". Current Reform MP, Lee Anderson, was suspended from the Conservative Party after claiming that "Islamists" were controlling the London mayor, Sadiq Khan (no, we don't know what this means either).

Learning from racist violence

Remember May 2020? In the immediate aftermath of the murder of George Floyd and Black Lives Matter protests, black squares and allyship statements from organisations pledging to review their diversity policies and embark on 'unconscious bias' training dominated social media feeds. After these promises were made, the world moved on. How does this relate to the violence that took place over summer 2024? Well, because the same pattern emerged. A flurry of statements from organisations condemning the 'unrest' and expressing their shock quickly materialised. But fast forward a few months, and it's as if the riots never happened. Why is this?

Both events were moments where extremely visible racist violence took place. Many people are unable (or unwilling) to link these moments with the more normalised forms of racism (the average, everyday systemic racism) that leads to acts of violence. As a result, people begin to view these as 'blips', or a 'few bad apples' that must be rooted out, instead of recognising a system rotten at its core. Some believe that a change in leadership, or a slight amendment to legislation may bring justice, and once reforms are put in place, people will move on. Ultimately, people often fail to realise that, for justice to be truly achieved, many systems of oppression need to be dismantled.

Part of that dismantling is calling out racism and other forms of oppressive language when we see it. That does not mean simply replacing a word or phrase with another seemingly less problematic word but, rather, understanding the root cause of where the language in question comes from. Without uncovering the foundations that uphold racist narratives, they will simply end up reproducing the same language they originally aimed to dispel.

In 2023, at a local residents' meeting in Lincolnshire to discuss turning RAF Scampton into asylum accommodation, residents were told it would be occupied by men from Afghanistan, Libya and "them sort of areas".

Check out the Migrants' Rights Network's Words Matter, Who is Welcome and Hostile Office campaigns.

STRENGTH IN DIFFER-ENCE

Miranda Wayland, CEO of the Creative Diversity Network, speaks to Aaqil Ahmed extensively about content considerations, Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) initiatives, and working in America versus the rest of the world.

Miranda:
I have worked in the media industry for over 20 years, beginning at ITV as their Head of Diversity and Inclusion, mostly looking after the workforce, but then moving into content programming, and on-screen representation. So, I spent ten years there developing their social partnership, which is a version of a diversity strategy for on-screen representation.

I left ITV and went to the BBC for five years, firstly at BBC Studios as they became a commercial entity. I covered content output, including radio, news, both scripted and unscripted content. As my BBC career developed, I became the Head of Diversity for Workforce and Creative. I did five years, and then got a little bit restless and thought, "Let me go and see what the streamers are doing". So, I did a two-year stint at Amazon and became their Head of International Diversity and Inclusion, looking after 62 countries around their diversity strategy, and now I am now the CEO for the Creative Diversity Network.

Aaqil:
Well, let's go back to Amazon, since I think a lot of people will be thinking: Wow, 62 countries, a big player, a huge player! What was that experience like?

Miranda:
It was a very steep learning curve. Obviously, operating in a UK market, you become familiar with other broadcasters. The Americans do things very differently. I really had a sense of how the customer and the viewer were central to every single conversation in which I was involved. The role I had at ITV was often positioned as mitigating issues that developed from a diversity perspective, whether it was on-screen or off-screen, often a little bit further down the line. What I found at Amazon is that, at the very beginning of the production and creative cycle, I was sitting in pitches; I was making decisions about character depiction; I was advising and consulting the writers. So I was really embedded in the production.

Aaqil:
That's how they always operate, is it?

Miranda:
That's the environment I walked into. I didn't have to manifest it.

Aaqil:
I imagine many people would be fascinated by that, because that's not the usual experience in the UK. Can you point to any successes you experienced that you think might not have happened here?

Miranda:
Yeah. There were a number of titles and shows that I was involved with from a D&I perspective. I'll take a particular title that we were developing in France - they were becoming much more aware about the increased representation their story arc needed. I saw the script come in, and normally, what happens at this particular point is that I've got business affairs, I've got legal, I've got HR, I've got production, and we're all sitting as equals talking about how we can make this programme - whether it's right for our audiences against a portfolio of other shows potentially coming up.

Having read the script, I asked why a particular character was depicted as having a mental health issue - depression in this case. A married woman, she was divorcing her husband and, all of a sudden, her mental health condition disappeared overnight. They said, "Well, it was our way of trying to represent a subsection of the society that we know has depression." So I said, "Firstly, let's have a look at the storyline for this character, and whether it is pivotal to the journey that they're undertaking? Why does it have to be a mental health condition? Could it be that her relationship with her husband was so poor that this was causing stress in her life. The present story feels like a negative storyline - to think you can address mental health by just fixing one element doesn't reflect what really goes on. So we went on a really big journey.

We expanded the character's role - the character was originally due to leave in subsequent scenes. We developed this character and the writers were really open to exploring what her backstory might be. How could that then be in the story? We went to Casting and said: "OK, everybody's read this script through a white lens. What would happen if we diversified the characters? How difficult would it be for us to cast much more inclusively, considering the country that we're in, the ways our audience will respond to it?" We changed the entire makeup of the lead and supporting roles as a direct result of just pushing and asking questions. The writers were really receptive, saying: Oh yeah - actually, I have written it from my perspective, but what would it look like if we did bring in this particular element?

. . . to think you can address mental health by just fixing one element doesn't reflect what really goes on.

Aaqil:
Is this difficult, though, since the Amazon audience is global? What Britain and America might find acceptable may also be different, particularly in how they define diversity. There are a lot of countries who may not want to see diverse stories and people in their shows. How do you diversify in a global context?

Miranda:
I think what I recognise from my time working there is that each country wants to be able to see stories that originate from there, reflecting its own nationality. I think that's true even in Britain. You want to see some British stories which resonate with you as a British citizen. Then you want to see the whole fabric of Britain beyond the already known.

There are complexities around that, but let's not forget that every broadcaster up and down the land has one single purpose: to be able to get people to watch their content en masse and not watch somebody else's.

So you're now in this big arena where people are creating content that has to travel. So, if you're creating something in the UK, the viability of me being able to sell it worldwide is paramount. Squid Games is a prime example.

Aaqil:
Well that's diverse to us, but it's not diverse in Korea. Around the world, a show like that feels diverse because that's not what the consumer is accustomed to. For a global streamer, the way in which you look at diversity, from a commissioning or selling point of view, is very different. I'm presuming, from a commercial perspective, you're also saying "Right, OK okay, we might take a hit in, say, certain white majority countries in mainland Europe, but there are other territories where we won't?"

Miranda:
Yes. In some places it's just not going to get the eyeballs that you want, but actually, it will travel around the world. There is an audience. There are diasporas everywhere. There is a place for the stories that you're making. The number one thing is that there has to be good content.

Aaqil:
So, if people want something, you sell it. The problem with that is you may then say: You know what? The biggest markets are X, Y, and Z, and significant sections of the populace might be a bit racist, or they have no relationship at all with, say, people from Africa or Asians, or whatever it might be. Do you tailor it for them, because they're the biggest market? You may also start thinking: You know what? The Arab market's really big. Let's suddenly make this character an Arab. Then, let's not bother about the Eastern European market or whatever that market may be.

Miranda:
Look, you know, a business is a business. As I said, in our business, it's about getting eyeballs, but also it's about making commercial sense. I know Amazon's aim is to be in almost every country worldwide, and to make people find Amazon as their single destination for content. In that respect, you are going to be using that double-edged sword. You need to create something that the country of origin is going to want to consume. However, my job, from a D&I perspective, is to look at the content we are pumping through to those countries.

We're doing this in a really weird ecosystem. We are playing with societal norms in which people are living and breathing day by day. So, if we're creating these stories, we need the audience to feel comfortable enough to watch it. Where we can, we will challenge and push certain boundaries - again, within the legal confines of the country in which we're operating.

If your bias or perception is X, how much more interesting is it for me to give you Y and for you to be challenged by that, but actually to see it play out in a positive way. What you historically have seen, perhaps more so in the UK and the US, is that we have traded on stereotypes because they sell. So, for

example, I have been around content that plays into black trauma.

It does well because audiences have been sensitised to that. We know there is a market for it. It makes a certain subsection of our audiences comfortable to see that play out. And so what you end up doing is perpetuating a cycle - you then get writers who want to tell a different story about the black experience, but then come to broadcasters and streamers who say, "Well, that doesn't really sell."

The conversations I've had with counterparts in the States show that the D&I person is not somebody that you chuck at the end of the production line. They're very much at the beginning. Their counsel is taken seriously. They will act on recommendations. So, if your D&I person is telling you, "Well, actually, should we look at the diverse makeup of this person and how would that play out? And do you know actually you're tripping into stereotypes?" They take that really seriously.

They will get writers in and reconstruct or, actually, go back and re-edit stuff based on what we're seeing. I've sat in on a number of edits which, again, is not something that I did very much in the UK. And we would look at scenes and we'd say: Actually, do you know that the proportion of people who are speaking on screen at the moment tends to be skewing towards men? Where are the women in this? The contributors that you had found would then go out and reshoot if the schedule permitted.

I found that level of autonomy and power that my role had significantly outranked anything that I had in the UK, which meant I felt my role could be even more effective. Now, there are always - in any scenario, no matter what role you hold in life - places where you win and places where you don't. There will be commercial imperatives that I am not aware of that change the course of what I am doing. More often than not, however, I found that when I was making a judgment call about something, it would be implemented.

Aaqil:
Now you're back in the UK, is there anything we can learn from your US experience? What do you think needs to change?

Miranda:
Commissioners, Heads, people that run channels who make decisions about content - I really would want them to embed their D&I person as close to the beginning of the commissioning process as possible. That is when they are most effective and it is their job to safeguard you and the audience to have the best outcome further down the line. I think where they currently are, their voice has little power and weight. Their job is not to deflect from any editorial decision, but to make the shows as rich as possible. If D&I can be seen in this light rather than, "Oh my God, we've realised that we haven't got an X or Y", that would help.

Aaqil:
You are right. Too far down the food chain. We are in such a big commercial, exponential race when it comes to content, though great for the customer because they get choice. You're seeing such an exodus from a number of D&I roles, both globally and in the UK, that you're now having to put a monetary value on this activity.

Miranda:
Something I was able to do at Amazon (and God bless legal and business affairs) was, every time I showed up to course-correct an issue, I asked them to cost how much it would have been had it just run its natural course - eg had I not been there. This takes the diversity issue out of being just a nice thing to have, to being a bolt-on.

More often than not, what happens is that you turn up to help on a project, you care about it, then you leave the room. The next person sitting in your seat says, "What's this load of rubbish? That doesn't help me meet my budget or the requirements of the commissioning brief. It doesn't do any of that, so I'm not going to bother." Whereas, if diversity is intrinsically part of the project, it doesn't matter who sits there.

Aaqil:
Are there enough of the right people for that? I don't mean this horribly - it's never really been resourced properly, since it's a lot of work and requires a lot of people, wouldn't it? If you think about the BBC, the number of platforms they have: TV, radio, you name it. I mean, you've been there, how did you attempt to navigate that? Tell me how you failed!

Miranda:
So glad I came here today, Aaqil! Teasing aside, you have a valid question. The end user, whether you're a freelancer, an indie, or a consumer, often feels that progress has been really slow. I was one of those people and I continue to be one of those people who gets frustrated that efforts I made are not materialising into amazing successes.

I'm not going to duck it. What I think is that I didn't have, or didn't acquire an understanding that there's a different way for this all to exist. I walked into a framework that looked as if it were touching the right parts at the right time. And I realised very quickly that the resources that we have to hand are insufficient and may always be insufficient.

Aaqil:
We talked before about the fractured nature of the market that we're in, and also about broadcasters across the world - here and abroad - who are scaling back, it feels, on ED&I. Does that mean it's dead?

Miranda:
It's not dead, but I would ask whether or not we have equipped others to have enough knowledge to know what they're doing. I am very pragmatic and I understand business. If you're looking to repurpose a headcount, you need to at least keep the ship afloat. You will, of course, do things to course-correct it so that can happen. What you want to be able to do is consult with the people that you need to consult with, so that your strategy doesn't go awry because you've had to make these cuts and changes. Instead of having Miranda, say, you might have a consultant you employ to get you through. But that requires a knowledge base there - you don't necessarily have to have them sitting there all the time, but you absolutely still need access to them. So, it's not dead in that respect - it may just operate in a different way.

Aaqil:
Miranda, we've been chatting about this for decades. We seem to have had ups and downs. I'd say that there was a bit of a golden period, when there were a few of us in senior positions. And then we had a dip. Why do we keep getting it so wrong?

Miranda:
Do you know what? When you see the successes that come when we have a more diverse pool of thoughts and people, different nationalities, races etc, you see how that comes through in the content. You see what the culture is like. I have very similar conversations with people when I'm talking to indies, or we're doing some big forum and we're talking about how to make your productions more inclusive. How do you make your content more interesting, more reflective?

Diversely-led production companies don't have this problem. They're not asking me, "You know what? My production wasn't inclusive or I upset someone with a physical disability." They don't have that, yeah. What happens is you block out the D word (for diversity), because you feel like you've heard it so much, you know it inside out. You feel like you're educated enough to know what steps to take to correct things. We have been talking about it for a while.

What tends to happen is those production companies without diverse representation are not really partnering up with those that have it. They're not learning.

We are playing with societal norms in which people are living and breathing day by day. So, if we're creating these stories, we need the audience to feel comfortable enough to watch it.

What we do naturally when we're diverse is we're inclusive in our language; we're inclusive in our thinking; we don't alienate people; we don't get issues with people walking off set, or making claims, or, you know, talking about harassment or microaggressions.

That's just not how we are as people. We therefore don't create our companies like that. You almost need to stop being 'the D&I person', because, actually, you see

What we do naturally when we're diverse is we're inclusive in our language; we're inclusive in our thinking; we don't alienate people . . .

me as the police. You need to have your peers, who are doing it organically and can talk to you about the challenges with your HODs (heads of department), with your execs or with the commissioner relationships.

The people at the top are slightly removed from the day-to-day. You almost want them to go back onto the shop floor - to take a day out and be a runner and see what that's like. To clock in at 5am, and be the last one on set when someone's screaming and shouting at you. I'm sure, in my role, this will happen to me, too - my intent and ambition is very clear about what I expect.

I would then cascade that to the people who I believe are going to impart that and manifest it. Then I don't think about it again, because I trust my leadership team. That's a really key point. So, until somebody on the ground comes up and says, "Oh, by the way, Ms. Wayland, what you wanted - is it really happening or did you know that so-and-so isn't doing that?" I am none the wiser. People have to be empowered to do that - you also have to be able to listen to them. That's the key at the moment: do we listen enough to the people telling us before the car crash happens? It's really interesting stepping up into this current role - the level of power and autonomy that I have. I can no longer look up and say, "It's their fault." I am up there. It's me!

Aaqil:
Tell us about this job, then. What is it like being the CEO of the Creative Diversity Network?

Miranda:
Well, it's a really interesting job. The CDN is formed by the broadcasters and trade bodies that have come together to collaboratively create change around diversity, inclusion and equity for the UK media industry. They've been operating for over 10 years now.

It was really a response to wanting to create equity for the industry across all forms of diversity, but using the Equality Act as the framework within which to do that. Through this iteration, it created Diamond, which is our industry monitoring form, and that gives us a temperature check on diversity both on and offscreen - offshoots of that have included training.

We want to map what the data identifies for us, and what potential training needs there are. We've done a lot of collaboration. So Doubling Disability came out as a partnership with our broadcaster members and D&I experts recognising a need. And the trainee commissioning scheme was another manifestation of that. So there have been lots of things that have come out but I think, primarily, CDN is known for Diamond.

There are chinks in what we do and offer, ones that I want us to smooth out, and there are opportunities that I want us to capitalise on. I also want us to be much more aligned with the partners working in this space, such as the Film and TV charity, Screen Skills and Women in Film and TV. There are some good organisations working to create equity, and I would love CDN to be in lockstep with them and to think about how we grow in future.

Aaqil:
What will success look like in the next three to five years?

Miranda:
Oh, that's a really good question, as I'm currently working on the strategy. Even before taking the CEO's seat, I always believed in CDN's ethos - working collectively with those on the Board, to bring them information that perhaps they don't see regularly. We're close enough to the data to have that conversation. As an external-facing entity, I want the data to be robust. I want the industry to come to us as a think tank for diversity that is data-led and to be trusted. What could we achieve when we understand what's going on?

We've got enough people contributing to that data subset, and we say: Right, we are going to focus on this particular issue. It's really weird, because when I think about diversity, throughout my entire career, there has consistently been this premise that, by pulling a strategy together that lasts for three years, I'm going to feel as if I'm the most included, respected and represented individual there is on the planet at the end of those three years.

I am a black woman, with two hidden disabilities: ADHD and dyslexia. I grew up on a council estate getting free meals. Yet, in the past, I've contributed to writing strategies, so don't get me wrong, I am part of this. I've had the mindset that, in three to five years, the utopia that I've written about today is going to manifest itself. This frustrates anybody who is marginalised in knowing that, when that time comes, things haven't changed. What am I supposed to do?

It makes people feel that the bosses don't care or put enough resources or money, or whatever, in. They feel: I wasn't worthy enough for you to meet that goal. Even in part, it still frustrates me, since the narrative of "we have still got a long way to go", which is true, is now the default for everybody. I've been to loads of panels this week and everyone keeps saying, "We've got a long way to go." And I'm thinking: Can we get to the point where we turn around and say, "We've come a long way."

Aaqil:
And still have a long way to go?

Miranda:
It's an infinite game, in the same way that most businesses want to be infinite in their existence. Whoever sets up your company is probably not going to be the same person who is standing in that space 100 years from now. No, but the company may still run. We have a number of companies that run that way. The BBC turned 100, right? So you have to recognise that diversity is the longest game you'll ever have to invest in, since your understanding of people is going to change.

We weren't really talking about socio-economic diversity five years ago. We really weren't even digging deep into transgender representations and all the denominations that sit behind that - what the language is, the provisions that need to be made, and what the challenges are.

Aaqil:
And religion?

Miranda:
Exactly. Religion, we capture the data, but we don't talk about it. We don't do interventions around it. Content doesn't often reflect it enough. So when you think about the human being that is your consumer, there is no way that you'd stop having this conversation about your consumer.

Aaqil:
Finally, what message do you want to send out to the industry? In terms of what they can expect from the CDN going forward, and also what you'd like them to do in terms of helping you to achieve what you believe needs to be done.

Miranda:
I'm really hoping that we can evolve CDN so it actually does become, as Amazon would say for itself, the single destination that you come to when you're thinking about diversity within the industry. Data-led so as to underpin initiatives, activities, strategic policy, all that. I want the data to be robust so that you trust it.

I need the industry to lean in and do what it says it's going to do. If I think about all the strategies manifested for people, and they had actually done the thing that they said they were going to do, we'd be a hell of a lot closer than we currently are. I recognise how hard it is in this economy for freelancers and for everyone really. But I want you to know that we are here watching - trying to create change so that you can sustain a career in the industry.

That is where we want the talent to be. Creating brilliant content that I can sit home and watch and enjoy with my family and friends. Well, that's what we all look forward to, right?

Miranda Wayland is CEO of the Creative Diversity Network. Read the most recent Diamond statistics here: https://creativediversitynetwork.com/diamond/diamond-reports/diamond-the-seventh-cut/

Aaqil Ahmed is the former Head of Religion at the BBC, Professor at Bolton University, and a Representology board member.

WHAT CAN THE NEW GOVERNMENT DO TO IMPROVE MEDIA FREEDOM AND DIVERSITY?

Natalie Fenton, Professor of Media and Communications, Goldsmiths, University of London

We must end the abuses and concentrations of media power and ownership. This means confronting media monopolies and limiting the power of Big Tech which makes millions from hosting journalism and streaming content, yet continues to pump capital into destructive technologies that amplify the spread of misinformation, extremism and hate.

The government should:

a) create legislative thresholds for triggering interventions on media/tech plurality with remedies to break down concentrations in media/tech ownership;

b) update the ways in which Ofcom measures media plurality to better account for the role of online news publishers and intermediaries, like Facebook, Google and X, in expanding and entrenching the market reach of dominant news outlets;

c) create public interest obligations for Big Tech platforms, including transparent reporting on the function of algorithms – with fines for noncompliance;

d) reinforce the principle of 'net neutrality' in UK legislation, to moderate the gatekeeping power of network operators and online platforms.

Furthermore, we need to address the prevailing crisis in local journalism and the growing number of news deserts. As the crisis in local news grows, not only do the most deprived communities have the most restricted access to local news, journalists of colour often report barriers to a profession accused of harmful stereotyping and divisive framing. A new local news strategy must direct funds from the tech giants to news media that is racially just, inclusive and accountable to diverse communities.

Finally, we must establish democratic, diverse and independent public service media. The BBC's role as a publicly-funded broadcaster has been undermined by pervasive political interference, debilitating funding cuts, commercialisation and market based regulation. We need to ensure media freedom by abolishing governmental control over appointments to the BBC and establishing an independent appointments process, with the BBC Board directly elected by its diverse audiences.

Finbarr Toesland, journalist and Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity Fellow

High levels of harassment and abuse are clear and present threats to journalists in the UK. While all journalists - no matter their identity - can face digital and in-person attacks relating to their journalism, LGBTQ journalists also contend with attacks directly related to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

During my time as a Fellow of the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity, I authored a report entitled: 'Are media organisations adequately protecting LGBTQ journalists from harassment and abuse?', which identified the ways in which anti-LGBTQ abuse against journalists can lead to people leaving the profession, thus reducing diversity.

In a highly contentious media environment, in which reportage on LGBTQ issues is often inflammatory, it's essential for the government to urgently review its policies on media freedom to ensure press freedom is upheld, at the same time as strengthening protections for journalists facing sustained harassment.

Much more work needs to be done to address online abuse and digital safety for journalists. While no quick fix exists to combat abusive online conduct, there is no question that the current social media environment is not supportive enough of minority voices.

If stronger regulations were introduced that made social media platforms take accountability for harmful content, more of an effort may be made by these companies to face up to this challenge.

Independent LGBTQ outlets are in clear need of more support and grants in the UK. Amplifying diverse voices is only possible if some, even a small, level of funding is extended to provide basic payments for editors and contributors.

The Welsh Government's commitment to funding Inclusive Journalism Cymru - an organisation that sets out to protect, support and represent people who've been marginalised by the journalism industry in Wales - is an example of the impact that investment in inclusive platforms can have on the wider media ecosystem.

If there are not platforms that are welcoming to LGBTQ voices, it will be extremely challenging to boost diversity in the industry and nurture early career talent.

Lexie Kirkconnell-Kawana, CEO of Impress

The press has had ample opportunity but has failed to reshape itself into a true representation of modern Britain. Robust press regulation would be the most effective way to address systemic and intrinsic cultural hegemonies, such as power, hierarchy, and partisanship, that entrench discriminatory practices (in both workplaces and on newsbeats) in reporting. Only a regulator with the powers to conduct investigations and who can offer direct remedies will be able to short-circuit these features and ensure meaningful change.

By the same token, media freedom - freedom from the political and powerful seeking to distort and silence truth-seekers - is only possible with a regulator that keeps those interests at arm's length from the industry, ensuring editorial processes cannot be manipulated, and journalists and publishers cannot be subjected to intrusive laws or compromised legal processes. This freedom comes with countervailing responsibilities, therefore the sector must maintain its integrity and command public trust by upholding standards of accuracy, transparency and accountability.

Additionally, there is a problematic presumption that there must be a commercial model for journalism, and it is simply the failure of the industry to realise it. There will always be certain types of journalism that need independent funding - for example, investigative journalism and journalism for smaller audiences, such as minority or vulnerable communities, which is of crucial importance. If we want a healthy, thriving media sector, then supporting that diversity of voice is an absolute necessity.

Key policy initiatives could include:

- Incentives for publishers to join approved regulators where they are subject to good governance, investigation and non-discrimination requirements;
- Civil procedure rules that require parties in legal disputes to first exhaust regulatory processes;
- Independent funding to improve media pluralism, and to support and sustain truly diverse news publishers.

Finally, some parts of our media are fundamentally broken – prioritising commercial bottom lines over the delivery of ethical news. Perpetuating harms such as the spread of discrimination and mis- and disinformation, it may be necessary to let these parts of the ecosystem fail. However, we must ensure that there is credible, viable alternative media in place which can act as a watchdog for the public and ensure that the public has access to information and sense-making.

Shirish Kulkarni, News Innovation Research Fellow at Media Cymru and JOMEC - Cardiff University's Journalism School

The government needs to take a long-term view - prioritising the effective, inclusive and equitable journalism of the future, rather than the failed models of the past. If we believe that journalism is a public good, then it needs to be funded as such. That doesn't mean directly funding the sector, with all the ethical difficulties that creates. Instead, it means supporting the structural conditions in which the journalism of the future can exist.

That relies on government developing a clear vision of what journalism could and should look like in the future, followed by support focused on the things we want to incentivise, rather than simply on the things we have now. Those things we want to incentivise will largely fall under the categories of innovation and inclusion.

Recent governments of all stripes have made vague gestures towards wanting to support journalism, but without any of the strategic thinking needed to back that up. In practice, that's led to media policy serving the institutions of the past rather than the citizens of the future. It may be politically expedient to continue propping up media moguls' newspapers and clickbait factories but we have to be clear: those organisations are in the advertising business, not the journalism business. We make a category error if we confuse the two, and government policy should incentivise activity which serves society, not simply shareholders.

There is hope though. The power of the legacy media lobby declines daily and pathfinder organisations genuinely serving their communities are showing the way. This is where government policy can make a difference - by helping to equip these organisations with the skills, knowledge and connections that they need to build sustainable businesses. In truth, journalism is easy - it's getting people to pay for it that's the hard part.

The journalism of the future will be founded on new business models that can support diverse and well-paid workforces to produce journalism that meets the needs of citizens, rather than billionaires. The government can, and should, make that happen.

Children Are Our Future - Let's Support Theirs

Francesca Sobande

Testcard F designed by George Hersee ©BBC

Children's TV should be the beating heart of public service broadcasting (PSB). As a media landscape that focuses on their sense of play and pondering, children's TV embraces the quirkiness of creativity and the transformative possibilities of imagination. In turn, such programming can be more experimental than other types, yielding innovative media that pushes the boundaries of genres, while frequently appealing to adults and children alike.

The lives that children go on to lead can be shaped by systemic power relations and oppression (e.g. ableism, capitalism, homophobia, Islamophobia, misogyny, racism, sexism, transphobia, xenophobia), not just what they do (not) see on screens. Still, children's TV is a fun and formative way to cultivate their dreams of the future, while acknowledging them here and now. Put briefly, children are our future, let's support theirs.

Image:
"Test Card F, designed by BBC engineer, George Hersee, was introduced in 1967, and aired on the new colour 625-line BBC Two service. This test card features Mr Hersee's daughter, Carole, pictured alongside Bubbles the clown."

Reference:
Rewind (2020), The history of the BBC trade test transmission (part 1/4), Available at: https://rewind.thetvroom.com/38764/features/the-history-of-the-bbc-trade-test-transmission-part-1-4/, Accessed 9/01/2025

Children are the public too

Positioned as delivering impartial and trusted TV programming, PSB provides the public with a range of media offerings. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) became the UK's first public service broadcaster in the 1920s, followed by independent commercial TV entering the PSB sphere with Channel 4 becoming part of it in the 1980s. Often, conversations about PSB and its future focus on news-based TV and accompanying questions and concerns about bias. Those discussions can be a fruitful way to critically reflect on the politics of news reporting and fragile notions of objectivity, as pointed out by a recent letter signed by BBC staff, accusing the broadcaster of a pro-Israel bias.

Alongside a focus on news, it's key that PSB and its related policy-making accounts for the breadth of TV programming (e.g. arts programming, as highlighted by the research of Caitriona Noonan) and the intergenerational nature of media viewing. This means ensuring that children's TV is not an afterthought, in comparison with news media developed for adult audiences. More than that, PSB children's TV must reflect the interests and perspectives of many different children if it is to truly be inclusive. Accordingly, PSB children's TV needs to be approached in a way that acknowledges the similarities and differences between the lives of children, such as the specifics of living in certain regions and the specifics of speaking different languages or communicating in other ways. With that in mind, the future of PSB policymaking should embrace more multilingual media-making strategies, and support the creation of children's TV across a wider range of UK locations.

In the context of the United States of America, Reading Rainbow (1983–2006) was a Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) TV programme dedicated to children's books and children's experiences of reading and reflecting on them. The show's upbeat and memorable theme song set the tone for what would follow – heartwarming discussions which, with care, covered an assortment of topics and questions: grief, love, anxiety, friendship, fear, and much more. Presented by the incomparable LeVar Burton, who recently received a National Endowment of the Humanities Medal from the White House, Reading Rainbow is a shining example of how such programming can be crucial in aiding children's learning and, thus, can be crucial to society at large.

As Burton said when accepting the award for his impact as an actor, storyteller and literacy advocate: "The arts and humanities, in my view, are the underpinnings of civilisation. Without the arts and humanities, we don't know who we are…where we've been…they can give context to where we're going…". PSB programming can play a poignant role in the arts and humanities but, for this to happen, related policy-making must make sure that the funding and support for children's TV is on a par with that of TV programming for adults. After all, children are the public too.

"The arts and humanities, in my view, are the underpinnings of civilisation. Without the arts and humanities, we don't know who we are…where we've been…they can give context to where we're going…"

LeVar Burton

Children's presenters as educators

As covered in the documentary film Butterfly in the Sky (2022), LeVar Burton's leading and educational contributions to Reading Rainbow, as a Black man in the predominantly white world of children's TV, were especially resonant for Black children, who are commonly underserved by PSB.

Here in the UK, I grew up in Scotland watching TV shows on various channels, namely CBBC (the publicly broadcasted children's TV channel which the BBC owns and operates) and CITV (the equivalent and formerly free-to-air channel from ITV). Children's TV then, as now, was not without its issues, such as the scarcity of meaningful depictions of Black girls and women in many shows. That was a problem repeatedly raised by those who I interviewed as part of my research in 2015–2018 on the media experiences of Black women in Britain. However, despite the shortcomings of such children's TV programming, the existence of CBBC and CITV still played a pivotal part in many childhoods. Hence, people continue to take to the internet to praise the shows and conversations that those channels have fostered.

I remember learning about consumer rights and greedy brands through enlightening shows such as CBBC's Short Change (1994–2005), delighted to see Angelica Bell and Ortis Deley imparting knowledge and speaking to and with children, not speaking at or down to them, like many adults do. I also fondly remember watching Comin' Atcha! (1999–2000) – a whimsical CITV series featuring the girl group Cleopatra, and one of very few series – then and now – that focused on Black girls and women. Additionally, I recall looking forward to watching Newsround (1972–present), presented by Lizo Mzimba between 1998–2008, which kept children in the know about the news.

Spending time watching such shows was no doubt enjoyable but was also informative. What particularly stands out is the way that children's TV presenters artfully took on the dual role of both entertaining and educating in ways that were considered, not condescending. Specifically, memories of connecting with the words and wisdom of Black presenters have stayed with me and, as suggested by social media commentaries about their far-reaching impact, are memories that have stayed with many other people too.

Indeed, as Anamik Saha wrote about in the Representology article "End Diversity" in the previous issue, it's important to move beyond superficial notions of representation and diversity which can be obstacles to substantive forms of structural change. At the same time, it's essential to recognise the ways that media depictions and discourse can affect children and the lives they do, or don't, go on to lead. However, this isn't all about representation or a single TV show.

My point is that the presence of channels such as CBBC (due to become entirely online in the near future) and CITV (which closed in September 2023), sent a message that at least some of the interests of children were taken seriously by PSB. That message could bolster children's sense of belonging in a world that often dismisses their needs and wants, and in a world in which they may be more likely to be treated as a pesky problem than as a whole person.

Conclusion: The perils of pivoting to online-only

In the UK, the 1990 Broadcasting Act established children's programming as a protected category, following on from the effective campaigning of producers, researchers, parents, and others invested in the vital ways in which such TV can support children and their development. During the decades since, the world of children's TV has expanded, shaped by technological shifts such as the rise of social media and streaming services. This has culminated at a point in time when the presence of children's TV in PBS feels acutely precarious – at risk of being relegated solely to online platforms, and at risk of not being recorded in sustainable and accessible ways. The recent hacking of the Internet Archive highlights the ephemeral and unstable nature of many types of digital content hubs and repositories, serving as a reminder of the challenges to be addressed as part of PSB efforts to archive their media in the long-term.

Online platforms and streaming services are foundational to many people's experiences of TV today, as is highlighted in Sandra Eyakware's research on the audience experiences of Black women in Britain. It is therefore understandable that the terrain of contemporary children's TV includes lots of different types of digital and online-only content. Yet, it would be a mistake for PSB to treat children's TV as being synonymous with the internet. Pivoting to a greater focus on children's online experiences may result in a PSB TV strategy that overlooks disparities regarding access to the internet and devices that can be essential to engaging with TV online. There is still power in PSB programming as live TV which isn't dependent on online content hubs, so children's TV must have ample space there too, providing children and those who care for them with different ways to engage such media.

Moving children's TV online may be part of PSB plans to become more "digital-first" overall, but such decisions can also be symptomatic of hierarchical approaches to programming, with media for adults typically prioritised over that for children and therefore being less likely to become confined to featuring in an online content hub. Ultimately, as indicated by the end of CITV and the plans to move CBBC entirely online, much needs to be done to ensure PSB protects and sustains children's TV, and supports efforts to broaden the demographics, regions, and languages that it depicts.

Dr Francesca Sobande is a reader in digital media studies at Cardiff University. She is the author of Big Brands Are Watching You: Marketing Social Justice and Digital Culture (2024, University of California Press), Consuming Crisis: Commodifying Care and COVID-19 (2022, SAGE), and The Digital Lives of Black Women in Britain (2020, Palgrave Macmillan)

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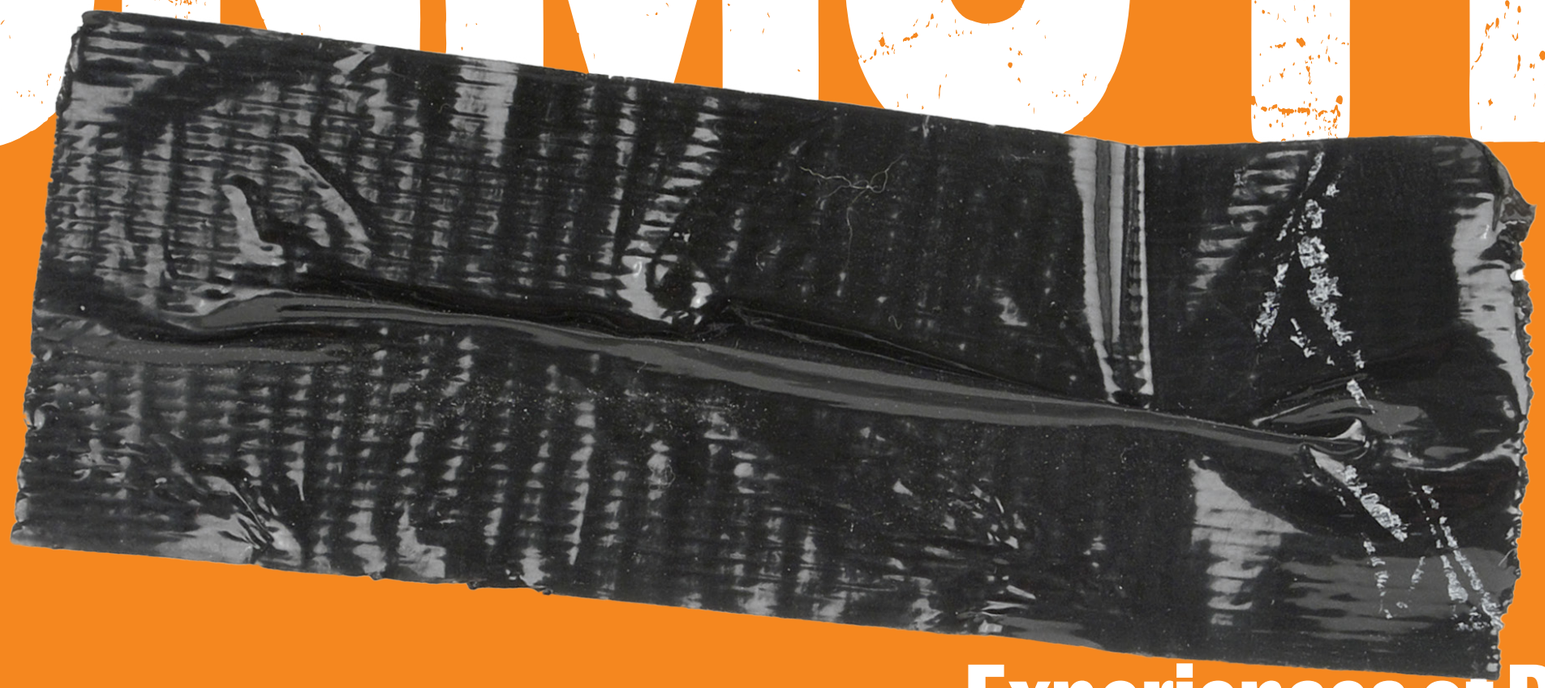

Experiences of Deaf Film and TV Professionals in the UK Media Industry - Key Findings

Erika Jones and Dr Ellie Tomsett

Deaf people have been working behind the camera in UK film and television for over four decades, yet there is scarce information about their inclusion in the workforce. UNMUTED is one of the first studies to focus exclusively on deaf film and TV professionals.

Some of the key findings of this report, based on a survey of over 40 deaf film and TV professionals and subsequent interviews, are:

- Deaf professionals responding to our survey earn at least £13,000 less than the wider industry on average.
- 98% of the participants say they have experienced discrimination whilst working in the industry.
- Only 5% of the respondents believe there to be enough resources and opportunities for deaf film and TV industry professionals.

It's estimated that currently around one in five adults of working age (18%) across the UK has a form of deafness, yet deaf people make up less than 1% of those working with the UK's broadcasting industry.

The findings presented in the report are focused on the questions surrounding the representation of deaf workers in the off-screen industry, so we explore the barriers to participation experienced by the respondents. The reason for this focus is that only 5% of the respondents believed there to be enough resources and opportunities for deaf film and TV industry professionals. Through the analysis of the survey responses, we have identified six main barriers to the participation of deaf people in the industry:

Communication Access

Disabled people can apply for an 'Access to Work' grant funded by the Department for Work and Pensions, to cover any support they require for their workplace, and for 95% of our respondents, this is largely communication support, which can be anything from an interpreter, a lip speaker, a notetaker or a technology system. While invaluable to many deaf people, the grant scheme is not without its challenges. Nearly a third of our respondents don't have all their support costs covered due to the funding being capped in recent years. This problem is made worse by the short-term nature of the industry, which makes it hard to plan and budget throughout the year. The level of administrative labour required to use the scheme is also huge. Applications can take from a few weeks to several months to get approval, not ideal when you start a new job. Once granted, deaf professionals often need to do all the organisation and paperwork involved and additionally, our respondents reported the burden of explaining about the scheme to their potential employers and colleagues – a strenuous and repetitive task in an industry with a high turnover of projects and staff.

Once a grant agreement is in place, there's still an issue of securing appropriate support. There is a vast shortage of interpreters and lip speakers so it can be difficult to secure interpreters at short notice. The interpreter also needs to be the 'right fit' with the industry typically fast paced - high pressurised with long hours. Throw in lots of industry jargon and the interpreter really needs a special skill set. Working with an interpreter who doesn't understand you properly, is unable to use correct signs for industry jargon, or who is poorly trained does lead to miscommunication and incorrect translation which can have a direct impact on the way hearing colleagues view a deaf colleague's professionalism, which in itself has an impact on performance.

Skill and Role Gaps

Over 70% of the survey respondents were in editorial roles, and in contrast, under 10% identified themselves in technical, postproduction and production management roles. Lack of access to training could be one of the reasons behind this skills gap as nearly a third (31%) of the respondents found training inaccessible.

Furthermore, the gap is also seen at the top of the industry ladder, as 14% of our respondents were in senior management positions, but 67% of those have their own production companies. Only 2% of our respondents are in senior roles within mainstream industry (which we defined in the survey as working on non-deaf specific content, in a team of hearing people) – clearly illustrating a 'glass ceiling' for deaf professionals.

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'Deaf Media'

67% of the survey respondents' current, or most recent, role is in making deaf commissioned content, so 'deaf media' is an important source of employment for many deaf professionals. A large share of deaf programmes and films are commissioned by British Sign Language Broadcasting Trust (BSLBT). Because it's the only commissioning body with a sole focus on deaf content, it's very often the only place where deaf professionals can pitch their ideas.

Although it's recognised as a positive and safe place, we also have reports that this comes with some drawbacks, which includes the organisation limiting creative freedom on their commissioned content and engaging in favouritism. It's also observed that the majority of commissions are going to hearing-led companies compared to deaf-led companies – their number winning commissions has dwindled over the last decade. Furthermore, our data shows that hearing-led companies employ fewer deaf people in comparison to deaf-led companies – a difference of 70%.

Ghettoising

The most common barrier identified in the workplace of major broadcasters making deaf content was 'ghettoising', which, within the off-screen industry, is keeping deaf and disabled employees in deaf or disability-specific content making, rather than providing opportunities across the spectrum of productions. Within the major broadcasters' productions across the board, you typically see staff moving around on productions, gaining new experiences and skills - progressing their careers, whilst deaf staff on deaf programming tend to be kept on, even if they express a wish to move around just as their hearing peers do, as was reported by our respondents.

Additionally, 78% of respondents working with broadcasters reported that they had experienced ableism across their careers, with 67% saying they have at some stage been bullied in their workplace. These are at least 20% higher than survey respondents working in other types of workplaces.

Mainstream

29% of the survey respondents had a current or most recent job in mainstream productions, and 14% have worked in it for all of their careers. However, a much higher number, 83%, of the respondents expressed a desire to work on mainstream productions. Furthermore, 40% of the respondents have rarely or never worked in the mainstream industry. This disparity in the numbers suggests a lack of opportunities - this is underlined by the fact that only 2% of all participants believed there are enough opportunities available for them in the mainstream.

However, even after you 'succeed' in getting into the mainstream, the barriers are still present. 83% of the survey respondents who worked all their careers in the mainstream have experienced ableism. It's almost a quarter more than for those who have never worked there. We also have reports of isolation within the mainstream workplace, additional pressure to 'code-switch' and respondents feeling that they have to work far harder than their hearing colleagues to prove that they are just as able.

Discrimination

98% of the survey respondents said they have experienced discrimination working in the film and TV industry, while 43% of the respondents said they have been bullied - verbally, emotionally, and physically.

Conclusion

In the report, we've made some recommendations aimed at breaking down the barriers identified by the respondents. As with other marginalised groups in today's diverse society, deaf people are not here to tick any boxes – they bring lots to the table; their experiences, stories, adventures, failures, victories, and most importantly of all, their talent. For film and TV productions to benefit from all the things deaf people bring to the table, the off-screen industry needs to move away from well-meaning words to tangible change. It's now time for the voices of deaf people working in the industry to be 'UNMUTED'.

Erika Jones has worked in broadcasting for over a decade. Ellie Tomsett is a Senior Lecturer in Media and Film at Birmingham City University. You can read their research in full at: https://bcuassets.blob.core.windows.net/docs/unmuted-experiences-of-deaf-film-and-tv-professionals-in-the-uk-media-industrya-w--133765744272723244.pdf

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Michele D'Acosta

The New WORLD OF AI-filmmaking, and different futures THAT LIE AHEAD.

Dr David Dunkley Gyimah

The night shift at Lehman Brothers could be as beguiling as it was challenging. Up on the 38th floor of the World Financial Center tower, peering over New York's landscape, copy editor Michele D'Acosta, could afford herself the time to dream.

What would success look like, this English woman in New York pondered, breaking from her screen to peer outside at the kaleidoscope of illuminated locations: the Brooklyn Bridge connecting Manhattan to Brooklyn, New Jersey and the World Trade Center.

Her shift over, she would make her way in the morning rush to her 11th floor loft apartment on 127 West 26th Street, which was designated as Joint Live-Work Quarters for Artists in NYC's Chelsea neighbourhood. On the 5th floor, she'd look in awe at an exhibition of one of the world's most exciting artists in the 1980s, Jean-Michel Basquiat.

A few decades later, the arc of the universe has come round. Late one evening in September 2024, D'Acosta, now at home in Brighton, received an alert from HUG - an artist community, founded by Randi Zuckerberg (Mark Zuckerberg's sister) and Debbie Soon.

It was an open call to an exhibition at the World Trade Center. In a 48-hour turnaround, D'Acosta trains a LoRA (Low-rank adaptation) AI model on video footage in her archive. She remixes and reworks her content with the AI tools ***Runway*** and ***Stable Diffusion***, explaining that "I was literally working with minutes to spare before the deadline closed".

As I write this, D'Acosta has discovered that her AI-video art, ***Autonomy, The Mind Hacker's Guide***, has been accepted into the exhibition. She's thrilled. I tell her I detect shades of Basquiat, before knowing of her previous encounter. She laughs.

It's been eight years since she delved into the world of Artificial Intelligence. The reason? To see if someone could create an algorithm to help her find her biological mother. That would eventually happen, following some sleuthing, and it would lead to a deeper interest in AI. During lockdown, she became part of a global arts community while selling her art as NFT Art.

Success

This isn't D'Acosta's first taste of her dream. Documentary credit watchers will recognise her as the co-producer of Nick Broomfield's award-winning 2002 documentary, ***Biggie & Tupac***, for which her TV skills (she once worked in BBC reportage), contacts and knowledge of the growing US Hip Hop scene were invaluable.

Today, we're swapping notes on the vision of AI filmmaking - how 'Gen AI' can be used for storytelling and storyboarding. She's not mincing her words:

"We need to wake up about this because it's not science fiction. And we need to have a voice, and we need to be at the top table," adding, "our story is already missing from the physical archive. So, when we start to create the AI archive, where are we?"

Generative AI, which predicts content without supervising the data it ingests, has an underlying concept that's emerged over decades from the 1950s, when one of Britain's best computer minds, Alan Turing, proposed how a machine's ability to show intelligence could, or not, be distinguished from a human.

Experts later leaned towards the human brain's physiology; its neural network as a way for computers to crack learning complex patterns. They would come to be known as large language models (LLM), but these early forms were limited in exhibiting context, as well as being slow.

It is only in the past few years, specifically 2017, that a research paper called ***Attention is All You Need*** by Google scientists, turbo-charged AI. It would impact text queries in ***ChatGPT***, images and moving image software. The key has been the use of algorithms called Transformers which enable code to track words thus providing contextual information and sentences that appear grammatical with semantic meaning. Image generation combines Transformer coding with another AI model, Diffusion, where the model learns from ingested labelled Images and recreates variations of these from text prompts.

"What I see in these things are great augmentations," says Dr Barry Ledeatte, an AI consultant with decades of experience, working for, amongst others, the LSE. An emerging worry is that Gen AI will replace human artistry, which Dr Ledeatte disputes.

"If you don't have the seeds of something to lay down, you can't really use them. Gen AI is going to get better and better, but they're always going to be able to enhance the core role of a person."

The frenzy around the use of this new tech in filmmaking has caused excitement and alarm in Hollywood, partly leading to the impasse in the 2023 Hollywood writer and actors' strike, and the pending legal disputes around the ownership of content that has been trained using material that has been taken from the Internet without permission.

How does an actor protect their creativity and prevent a studio from creating a digital 'twin' in form and voice for other projects to which the actor has no claim? Vanity Fair reported in 2022 that the Star Wars actor James Earl Jones had signed over the use of his voice to Lucas Films to be replicated with Gen AI as the character Darth Vader.

Last year, the producer and actor, Tyler Perry, put on hold a £640m studio expansion plan when he observed OpenAI's video generator, ***Sora AI***, being capable of creating cinematic 'dolly shots' mimicking a camera's movement through a market full of people.

Since then, several AI companies including Google have gone on the offensive with products such as ***Veo 2*** and ***Gemini*** prompting experts and commentators to observe an AI race.

In January 2025, Chinese hedge fund High-Flyer released DeepSeek, which astounded the AI market. While ChatGPT, in the last year alone, cost £4 billion to develop, DeepSeek was developed for a fraction of the cost at £4 million, and it's made its code, though not its training data, available for anyone to use. The impact is multifarious. Lower costs could lead to more Generative AIs (Gen AIs) on the market, and if states' copyright laws aren't updated to protect creatives, that could imperil the livelihoods of creatives.

In her book ***Supremacy***, which won the 2024 Financial Times Business Book of the Year Award, author Parmy Olson voices deep concerns about tech leaders, described as 'effective altruists'. She details how in search of the greater goal of achieving the nadir of AI, Artificial general intelligence (AGI), and the financial gains that will bring, they are ignoring guardrails in ethics, morality and equality.

As an unregulated field, Gen AI also has a darker side, with users spawning deep fakes—images that imitate real people that are then peddled in porn or used for impersonations – with criminal intent. Thus far, there are relatively few guardrails, nor is there proper legislation yet governing their use. A new EU AI Act came into force in August 2024, with what some critics say is a "light touch" in regulating deepfake. Hence, rather than potential bans or stricter regulations in its misuse, developers are merely required to be transparent when using deep fake technologies.

"We need to wake up about this because it's not science fiction. And we need to have a voice, and we need to be at the top table . . ." *Michele D'Acosta*

The extent of Gen AI's impact on high-end film production is uncertain, but it may create a renewed industry not unlike YouTube's disruption of the video and broadcast industry, providing new creative and business streams. As an early adopter of the Net and social media, creating my first platform in the late 90s and receiving international awards for innovation thereafter, the

signs and potential of its innovation appear to me to be similar.

Last year, major recognition was given to the form at the AI Film 3 festival in Arizona, USA. Producers claim it was the first international festival showcasing AI film and art from around the world, including D'Acosta's film ***Remnants*** and my own short film ***Empowered***, which depicts a young Black girl growing up seeing Black women break glass ceilings to reach the ultimate goal.

Empowered is an example of Gen AI's use in storytelling in the intersection of social action, innovation and diversity. The latter is particularly poignant at a time when diversity programs in corporate companies are under threat. It was inspired by, among others, women around me, such as my two sisters, who recently left Britain to set up a primary school in Ghana. Its UK debut at the Black Business Entrepreneurs conference, a leading entrepreneurs' event driven by Dr Carlton Brown, drew significant attention.

On the advances in AI for film and storytelling, D'Acosta sees its fresh approach as the epitome of creativity. "When we go out and shoot, we know what the picture's going to look like, but I don't know what it (AI-film) is going to look like until it's made. And that's incredibly exciting. Again, we're always trying to get something from what we have in our mind or in our imagination, and to reproduce that as closely as possible."

D'Acosta says she's laying down a marker, cognisant that she's one of relatively few Black artists and filmmakers making a living from the genre. Yet there are huge, potentially significant, barriers ahead. The broadcaster, Sandi Toksvig, summed it up thus:

"Wikipedia is a serious problem for us," she told BBC Woman's Hour, "It is the largest collection of knowledge in humanity's history. It is, because of the way it's sourced, 85% by and about white men. Now, if we carry on with this and AI scrapes that data, what will happen is that women and other groups will be left out of history."

Toksvig is collaborating with Cambridge University on a new Mappa Mundi project with the aim of creating a digital resource documenting women's position, achievements and struggles across the globe. The concern for other groups, such as Black and Brown people, is palpable. LLMs rely on the data they're trained on and the absence of diversity from the encoders and data yields produce concerning results.

Overcoming AI Bias

In 2018, Dr Joy Buolamwini, a Canadian-American-Ghanaian computer scientist, first exposed racial biases in AI in relation to facial recognition through her work at MIT as an author and activist. In a ***Ted Talk***, and her documentary, ***Coded Bias*** (2020), she warns against its future use, exploring its use in predictive policing, wrongful identification and miscarriages of justice.

"Most of my work today is to correct misrepresentation," he tells me from his office in Lagos, "training the neural network to properly understand the right kinds of data set that represents, like, Africans, black people, Nigerians, subcultures".

Malik Afegbua

Interviewed by Jon Snow on Channel 4 News in 2019, she recounted how figures like Michelle Obama and Serena Williams were being gender mis-labelled by AI software. Buolamwini's investigation led her to coin the phrase "Pale Male Data", as data sets used to train the AI were derived predominately from white men or those of a light-skinned complexion.

Essentially, as pattern recognition software, AI is studying patterns and behaviours to reflect or amplify results, so if its inputs are skewed, lack diversity, or are deliberately maligned as the case with Microsoft's bot Tay, results can prove controversial. In Tay's case, as a chatbot released on Twitter (now X) in 2016, it began to post racist tweets after 16 hours before it was shut down. Microsoft attributed this to users deliberately interacting with the bot using foul language, which the bot then learned.

For this article I carried out a simple test in Gen AI, to see if biases against Black and Brown people, in terms of race and gender, are also evident. By using simple text prompts in one of the most popular image generators, the experiment yielded the following: Typing "Show me doctors", "Show me engineers", "Show me models" and "Show me academics" reveals an all-white cast. "Show me athletes" reveals three out of the four images generated to be Black males, whilst "rappers" returns all four images as those of Black men.

The reasons for this outcome could be many. The ingested data could be unrepresentative of society because data acquisition is costly and time consuming. There could be bias in the actual code, a lack of human scrutiny for fairness, a lack of feedback loops to correct the system, or no regulatory or transparent ethical guidelines to adhere to. One of Scandinavia's largest newspapers, ***Aftonbladet***, uses AI to investigate its own diversity. The Swedish platform analyses age, gender, ethnicity to provide fairness in its representation of stories.

The bias in Gen AI has worrying implications for the future. As these models become embedded in education and civic life, or are simply accepted as the norm, they may begin to recycle their own answers. This recycling effect could lead to 'model collapse,' a phenomenon that would be detrimental to human knowledge.

Hence, correcting these flaws requires the continual training of Gen AI models on new bespoke and diverse images - something AI-filmmakers, such as D'Acosta, myself, and Malik Afegbua - whose efforts have been covered in ***CNN*** and ***Vogue*** – are aware of.

"Most of my work today is to correct misrepresentation," he tells me from his office in Lagos, "training the neural network to properly understand the right kinds of data set that represents, ike, Africans, black people, Nigerians, subcultures".

Gen AI Africa

A 2010 Surrey University business graduate, Afegbua's penchant for tech is writ large in his background. Now back in Nigeria, he's turned the world of fashion - and the perceptions of senior citizenry as being unfashionable - upside down, with his ***Elder Series***. It features cinematic images of Black grandmothers and grandfathers sashaying across Milan-like digital catwalks in cultural and heritage costumes.

Self-taught in innovative tech-film productions and commercial making, his entry into AI stemmed from personal circumstances when honouring the memory of his late mother. Today, the ***Elder Series*** has been realised on physical catwalks, working with senior citizens between 60 and 80 years-of-age modelling in Amsterdam and Nigeria. This has made him famous and brought him into the fold with Hollywood filmmakers, such as Ruth E. Carter, the costume designer for ***Black Panther***.

"I wasn't expecting to go viral", he tells me. "I didn't plan it. It wasn't, like, I didn't go out to say, 'I want to go and create a fashion show for the elders and let it go viral.' I know it's never been done before. This was not my plan."

Afegbua echoes D'Acosta's concerns about AI-filmmaking as a storyteller seeking to tell original stories, when access to telling stories has been a perennial industry issue. His ambition is to build a state-of-the-art AI studio, accompanying his own bespoke large language models (LLMs) which he has been training using his own archive material.

Increasingly, new lines of LLMs are being developed to focus on specific groups, such as SEA-LION in Southeast Asia's diverse contexts, languages, and cultures, whilst in Africa, Jacaranda, an African-language LLM, caters for speakers in Swahili, Hausa, Yoruba, Xhosa, and Zulu (it's soon to add Twi, an Ashanti language). The future of LLMs looks increasingly specialised, focused on personalised and custom-trained data. This trend is opening up new fields of personalised Gen AIs. For example, Professor Paul Bradshaw of Birmingham City University has been training his own custom generative pre-trained transformer, a 'GPT', on his books and blog posts.

Personal circumstances, too, were the catalyst for my own foray into AI-filmmaking, in 2015, when I fed a film made on the Syrian border into IBM's AI machine, Watson. A few months earlier, Watson had created a trailer for a Hollywood film, ***Morgan*** (2016), which surprised industry insiders when it aired. It differed by two shots when the same material was given to a Hollywood trailer producer. Could AI predict emotional engagement arcs on a film, I queried, and, if so, could you literally engineer a film to sync with viewers' emotional reception? In 2018, working at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, as its Asper Visiting Professor, I demonstrated how a film's narrative patterns can be learned and applied to journalism to engage audiences. But it wasn't until Gen AI that the ante was upped.

My father had passed away in 2006 and, during lockdown, we came across letters of his in a briefcase. The missives, both personal and official, gave the family new insight into his past. My problem was a common generational one. There was relatively little archive of my father and his generation and a general lack of archive

Could AI predict emotional engagement arcs on a film, I queried, and, if so, could you literally engineer a film to sync with viewers' emotional reception?

during his adolescence in Ghana, then called the Gold Coast. The reasons were not just a dearth of image-capturing equipment and expertise. Between the 1930s and 60s, films about Africans made by Africans in Anglophile Africa faced several hurdles that were economic, that were around censorship and the difficulties acquiring filming permits. In Francophile Africa, the 'Laval Decree' - named after Pierre Laval, who would become the Vichy France Government's Minister of the Colonies - legally prohibited Africans from making films.

Could the presence of written documents, interviews, and AI help to recreate archives, albeit synthetic? My 2-minute short, ***Chairman: the Ghanaian***, explores this question. The film was screened for members of the British Screen Forum and the Channel 4 Board of Directors, who invited me to present it. But what of the ethical considerations? The Archival Producers' Alliance recently outlined its approach to AI in documentaries, emphasising transparency as a prerequisite for both producers and audiences. This transparency is essential for building trust in filmmakers' decisions, particularly regarding their collaboration with stakeholders and the potential use of AI as an alternative to traditional archives. ***Chairman: the Ghanaian***, for example, explores how AI can be used in this way.

In BBC Two's feature on Salman Rushdie, ***Through a Glass Darkly*** (2024), Gen AI is also deployed. Rushdie recounts the shocking attack on him at a literary event. In trying to understand his assailant's motives he constructs a scene — a dialogue between him and his attacker — using Gen AI. It's fictional, but this BBC production draws from research on the attacker's past. Rushdie relies on research and memorisation, delivered as artistic representation.

Rushdie's film opens an ethical dilemma. How trustworthy, and ethical at the same time, is it to write the words uttered by an interviewee without their consent when they are still alive?

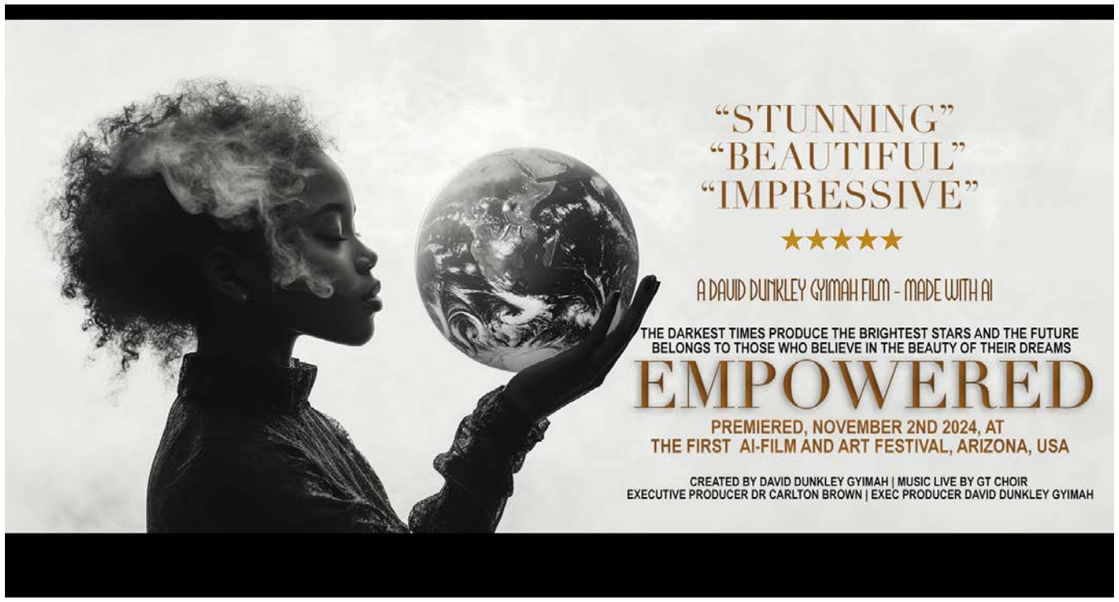
Can we place our trust in the artistry of the production because of our faith also in Rushdie's reputation? In seeking to be transparent and truthful. Rushdie makes his past apparent - his story told for those who are unaware of it. Technology could also help audiences assess trust by providing metrics and readily accessible information about content creators, including recommendations and peer reviews. I've observed this need while acting as a reviewer for Google's EU news fund and have implemented a similar feature on my own platform, www.Viewmagazine.tv, linking to a 60-second showreel.

Gen AI in Academia

One of the few AI storytelling platforms in the UK that is aimed at researchers and academics is now in its second year - ***Storytelling + Machine***, at Manchester Metropolitan University. In July 2024, as one of the presenters, I met Beth Senior, Academic Lead for Outreach at the School of Digital Arts (SODA), with more than 20 years' experience in the gaming industry.

I noted that I was the only Black person presenting, which could be due to a myriad of reasons, but reflecting on her own involvement with the conference, Senior says, "I think sometimes invites aren't as active as they could be, and I do wonder if that's because it's primarily aimed at research people. I, myself, am not on a research pathway - I'm on an EPC (Education, Pedagogy, and Citizenship) pathway."

Therein lies the rub for active engagement in shaping AI-filmmaking's future and securing academic funding in tertiary institutions. Figures for the number of Black people on academic research pathways compared with those who are practice-based (such as EPC) are difficult to come by - however general figures for research backgrounds provide a loose anecdotal metric. According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), the number of Black professors increased by 40 last year, to 210, but that figure still amounts to only 1 per cent of all professorial staff.



The solution, says Senior, is, firstly, for practice-based pathways to be given the support that is now given to researchers to delve into areas like AI-research. Secondly, for funding bodies, like the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), to recognise practical work in AI-filmmaking from practice-based scholars as incubators of knowledge. Thirdly, for greater diversity at conferences, or other ways of targeting underrepresented or diverse groups for funding. I agree.

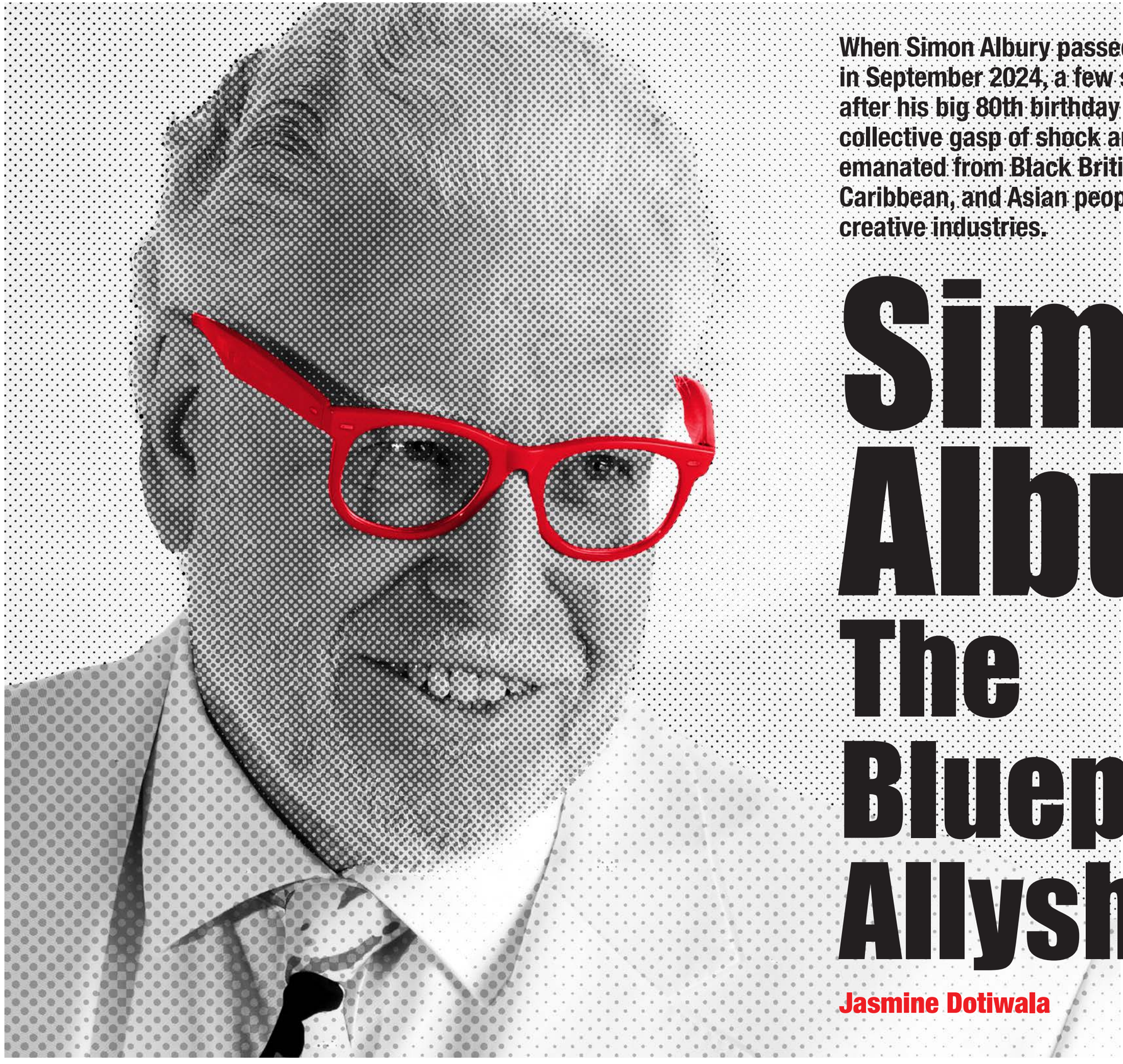
Recently, Prime Minister Kier Starmer laid out his government's bold plans for promoting AI in general. But the balance between innovation within the creative industries supporting diverse work and policies safeguarding creativity and ownership is one of many issues ahead. In February, Paris holds a summit to create an AI governance framework, following the UK's Bletchley Park summit in 2023 - but for marginalised groups and those from the Global South, it could be Rwanda's AI summit in April which offers a deeper engagement from Black and Brown people across the globe.

In the summer, a group of industry professionals, including myself, are looking to hold an AI conference asking the question "Can AI match or even enhance the art of storytelling - stories that are particularly aimed at the global majority?"

Yes, I theorise. It will be ambitious but by no means exhaustive, as the large language models (LLMs) that we're looking to build recognise the heterogeneity and diversity of Black people and how storytelling emerges from cultures and are redefined by sub-cultures and interactions. The need, therefore, to skill up the next generation could not be more pressing. It's an important step towards reclaiming the future.

Dr David Dunkley Gyimah is an Associate Professor at Cardiff University in Tech and Innovation in Journalism, as well as an established authority in creative technologies. He's been researching AI's potential in entrepreneurship and storytelling for over a decade.

The cinema version of *Empowered* is available to download for groups and individuals working in leadership, diversity and careers. For a copy, email Dr Gyimah at: gyimahd@cardiff.ac.uk



When Simon Albury passed away suddenly in September 2024, a few short months after his big 80th birthday party, a collective gasp of shock and painful loss emanated from Black British African, Caribbean, and Asian people across the creative industries.

Simon Albury: The Blueprint of Allyship

Jasmine Dotiwala

To the TV execs of yesteryear, Simon was a former TV producer and director, the Chief Exec of the Royal Television Society from 2000-2012 and Director of the Campaign for Quality Television (1989-90). To the rest of us, fighting for equality and recognition in the TV industry, he was a larger-than-life figure - visually, vocally and a relentless, unapologetic advocate for Brown and Black people having a voice, opportunity and position.

Even though he had retired decades ago, he could still frequently be seen at industry events, OFCOM meetings, seminars, and when TV diversity data was being released. He would always be the first to raise his hand in post-event Q&A sessions.

Simon recognised that his privilege had power. The use of the word “privilege” can sometimes be polarising, but it is essential to recognise the privileges you have and to show up as an ally for others. Simon often said he knew he had privilege and felt it was his duty to use it to make change. He was astutely self-aware. Addressing it head-on created authenticity and honesty.

Personality

You would easily spot him in a crowd – he was tall, handsome, had a thick mane of pure white hair, wore red-framed spectacles and rocked a cream or white suit. His visual brand was recognised and respected, way before influencers on Instagram were creating personal brands. His energy was endless. I can’t even begin to imagine that aged 80, I will still connect and party with the future TV leaders in the way that he did.

Courage

His social media accounts would tell the public that ‘’I can speak out because I am privileged, retired & have nothing to lose - bold but not brave”. However, in that regard, he was wrong. He was as brave as Hanuman and Hercules. Simon’s presence was one of the reasons that people like me had the courage to speak up. His words, actions and voice fuelled us when, through the constant struggles
driving for diversity, our batteries ran low.

Not once did I ever see Simon cower or flinch when he spoke to people from various worlds - whether in media, television, film, fashion. Anyone from any generation could speak with Simon and he would form a new bond and connection with them. It was mesmerising to see him work a room.

Allyship

Simon was the blueprint of how colleagues from non-diverse backgrounds can and have supported those from more historically marginalised demographics. He wasn’t a white saviour. He was an ally. In the DEI world, we often ask everyone to act as an ‘’ally” to those who are unlike ourselves. Simon Albury epitomised the power of allies in the industry. Maybe, when asked, people can say that they can think of at least one ally in the workplace, but it’s unusual to ask the great and good of the TV industry this question and for everyone to name Simon Albury.

Being an ally means being able to recognise your privilege. Simon was a staunch ally who advocated and worked alongside the Black community. He went out of his way to learn how to recognise what everyday racism looks like – from pay inequity to social persecution – and addressed it.

Leaning in

Simon wasn’t afraid to speak up: he used his privilege to advocate for others and promote equity. He understood that speaking up can be influential, and that the consequences of not speaking up can be harmful. He regularly posted #DiversityDeficit posts across social media.

He was happy to unlearn everything he thought he knew. When Simon wasn’t sure about something, he would often call and ask about it – he had no pride, just a yearning to learn and stay on top of things. He showed that allyship means that when you’re unsure about how to approach language or different communities, ask them what the best approach would be - they will be relieved that you have cared enough to ask.

Fearless and rigid in his desire to support other communities, he also knew into which conversations his voice belonged, and where it didn’t. Similarly, he knew in which spaces he physically belonged, and where he didn’t. When Simon had the answers to challenges that could help other communities of which he was not a part, he aligned with those who trusted him and offered to help if they would like him to do so.
Sir Lenny Henry, Marcus Ryder, Simone Pennant (founder of The TV Collective), and I were Simon’s buddies, and he was our ally.

Simon connected many of us across the Creative Arts industry and shared many lessons in allyship, including:

- Educate yourself: Learn about the experiences of the groups with whom you want to ally. This can help you identify biases and realise what you can do to change your behaviour.
- Listen: Listen honestly to people who are experiencing oppression.
- Avoid assumptions: Be mindful of your default assumptions and unconscious biases.
- Amplify other voices: Be conscious of not injecting your own experiences into a conversation unless you’re a part of it.
- Collaborate: Respect the autonomy, agency and leadership of the groups with whom you want to ally.
- Hold yourself accountable: Learn from your mistakes and hold yourself accountable by changing your behaviour.

Allyship involves continuous effort and commitment to supporting others, and Simon’s energy never wavered.

Finding joy in the fight

Simon was a unicorn, curating numerous fun moments and parties. Fighting for equality can be a tiring, exhausting life. Yet Simon was determined to bring joy and celebration to our world, holding safe spaces at his regular ‘’Broadcasting Equality Bash” and celebrating those people that WE held in high regard but who weren’t always recognised by the establishment.
He accepted that being an ally to the Black community meant there was no certificate or completion date, knowing that sometimes he might get it wrong and do it anyway.

Simon used his voice to:

- Amplify Black voices, using his power to share contacts and appreciating Black expertise.
- Create safe spaces for Black people to discuss their issues and celebrate.
- Challenge racism, using his position and reputation to challenge racist remarks and behaviour.

It would be easy to read about Simon and assume he simply stood up and challenged people regularly. He didn’t (well, not 100% of the time!). He often called me when I was frustrated at work and advised me to respond strategically, rather than to react.

Simon made so many of us feel like we were a special friend, he connected so many of us to each other, he reached out and commented on our social media posts, called and congratulated us when we were doing well and invited us to fabulous events.

He was our personal cheerleader! There are so many examples, but each time I’ve, say, given evidence at the House of Lords about the TV industry, he has shared the footage across that industry – calling me to say “WELL DONE”, really making me feel valued and seen.

People who’ve had glittering careers and held positions in high esteem tend not to mix and frolic with the working class or their juniors, but Simon turned that stereotype on its head for me. He was warm and welcoming, helping people to get ahead, progress, connecting so many of us.

The connector

Simon made so many of us, (hundreds, in fact, in the creative industries), feel that we had an elder, Yoda-like figure - a senior who had seen it all, and done it all, who could guide us in times of frustration or confusion.

You never got the feeling that Simon wanted to be the hero of the story, to fix or rescue anything. He simply spoke up, introduced, turned up and then let things happen. He shared industry insights, reports, opportunities to sign public letters. This gave us a voice, gave us gravitas and allowed us to align with other allies

I know, after hearing about Simon from his friends and family at his funeral, that throughout his life, he always had a huge passion for Black pop culture, music and civil rights. Also, like my former colleague at Channel 4 News, Jon Snow, Simon happened to be married to a Black woman. I am certain that their alignments to other worlds, opportunities and a loved one’s experiences, made them both champion people who didn’t have their own privilege. Simon and Jon turned up, spoke up, pushed people up.
I know that Simon would want all of us who knew him - and those who didn’t - to keep his legacy alive, by

Simon often said he knew he had privilege and felt it was his duty to use it to make change. He was astutely self-aware. Addressing it head-on created authenticity and honesty.

Much of my contacts’ book and so many of my new friends exist because Simon thought to connect us - because he thought we would enjoy each other’s energy. I also know that he connected people that he thought could be a force for change and he knew that, together, we were stronger as a movement – and not alone. Even outside media conversations, Simon went out of his way to invite me to ballet performances, once he had found out I had been a ballet dancer in my early days.

speaking up and standing up for inclusion, justice and diversity when it comes to race.

His loud booming voice, with its deep bass and operatic timbre, will be something I remember forever. Those of us who knew him will channel it to continue his work. **In an increasingly chaotic world, let’s all be more Simon Albury!**

Jasmine Dotiwala has over 25 years experience in the television industry working at Netflix UK, Channel 4 News and MTV.

The use of photography

Annie Ernaux and Marc Marie, tr. Alison L. Strayer
(Fitzcarraldo Editions)

Review by **Francesca Reece**

Towards the end of *The Use of Photography*, Annie Ernaux's then-lover, Marc Marie, tells her that he's "never been with a woman as feminist as [she is]. Not by a long shot." The comment makes Ernaux wonder how women should even "behave towards men who don't see them as feminists." This is, after all, the writer who took Michel Houellebecq to task in a national newspaper for what she described as his "anti-feminist and reactionary" novels. In a career spanning fifty years, Ernaux has produced a body of work very much in keeping with her insistence that *"l'écriture est politique."*

She is a Nobel Prize laureate whose parents came from the Norman peasantry; whose grandfather, upon whose life she touches in *A Man's Place* (1983), couldn't read or write. Both feminism and social mobility are foundations upon which her work is built. She has written unflinchingly about the illegal abortion she procured as a student in the sixties, about the stifling conditions of motherhood under the patriarchy, and about female desire.

It's no surprise then that this is a writer concerned with the radical– on a formal level as much as a thematic one. In *The Use of Photography*, Ernaux seeks "a literary form that would contain my whole life... [which] did not yet exist". In many ways, the book is an exercise in creating that new literary form. Long time readers and particularly fans of her magnum opus *The Years* (2008), will be well-acquainted with the French writer's quest to find a mode of writing that takes its structures from life itself.

First published in France in 2005 and translated into English by Alison L. Strayer, *The Use of Photography* is a collection of short essays by Ernaux and the late journalist and photographer, Marc Marie. Both Ernaux and Marie are at critical junctures in their lives. She is in chemotherapy and he has just quit his job, left his long-term romantic partner, and is living in a Parisian hotel. Sexual chemistry is immediate, and early in the relationship, Ernaux is struck by the desire to take photographs of the clothes abandoned in their ardour. Tidying up pre-coital disarray is a painful act. She feels as if she "were removing the only objective trace of our pleasure". The couple embark on a project of which this collection is the fruit. One of them, usually Marie, photographs the accidental "compositions", and each then writes a response to the photo. What results is a compelling meditation on sex, impermanence, on the passing of time, on memory and mortality, and on what constitutes a literary text. So far, so Ernaux.

In the developed photographs, clothes become "bearskins", "open mouths" and "hornets". *The Use of Photography* is a book about transfiguration. The arrangement of garments becomes a language in itself. In the opening essay, Ernaux writes that to "move a high-heeled shoe or a T-shirt" before taking the ritualistic photograph would be comparable to "changing the order of words" in her journal. The compositions are testament to some forgotten, fugitive movement that was part of the sexual act and so are, to some extent, the material incarnation of the act itself. Through the inadvertent creation of the composition and the subsequent – and intentional – recording of it, the intangible erotic act is rendered tangible.

So much of Ernaux's oeuvre is preoccupied with this kind of transubstantiation, particularly in the case of memory. In *The Young Man* (2022), Ernaux's younger lover – embodying as he does the working-class Norman milieu into which she was born and has since ascended out of – incarnates the past. In the same book, when she hears the song, *Don't Make Me Over* in a restaurant in Madrid, the effect is Proustian, and she finds herself back in the Rouen of 1963, desperately seeking an illegal abortion. She knows that, henceforth, the song will unlock a palimpsest of memory, and that Madrid and the young lover will be superimposed upon the image of her student halls in the month of the Kennedy assassination.

Through the inadvertent creation of the composition and the subsequent – and intentional – recording of it, the intangible erotic act is rendered tangible.

In *The Use of Photography*, it's suggested that the power of music to incarnate memory is superior to that of the photograph; "a song is an expansion into the past, a photo is finitude". Throughout the book, the various vessels of memory are compared – not only music, photography and the written word, but also inanimate objects (for Ernaux, everyday objects are in themselves literary texts: "All women", she writes, "are readers of stains"). Of his recently deceased mother's possessions, Marc Marie keeps only a few items of clothing that retain the odour of "burnt wood, mustiness and lavender eau de cologne"; fragrances that give him the "sad pleasure of being abruptly plunged back into the time when she was there".

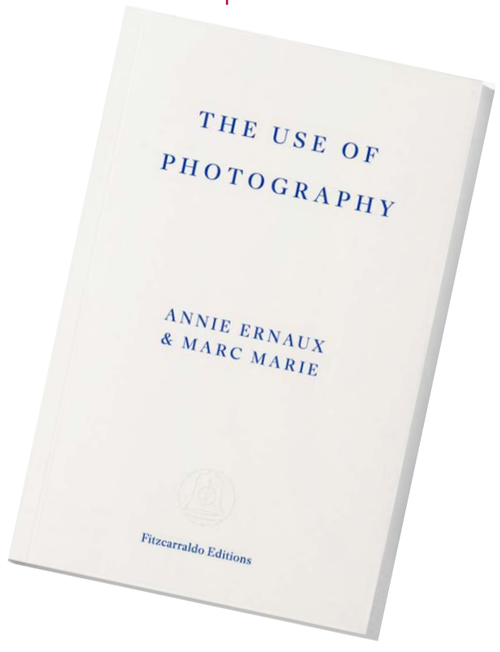
In *The Years* especially, collective memory is posited as a means of transcending mortality. Throughout Ernaux's work, this potential for transcendence is in tension with the prospect of the void brought about by death. In *A Man's Place and A Woman's Story* (1988), Ernaux meditates on the lives and deaths of her respective parents. In several striking passages in *The Years*, she reflects on the universe that is erased when a person dies. The spectre of mortality – and the resulting obliteration – looms larger than ever in *The Use of Photography*, given that she is facing her own. Cancer is characterised as a disorienting source of alienation from the body, but for all that, *The Use of Photography* deals with the erotic, ergo the physical - the aspect of death which horrifies Ernaux the most is the disappearance of thought.

The period of illness is presented as something parenthetical in the essays and one gets the sense that the relationship between Ernaux and Marie was similar. For readers used to the singularity and intensely personal nature of Ernaux's voice, the addition of Marie's can feel jarring. If anything, though, in a book so concerned with perspective (the visual versus the written; the lived versus the immediate future and, furthermore, the far future), the choice to work collaboratively is appropriate. For this reason, it's especially interesting to read *The Use of Photography* in translation.

Although Strayer's rendering of Ernaux's voice in English is impressively close, *The Use of Photography* remains a text in translation, and thus removed from its original source text. It is, to a large degree, something transfigured.

Translation is, in itself, an act of transformation, much as the turning of a pile of clothes into a text to be parsed is. Anglo-Saxon audiences will read *The Use of Photography* through a filter of foreignness. No French reader, for example, would have to be told that Leroy-Merlin, the French equivalent of B&Q, is a "home improvement shop" – an explanation that, although required, adds an alien clunkiness to the sentence. Translation is a lens allowing us to comprehend other cultures but, transparency aside, lenses are necessarily distorting. This is a distortion that would presumably please Marie and Ernaux, given their interest in the art produced from differing readings of the same situation and, above all, their shared preoccupation with the distorting power of time.

Francesca Reece is a novelist and translator from North Wales. Her latest book, Glass Houses, was published last year on Tinder Press



REPRESENTOLOGY RECOMMENDS

Lamorna Ash

A non-fiction writer whose first book, *Dark, Salt, Clear: Life in a Cornish Fishing Town*, won the Somerset Maugham Award in 2021. Her next book *Don't Forget We're Here Forever: A New Generation's Search for Religion* (Bloomsbury) is out in May.

Read

Simon Critchley (Profile)
On Mysticism: The Experience of Ecstasy

Any subject that the philosopher Simon Critchley sets sail for, I will gladly follow in his wake. But this latest book felt especially significant to me. To orient his thinking on mysticism (an interest which he suggests is borne of his 'passional need to take the world religiously', something I increasingly feel, too), he chooses several figures and their work to be his navigational stars: Annie Dillard, Anne Carson, T.S. Eliot and Julian of Norwich, plus several 'krautrock' bands (NEU!, Faust, Amon Düül II). By exploring the work of mystics or those whose work tends towards mysticism, he hopes we might discover a joy which does not resemble 'the transitory excitations that surround us and press in from all sides,' but shows as a 'deep abiding persistence of love'.

Emily Witt (Pantheon)
Health & Safety: A Breakdown

I am a big fan of Emily Witt's work - her compulsive, at once lean and shimmering style, her subject choice, her fearlessness. Following on from her debut, Future Sex, an investigation into burgeoning forms of sexual expression in contemporary America, we now get Health & Safety, an exploration into rave culture in Brooklyn (the drugs, the clubs, the figures who populate the scene), in which Witt became immersed in her thirties. It will make you want to take a heroic dose of mushrooms. And then it will bring you straight back down with its brutally frank portrayal of her relationship breaking down during the pandemic.

James Baldwin (Penguin)
Go Tell It on the Mountain

I read Baldwin's debut for the first time on a residency in the States in a library named after him. In a way, I feel grateful to have come to his beautiful, furious, magnificent prose (and storytelling) so late. I don't know if I would have been ready for it when I was younger, at least I imagine I would have been less able to receive the extraordinary delicacy of his writing about religion and belief: the simultaneously empathetic, critical and deeply serious way in which he portrays a Pentecostal church community in Harlem. Going for *Giovanni's Room* next.

Sarah Kane (Metheun Drama)
Blasted

Late to the party, again. Twenty-five years since Sarah Kane's suicide. This was her debut at the Royal Court in 1995, panned by easily ruffled, predictably unimaginative, middle-aged critics - like Michael Billington, who then called it 'naïve tosh'. Five years later, on the occasion of its revival, Billington revised his assessment, suggesting he was now struck by Blasted's 'sombre power'. I was totally overwhelmed by this play - the dialogue hard, demanding, beautiful and violent. In there is Ibsen, Beckett, Shakespeare. It's electric, it's horrifying, it's compassionate, it's a gut-punch. I wish there were playwrights who could get anywhere near her awe-inducing skill today.

Nathaniel Dorsky (Tuumba Press)
Devotional Cinema

My friend lent me this very short idiosyncratic book about the ways in which certain films can produce in us states adjacent to religious devotion, interrupting the temporal flow of our lives, creating a rupture, a breakage, after which we experience the world in slightly altered form. I have felt this several times in my life, and these days I feel increasingly disappointed by how rarely contemporary cinema even strives towards these lofty ambitions - how regularly its makers prefer to condescend to their audience. Dorsky, a filmmaker, argues that cinema is a metaphor for human sight: our skull, the auditorium; the screen, the luminous world we see before us.

Watch

Pier Paolo Pasolini (1964)
Love Meetings

'Outrage is the fear of losing one's personality', the writer Alberto Moravia explains to Pasolini in his documentary about his nation's relationship to sexuality and love - from the north to the south of the country, from the wealthy to those living in poverty. This happens in one of the frame sections, in which Pasolini speaks to Moravia and a psychoanalyst about his motives, his methodologies for his proposed film. Pasolini is there in every shot, asking his questions in the typically leading way of an auteur. What is beautiful about the film is the way it preserves a moment, crowds of Italians, young and old, gathered in each frame, moving between shyness and candour as they try to discuss what they think love is and what it does.

David Lynch (1977)
Eraserhead

I watched this on an incredible hangover, and it leapt straight into first place in my Lynchian rankings (I loved everything he made, from Dune to Twin Peaks. His death felt like a terrible rip in the world). There is a purity to *Eraserhead*, his first feature, produced over five years, as and when they had the money to continue with its making: it feels as if Lynch doesn't surface once from his melancholic, mundane, macabre vision for its execution. Watching it, I moved between childlike wonder and childlike terror, intense, dreamlike sensations I can rarely tap into as an adult

Agnès Varda (1965)
Le Bonheur

Polyamory will kill you – would be my silly Letterboxd-truism review for this film. I love Varda more and more: the colourful brilliance of her compositions; the way she fools you into a happy delirium with her idyllic pastoral scenes of summer and promises of ever-expanding happiness, before suddenly pulling the rug from under you. There is such darkness and eeriness to the ending of this film.

Alice Diop (2022)
Saint Omer

The most beautifully executed, intelligent and strange contemporary film I have seen in years. Hardly a week goes by when I can't find a reason to bring it up in some conversation. At first, it feels deceptively simple, a courtroom drama set in France, on trial, a young Senegalese woman accused of killing her child (based on a true story). But the questions that the features of the trial raise about the legacy of colonialism, about our failure to accommodate or make room for differing cultural practices in Europe today are incredibly complicated and nuanced. I will never forget the speech from the defence, close to the film's end, about women existing as chimeras.

Zia Anger (2024)
My First Film

Ever since watching this, I have been obsessively listening to 'Heartbeats' by The Knife: both the film and song make me hugely nostalgic. I was so moved by its form (which held together – but only just), a reconstruction, complete with meta-commentary, of the feature Anger had tried to make in her early twenties, with disastrous consequence. My response each time to Anger's sentiments about why it matters to her, making art, pursuing art alongside other collaborators, was a resounding, appreciative 'Yes! Yes! Me too!'.

Listen

Podcast
TrueAnon

In the build-up to the American election, it was Brace Beldon, Liz Franczak and Yung Chomsky (of TrueAnon) who kept me half-sane. By way of their incredibly playful, enraged and hugely sceptical coverage – attending both the Democrat conference and the Trump rallies – I felt capable of staying in-the-know without feeling like I was being required to pretend this election was anything other than a horrifying circus, with some of the biggest (and most dangerous) clowns in political history on show. I also love the episode with William T Vollman.

Arvo Pärt

My composer friend has just got me into Arvo Pärt, a contemporary Estonian composer who makes simple, affective religious compositions, sometimes referred to as part of a genre called 'holy minimalism'. I keep working to his music, though, which I think ruins the impact, refiguring it into background music.

Charlie XCX
Brat and It's Completely Different but Also Still Brat

The remix album. I don't need to say much here. My whole being (age, background, sensibility, sexuality) was designed to love the music of Charli XCX. And I have, loyally, since my early twenties. The music journalist Laura Snapes wrote that 'I Think About It All the Time' is Sheila Heti's Motherhood (about whether she ought to have children) condensed into song form. I think that's true; I think this album is for confused millennials hitting their thirties.

Flo Dill's Breakfast Show on NTS

I rarely miss an episode of this, and discover most of what becomes my most beloved music through Flo's show, from ML Buch to Jim Legxacy to old J Dilla tracks, Joan Armatrading, Arthur Russell, you name it. I like to listen on long drives. It feels like I'm travelling in community with all the people she talks to in the chatroom.

Podcast
LRB Bookshop

Probably the only podcast whose every episode I listen to. Recent highlights include Jonathan Nunn and Owen Hatherley on London Feeds Itself, and K. Patrick with America Abraham on Mrs S. I go to a lot of the conversations in person, too, and find it very comforting hearing on the podcast the beautiful team at LRB Bookshop explaining that, in a fire, you should… exit through the door.

REPRESENTOLOGY EDITORIAL BOARD

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Representology is a hybrid journal at the intersection of industry practices, academic research and policy making.

We welcome both non-academic and academic authors who would like to contribute thoughts, perspectives, analyses and research findings that help to foster diversity in the media and strengthen the media in diversity.

All ideas, abstracts and full manuscripts should be sent to **Representology@bcu.ac.uk**

The journal accepts contributions in two strands: journalistic and academic, each with a different review and decision-making process. Please understand the differences between the two strands when preparing and submitting your pitches, abstracts and manuscripts.

Journalistic articles

Journalistic articles should be between 1,000 and 3,000 words, and can take one of the following forms

- feature stories
- reflective essays
- issue reviews/analyses
- commentaries
- expert Q&As
- multimedia artefacts (for online publishing only).

Potential contributors must pitch their ideas to the journal in the first instance. Please include a two-line biography, including relevant links to past published work.

Commission decisions will be based on evaluation by the editor in consultation with the editorial board.

If we are interested in your pitch, we will contact to commission your piece. As our editorial team is small, it may take you up to a month to receive a reply.

Full articles will then be assessed by members of the editorial board. All articles will be read on the understanding that they are solely submitted to **Representology**, and published articles will receive a modest honorarium.

Academic papers

Academic articles can take one of the following forms:

- research notes of around 3,000-4,000 words (discussion notes that seek to advance a new idea, concept, theory or method)
- research perspectives of around 3,000-4,000 words (short research-based analyses that aim to provide new, unique viewpoints on established issues)
- reviews and commentaries of around 2,000 words on recent research publications
- full-length studies of around 6,000-7,000 words.

The lengths specified above are inclusive of everything (abstracts, texts and references).

All academic submissions will go through a two-stage submission process:

In the first instance, please send us an abstract of no more than 500 words, outlining the topic, its background, rationale, theoretical and methodological approaches and key findings.

The abstract should make clear which of the above academic paper forms the article belongs to.

Abstracts should be sent, together with biographies of no more than 100 words per author, to **Representology@bcu.ac.uk**

Our academic editors will consider whether your intended paper falls within the remit of the journal. We will respond to you within a month of submission.

All full manuscripts developed from accepted abstracts will go through a rigorous peer review process by at least two relevant experts in the field.

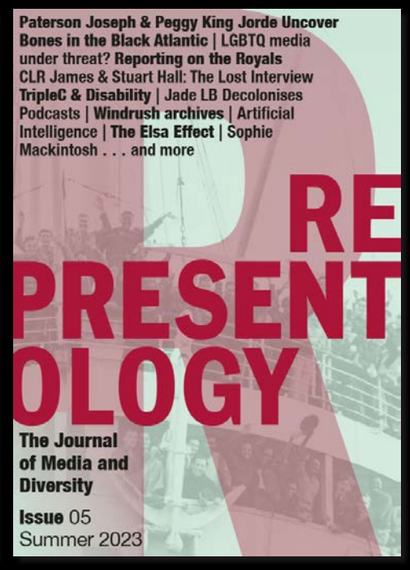
Final acceptance or rejection will be made by the editors in consideration of peer reviewers' recommendations.

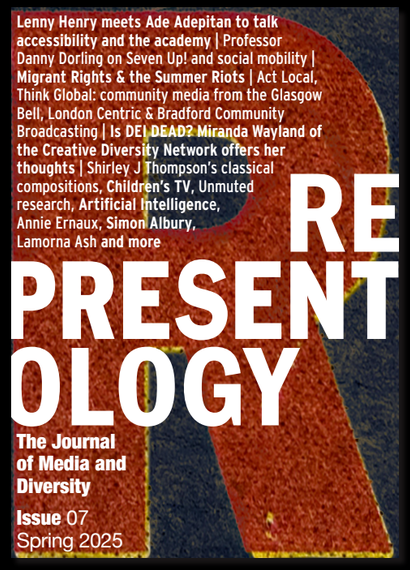
For transparency purposes, each peer-reviewed article will be published with meta data regarding the peer-review process and editorial decision (e.g. date of submission, date of revision if any, and date of acceptance) at the foot, to help readers distinguish them from non peer-reviewed pieces.

All articles will be read on the understanding that they are solely submitted to **Representology**, and published articles will receive a modest honorarium.

Five Guiding Principles For Contributions

1. **Clear language**
   Making content as widely accessible as possible, writing should be clear, concise and engaging.
2. **Expertise**
   Contributors are expected to write on subjects for which they have proven expertise.
3. **Evidence**
   Articles should be supported by verifiable facts and research findings.
4. **Refresh debate**
   Submissions should seek to enrich current debates or create new ones.
5. **Diversity of perspectives**
   Preference will be given to writers seeking to widen representation and outline new perspectives.





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