

Institution: University of Wolverhampton		
Unit of Assessment: 33 Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies		
Title of case study: Minding the Media/Culture Gap: Reframing Understanding, Accessibility, and Digital-Learning Policy		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2015 - 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Benjamin Halligan Dr Mathew Dalgleish	Director of Doctoral College Senior Lecturer in Music Technology	2015 - Present 2010 - Present
Dr James Lovelock	Senior Lecturer in Musical Theatre	2014 - Present
Dr Bianca Fox	Senior Lecturer in TV, Broadcasting and Journalism	2015 - Present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016 - 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>The research at the University of Wolverhampton has demonstrated gaps in accessibility and digital learning policy in the contexts of creativity, culture and society, whereby the direct beneficiaries are filmmakers, creative professionals, educators, pupils and audiences with specific access requirements. It has given rise to impact which challenges established norms and values through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The co-production of a documentary film that raises awareness of a historic cultural figure • The generation of new ways of thinking about audiences and representation that empowers historically-excluded communities and individuals • Impact on changes to delivery of subjects in schools and the Higher Education (HE) sector <p>The resulting shift in local, national and international perceptions, attitudes, discourse and priorities within culture and education towards modes of representation, historical perspectives and digital media has particular relevance in the current global context.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>The underpinning research has been conducted through two centres: the Centre for Creativity, History and Identity in Performance (CCHIP), which pursues creative inquiry and critical analysis at the intersection of theory and performance practice; and the Centre for Film, Media, Discourse and Culture (CFMDC), which focuses on theoretical aspects of film, media and culture. The research has led to three findings, namely:</p> <p><u>F1. There is a need for ongoing reappraisal of cinema, its history, and its messages</u></p> <p>Our research considers a range of 1960s British, American and European cinema and television that was in some way considered controversial or taboo. Halligan's work in 1960s film and theatre history specifically addresses the radical, permissive, and politicised approaches adopted by certain filmmakers and playwrights. For instance, he examines the political stance of playwright and activist, Daniel Berrigan, suggesting that Berrigan's dramatisation of the trial in which he and</p>		

fellow anti-war activists were arraigned for publicly burning draft cards in 1968 (*The Trial of the Catonsville Nine*) was intended as a contribution to a cultural front against the US government concerning the war in Vietnam [R1]. This builds on previous work on European Cinema [R2] that shows film was likewise galvanised and transformed by the revolutionary fervour of 1968. The research provides an account of the era's cinematic crises, innovations, and provocations, as well as the social and aesthetic contexts in which they appeared. Halligan notes that these politicised dimensions of theatre and European Cinema during the late 1960s, as mediated through artistic expression, also extend to the contemporaneous outputs of British filmmakers such as Michael Reeves [also R2]. As Halligan notes "Experientialism, in the 1960s, tallies with the hyper-individualism of many of the films [O]ther examples include *The Sorcerers* (Reeves, 1967)" [R2]. Such aspects of Reeves' filmmaking directly inform the documentary, which furthers a critical apparatus around opposition and popular culture grounded in and developed by Halligan's research on the 1960s [R1 and R2]. The documentary thus gives insights about, and raises cultural awareness of a historically significant but previously under-acknowledged director whose work, channelled through Halligan's uncovering and synthesis, has since attained 'classic' status.

F2. There is a need for greater diversity and plurality of voices within the creative sector

Much of the research in CCHIP addresses issues of accessibility and diversity within the sector, with particular emphasis on the audience experience (Dalgleish), and creative professionals (Lovelock). Dalgleish's investigation into the creation of an ambiently-diffused soundtrack for visually impaired theatre goes [R3] responded to the issue that theatre conventionally relies primarily on the visual to convey narrative and context and to set the scene. This reliance can significantly hinder the experience of blind and visually-impaired individuals, and may, in some cases, exclude them entirely. Conventional audio description for theatre makes performances accessible for blind and visually-impaired patrons by translating the visual aspects of a performance into a spoken commentary that fits between the gaps in actors' dialogue. It is therefore prescriptive and does not allow for personal interpretation, an aspect which Dalgleish's study aimed to address. Lovelock's research into reclaiming authentic representations of LGBTQ+ characters in 21st century musical theatre [R4] similarly opens up opportunities for historically-excluded groups to add their voice. This is done in the context of a wider cultural milieu that includes gender and race. The research in both cases underlines the need for greater diversity and plurality of voices and experiences within the creative sector.

F3. There is a need to understand context in the formulation of cultural debate

Researchers in CFMDC have identified key areas where context and the understanding of it has proven pivotal to debating and discussing culture. Fox, in particular, has contributed very different appreciations of those areas in her research. Her investigation into loneliness in young adults living in an age of mobile and social media [R5] showed how many young people (18-24) had been affected. The study addressed the fact that little research exists into how young people live with loneliness, despite the fact that one survey conducted in 2015 found that 83% of young people feel "often, always or sometimes lonely" [see R5]. Fox advanced the understanding of the relationship between the use of social media and loneliness and, by focusing on young people's perceptions of the consequences of social internet use on their wellbeing, identified which social networking sites can increase or decrease loneliness in young adults and under what conditions. The study also revealed young people's lack of digital literacy skills, including the inability to react to and report signs of cyberbullying or knowing how to manage social media in order to avoid increased exposure to negative content or destructive criticism. A follow-up study revealed that exposure to negative experiences on social media leads to body image issues, disordered eating and loneliness in youth [R6]. Research such as this indicates that despite being seen as technologically adept, young people lack basic e-safety skills and other digital competences, as identified by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Fox's pioneering work to address this gap in digital literacy led to the Erasmus+ funded MeLDE project and the development of a framework, toolkit and e-Platform for use by educators and students in the UK and Europe. The MeLDE project's commitment to furthering understanding and debate on the subject of digital

literacy extends to its use of social media – for example on Instagram (93 followers), and Facebook (200 followers).

3. References to the research

The following references have been through a rigorous peer review process. Fox's output on loneliness is also a reference point for work beyond University of Wolverhampton. The Joint Research Centre of the European Commission (<https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en>) is currently supporting the Cabinet of Vice-President for Democracy and Demography, Dubravka Šuica, in an exploration of issues related to loneliness. In this context, they have sought advice from Fox to discuss what is known in the field, what is not known yet, and what could be done in terms of policy actions.

R1. Halligan, B. (2018) 'This is Father Berrigan Speaking from the Underground': Daniel Berrigan SJ and the Conception of a Radical Theatre, *TDR (The Drama Review)*, 62(2), pp. 97-114. (http://doi.org/10.1162/DRAM_a_00750) (REF 2 Output).

R2. Halligan, B. (2016) *Desires for Reality: Radicalism and Revolution in Western European Film*, Oxford: Berghahn, ISBN 978-1785331107 (REF 2 Output).

R3. Dalglish, M. and Reading, N. (2019) 'Seeing with One's Own Ears: Soundtrack as Interface for Theatre' in Soveral, I. and Pombo, F. (eds.) *SYNCHRESIS - Audio Vision Tales*, Aveiro, Portugal: Universidade Aveiro Press, pp. 35-41. ISBN 978-9727895915.

R4. Lovelock, J. (2019) 'What About Love?': Claiming and Re-claiming LGBTQ+ Spaces in 21st Century Musical Theatre, in Whitfield, S. (ed.) *Reframing the Musical: Race, Culture and Identity*, London: Red Globe Press, pp. 187-210. ISBN 978-1352004397 (REF 2 Output).

R5. Fox, B. (2019) Loneliness and Social Media: A Qualitative Investigation of Young People's Motivations for Use, and Perceptions of Social Networking Sites in Fox, B. (ed.) *Emotions and Loneliness in a Networked Society*, London: Palgrave, pp. 309-331. ISBN 978-3030248819 (REF 2 Output).

R6. Fox, B. (2020) Associations between Social Media Use and Loneliness, Body Image and Disordered Eating: A Qualitative Study of British Young Adults, in Marinescu, V. (ed.) *Food, Nutrition and the Media*, London: Palgrave, pp. 287-311. ISBN 978-3030464998

4. Details of the impact

The impact that follows challenges established norms and values through the co-production of cultural artefacts: a documentary film raising awareness of a historic cultural figure [I1]; the generation of new ways of thinking to empower and improve the experiences of audiences and creative professionals [I2]; and improving delivery of subjects within the secondary and HE sector [I3]. These reflect an emerging process of defining, informing and thereby enhancing cultural understanding on the one hand, and the challenging of norms and shaping incipient policy debate on the other. The direct beneficiaries of these impacts are filmmakers, creative professionals, educators, students and audiences with specific access requirements.

I1. Co-production of cultural artefacts

Impact arising from the research in the Unit has led to the co-production of a documentary film, the significance of which is measured through raised knowledge and understanding of a key figure in British Cinema. Building on Halligan's research into radical, permissive and exploitation cinema and theatre [F1], he acted as technical consultant and was interviewed on screen for the documentary film *The Magnificent Obsession of Michael Reeves* (2019). Directed by Dima Ballin, the feature-length documentary, which received a score of 7.8 out of 10 by visitors to the Internet Movie Database site, "focuses on the life, loves, passions, and films of... Reeves, from his childhood dreams, and early excursions to Hollywood, to an in-depth analysis of all of his major works, and finally the sad circumstances of his early death" [C1]. Critical reviews highlight the importance of the film in heightening awareness of the work of Reeves, one such reviewer noting that it derives from "the valuable work of [...] Halligan in mapping out Reeves' short life and premature death" [C2]. Halligan's role as both technical consultant and principle storyteller in the creative process was pivotal, as indicated by producer and director Ballin who stated that,

“Halligan’s research greatly expanded the scope of the whole production’ of the film which ‘would not exist in its current [...] form [...] had it not been for the rich detail Halligan was able to add” [C3].

12. Generating new ways of thinking that influence creative practice, its artistic quality or its audience reach

Research on inclusivity in the film and theatre industries has led to increased awareness of the need to address accessibility issues (Dalglish) and the inauthentic representation of marginalised groups in the creative sector (Lovelock). Both are enhancing wider cultural understanding and actively forming and creating the basis for more inclusive working methods.

Following on from Dalglish’s research into techniques for improving non-hearing experiences in theatre settings [F2], he developed the use of an ambiently diffused soundtrack as an alternative to audio description for theatre. Informed by conceptualisations of the soundtrack posed by theorist-composers Michel Chion and Stephen Deutsch, the system used an assemblage of informative and emotive sounds to provide a type of auditory interface or ‘way in’ to the performance. Crucially, and contrary to audio-description, the soundtrack evoked and implied but did not enforce a single rigid or fixed interpretation. Additionally, use of the house sound reinforcement system removed the need for specialised and potentially othering personal equipment. The system was trialed in two performances of one play - *Bert* by Dave Pitt, directed by the Artistic Director (AD) of the Arena Theatre, a venue which places emphasis on accessibility and diversity [C4]. Noting the need for venues to embrace alternative methods of engaging visually-impaired audiences, the AD stated that “[i]t was very valuable... to explore new approaches and to test these on a live... audience”, which in turn “[allows] for deeper integration and stronger relationships” with the public [C5]. However, “[w]hile... the ideas tested are not going to become mainstream... they [have] provoked interesting conversations” and have also lead to the AD adopting “a mix of traditional [audio description] supported by a diffused soundtrack” in his artistic direction as a result [also C5]. Audiences of blind and visually- impaired participants were invited, and group interviews were held immediately after each performance [C6]. This work has had implications for the way that the venue approaches production design for hearing impaired audiences, and the findings have implications for venues both nationally and internationally. 25 people participated in this evaluation study [also C6]. These include 14 men and 11 women, with an age range of 35 to 81 years. All participants self-reported as visually impaired, and all were visitors to the Beacon Centre for the Blind in the West Midlands. 16 of the participants were accompanied by a companion who watched the performance but did not otherwise participate in the study. Both performances exposed the audience to established audio description methods in addition to the soundtrack.

Halligan’s research has informed wider understanding through a reframing of cultural history while Dalglish has created the basis for future inclusive production design. Similarly, Lovelock’s raising of awareness of the experiences of LGBTQ+ creative professionals has led to the opening up of a dialogue on this subject, notably on the need for greater diversity and plurality of voices in the creative sector. Certain practitioners have recognised the particular importance of Lovelock’s work [F2] in shaping this debate. One such Musical Theatre practitioner notes that Lovelock’s research has started “a much needed conversation”, and that his discussions with Lovelock regarding bisexual representation were beneficial not only to himself, but also to others – after writing and publishing a summary of his experiences on Twitter, he notes that, “[w]ithin minutes of posting [his] inbox was flooded with other people who are bisexual with their experience and in that shared connection, a conversation was born” [C7]. Since then, “[m]ore and more people share that thread and message [him] daily with how much it has helped them” [also C7].

13. Impact on changes to delivery

Fox’s research into social and digital media use by young people [F3] and the uptake of the MeLDE initiative by educators underlines a change in attitudes to digital skills in teaching as well as a potential revolution in digital literacy in schools and the HE sector [C11]. Fox’s MeLDE project has led to the development of the MeLDE tool bank, and the e-Platform which has enabled secondary and HE educators from the UK, Greece, Germany, Romania and Mexico to improve

their digital skills and safely adopt technology in both teaching and learning, and in their personal life. The e-Platform further serves as a community forum for European teachers for the duration of the project and beyond (this means they can share experiences, ask for support, and become part of a community of teachers). A Curriculum Leader for Art and Design commented on the usefulness of the MeLDE resources, noting that they had adopted “Padlet” as a result for their “year 9 GCSE group”, and “Lucidpress” – which would be particularly useful for their “lowest ability students [on the BTEC Creative Media course] ... [which] will be really helpful as an introduction to design for print, eventually building them up to the professional software using photoshop/indesign” [C8].

Indeed, use of the platform and associated engagement activities have had an impact on the delivery of teaching and learning internationally, highlighting the reach of that impact. Using work done for the MeLDE project, Fox presented the framework and platform at a series of international conferences, including an invited talk at the University Autonoma de Baja California (27/2/2020), attended by approximately 40 academics, secondary school educators and Masters students) [C9]. She also presented at the *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Culture, Society and Arts: Mapping Future Research Directions* at the University of Bucharest (25-26/2/20), attended by approximately 60 academics, secondary school educators and PhD students from Romania, Bulgaria, Spain, UK, Germany and Vietnam, further to which attendees adopted the online platforms in their own practice. Of the latter, the organising institution themselves created an account on the MeLDE platform and implemented some of the recommendations, for example, “[using] Google Jamboard for the first time with [their] students at the Francophone Summer School in June 22-26, 2020” [C10], with the organiser of the conference noting that,

“I believe that the project is timely and would help Romanian teachers to keep up with the new technological developments and make the most of the existing digital technology available for teaching particularly. I believe that in Romania there is an urgent need to educate primary and secondary school teachers on how to safely use technology in and outside the classroom so I would encourage as many schools as possible to use the instructional videos and teaching materials available on the MeLDE e-platform” [also C10].

These impacts serve to show that while the two distinct areas within the unit (performing arts, and film and media) remain discrete, both share priorities in, and impact on, improving understanding and promoting inclusivity within the creative sectors and beyond.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

C1. *The Magnificent Obsession of Michael Reeves: The Definitive History of One of Genre Cinema's Most Elusive Cult Visionaries* (<https://diaboliquefilms.com/the-magnificent-obsession-of-michael-reeves/>)

C2. Kim Newman (writer) review: <https://johnnyalucard.com/2019/08/25/frightfest-review-the-magnificent-obsession-of-michael-reeves>

C3. Testimonial from Producer and Director of the documentary film, *The Magnificent Obsession of Michael Reeves*

C4. Recording of *Bert*, performed on 3rd May 2017 (<https://youtu.be/QQNI-cS09m4>)

C5. Artistic Director Testimony, Arena Theatre

C6. Dagleish, M. and Reading, N. (2017) Soundtrack as Auditory Interface: Exploring an Alternative to Audio Description for Theatre – Proceedings of the Institute of Acoustics, top of p7. (Available at <https://wlv.openrepository.com/handle/2436/620895>)

C7. Testimonial from Musical Theatre Practitioner about the role Lovelock's research played in their experience and way of working

C8. Email from Curriculum Leader for Art and Design, Blessed William Howard School

C9. MeLDE Report on Dissemination Activities 2018-21 (with relevant information up to 2020)

C10. Email from Professor of Sociology, University of Bucharest

C11. Erasmus+ 2018 Key Action 2 Strategic Partnerships for the Field of Education (2018-1-UK01-KA201-048041 - GBP29,3743.75 at 10/9/18) – for MeLDE: Media Literacy in the Digitalised Era” (<http://meldeproject.eu/>)