

country and selected from all points on the socio-economic scale. The idea behind the series was to examine the proposition that the class system in the UK is so embedded that a person's life path is predestined and fixed. While there were a few cases of upward mobility among the 14 participants, one scholar has commented that at the extremes of the spectrum, i.e. the individuals from the upper classes and the very poor, 'the accuracy of the children's personal predictions for their own class trajectories is shocking in its precision' (Burawoy, 2009: 319). Although seen almost entirely through the lens of class and thus perhaps a very British take on individuals' lifecourses, the Jesuit maxim which inspired the series, 'Give me a child until he is seven and I will give you the man', has universal resonance and the programme has spawned imitators in many other countries, including the US, Russia, South Africa and Japan.

Documentary as ethnography

Documentaries resonate with the work of ethnographic researchers who revisit the field, seek to create coherent narratives from an excess of material, and who confront ethical dilemmas as they investigate the private lives of subjects (Thorne, 2009). Like an ethnographer, documentary makers usually end up with a surplus of material: in *42 Up* Apted says that he uses about 1/30th of the footage gathered. While the documentary genre appears to offer transparency and honesty, it is of course within the power of the director to control, manipulate or exploit the medium. Like any sociological analysis, the most interesting variable can be applied retrospectively to make sense of the whole or to give the data a particular slant. Duneier (2009) cites the case of Nicholas, who grew up on a farm and had little structured activity to occupy him. 'The world of the seven-year-old can be primitive, even violent,' the narrator says as Nicholas discusses his enjoyment of fighting. For Duneier, Nicholas' lack of discipline makes him the same as the East End working-class children in an orphanage who were portrayed as having too much freedom and not enough structure and discipline, but because he went on to study physics at Oxford and became a university professor the focus moves to him at age seven saying that when he grew up he wanted to understand the moon, and as an adult saying he was always interested in technical and scientific things (Duneier, 2009).

Apted acknowledges the manipulative possibilities of a genre that purports to tell the truth, and confesses that during the making of *21 Up* he believed Tony (who at seven was at an East End primary school and dreamed of being a jockey) would soon be in prison, so he filmed him around dangerous looking areas for use in later films:

He lived in a pretty violent environment, and was making quite a lot of cash running bets at an East London greyhound-racing track for some pretty unsavoury looking characters. It didn't look like the future held much promise, so I had him take me round all of the crime hot-spots in anticipation of shooting 28 Up! in one of Her Majesty's prisons. I was wrong and embarrassed. Tony married Debbie, they had children, and his life took a different course. Tony was decent about it and let me off the hook: 'Don't judge a book by its cover, Michael', he told me. (Apted, 2009: 362)

Nonetheless some critics have found it difficult to move away from a Marxist interpretation of the series. Paul Willis laments 'Class still matters to me' (Willis, 2009: 349), and he talks of the 'achingness I pick up in Michael's subjects [which] continues to relate to the structured exercise of power, the costs of domination and the pains of subordination' (ibid.).

The prison documentary brings the exercise of power and pains of subordination into particularly sharp relief. Given our earlier discussion of the failure of prison films to have any positive impact on prison reform, it seems a bold assertion to say that the prison documentary may be one of the few types of prison film that can claim to have made any difference at all to perceptions of prisons and prisoners but, given Michael Apted's belief that 'empathy is at the heart of most documentaries' (2009: 360), there may be a case for the suggestion. Of course, some prison documentaries are simply voyeuristic and pander to stereotypes: *America's Most Deadly Prison Gangs* and *Louis Theroux: Behind Bars* (filmed at San Quentin prison in California) are two examples which apparently set out to demonstrate that US jails really are like their Hollywood depictions.

By contrast there have been several thoughtful and challenging prison documentaries and series broadcast on British television which may genuinely be able to claim some influence; although, in the case of *Feltham Sings* (2002) a Channel 4 documentary musical filmed inside the biggest young offenders' prison in Europe and co-produced by well-regarded film-maker and academic Roger Graef, the notion of inmates expressing their thoughts and lives to reggae, R&B and hip hop beats did not precipitate a more enlightened attitude to prison arts. Despite the endorsement of Graef who is quoted as saying: 'The arts - especially music that links with their experience - can reach those parts that no other form of rehabilitation does' (<http://tinyurl.com/yehnw4>), the programme pre-empted an announcement by the Justice Minister that arts in prison were to be curtailed. Embarrassed by a newspaper report that inmates at a high-security prison were offered courses in stand-up comedy, the Minister's directive to prison governors that they must consider how activities 'might be perceived by the public and victims' was interpreted by the course teacher rather differently: 'I wouldn't mind if it was a new idea, but we've been doing this programme for 10 years now. I'm trying to understand what

other areas of criminal justice the *Sun* gets to decide' (quoted in the *Independent*, 25 January 2009). In fact, the public at large may not be as punitive as the Minister assumes: prison documentaries are generally commercial as well as critical successes and it is unlikely that all viewers are tuning in to be disgusted and outraged at how cushy prisons are. For example, the first part of an ITV series about the women's prison *Holloway*, which focused on a teenage girl who self-harms, won the prime time slot with 4.2 million viewers, or a 17.9 per cent share of the 9pm to 10pm audience (www.guardian.co.uk/media/2009/mar/18/tv-ratings-holloway). Moreover, several newspaper TV critics confessed that they tuned in with certain preconceptions largely based on their viewing of *Bad Girls* or *Cell Block H*, but watched instead with sadness or distress.

The Executive Producer of *Holloway*, Paul Hamann, has made several other documentaries about criminal justice, including *Fourteen Days in May* (1987), a film covering the last two weeks in the life of Edward Earl Johnson who became only the second man to be executed in Mississippi after the national hiatus in capital punishment was ended in 1977. *Fourteen Days in May* charts the build up to the execution; the preparations of the gas chamber, the media coverage and the legal challenges, led by the Human Rights lawyer Clive Stafford Smith. Commenting on the film, Jamie Bennett (2009) says that the film is given 'an unusual moral depth' by virtue of the fact that it raises specific concerns about the validity of Johnson's conviction, including an alibi witness who came forward who was refused access to the court. As the execution approached, Hamann became increasingly disturbed by events and started not only to openly sympathize with Johnson, but also raise his concerns with those in authority. The difficulties – and indeed, undesirability – of impartiality on the part of the documentary film-maker are articulated by Hamann in an interview with Bennett:

I felt I was in a strange nightmare because it became clear off camera that the prison psychiatrist, the warden, the death row staff, all felt he did not commit the crime he was convicted of. At that moment I stopped being the objective BBC journalist and started doing everything I could to stop the execution ... In the end it didn't work. The last week of making that film was really horrible, I didn't want to be making it, but morally we had to. Afterwards, myself and Clive Stafford Smith ... made a follow up film called *The Journey* where we tracked down the man who everyone thought had really carried out the murder ... the film did prove that Edward Earl Johnson should not have been executed. It was a film made a year too late. (Bennett, 2009: 47)

In the same interview Hamann says that he was greatly influenced by the work of Fred Wiseman, an American pioneer of documentary film-making in the tradition of *cinéma vérité* and by the British documentary film-maker Rex Bloomstein, particularly his eight-part series *Strangeways* about life inside

HMP Manchester. As someone who has shown his work in prisons and lectured at criminological departments, and is a recipient of two British Academy Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) awards, Bloomstein has to a large degree built his reputation on exposing the realities of prison life and addressing aspects of the British penal system that are usually closed to public scrutiny. Employing apparently simple (though in fact highly sophisticated) film-making techniques that eschew background music and narrated voice-overs in favour of a more direct focus capturing genuine, spontaneous emotions (sometimes known as 'fly-on-the-wall' filming), Bloomstein is widely appreciated for humanizing his subjects, while still conveying the complexities of their personalities, motives and circumstances; a process he has called 'undermining the simplicities' (Bloomstein, 2008; cf. Bennett, 2006a).

Perhaps the most profoundly affecting of Bloomstein's subjects was Steve, who was interviewed twice; first for *Lifer*, a two-hour documentary made for ITV in 1982 and, 21 years later for the follow-up, *Lifer - Living With Murder*, which was broadcast on Channel 4. In the first film Steve is serving a life sentence for kicking a man to death at the age of 17. Twelve years into his sentence he is cocky, athletic-looking, restless and resistant. Prone to responding violently to provocation, he describes how his anger has led him to trash his cell and cause damage to the prison wing on several occasions. He speaks contemptuously of the prison officers who restrain him physically and with drugs. But 21 years later we see the effects that the 'liquid cosh' has had on Steve. Bloated, dulled and his speech so slurred that the interview has to be accompanied by subtitles, the effects of 32 years in custody are dramatically conveyed. Now held in the secure wing of a psychiatric hospital and reduced to a shell of his former self, there can be no more graphic or moving illustration of a life inside.

With a prolific back catalogue that includes *The Sentence* (1976), *Release* (1976), *Prisoners' Wives* (1977), *Parole* (1979), *Strangeways* (1980), *Lifer* (1983), *Lifers* (1984), *Strangeways Revisited* (2000), *Lifer: Living With Murder* (2003) and *Kids Behind Bars* (2005), Bloomstein has arguably done more than any other single individual to reveal the experience of imprisonment and its effects on inmates and their families. He has also influenced those who work within the Prison Service, including its senior personnel. The most published author on Bloomstein's work, Jamie Bennett (see, for example, Bennett, 2004, 2006a, 2006b) is also a serving prison Governor, while former Director General of the Prison Service, Martin Narey, has cited *Strangeways* as the primary inspiration for his decision to join the service (Narey, 2002).

The question remains, however, whether the powerful, reflective and raw films created by Graef, Hamann, Bloomstein and others have the ability to challenge public attitudes to prisoners. Rex Bloomstein firmly believes that documentaries do have the ability to alter entrenched attitudes and he counsels against underestimating the potential for a change in public attitudes, if

the complexity of criminal conduct is allowed to be developed in documentary form (Bloomstein, 2010, personal correspondence). Conversely, the empathy inherent in the documentary process may only be felt by those viewers who already share the narrative's perspective and have pre-existing sympathies with its subjects. While prison documentaries such as those described here unquestionably create a profoundly important media space for more considered and thoughtful reflection (Bennett, 2006), the audience may inevitably view them – like any other media text – through the lens of their pre-existing cultural resources, experiences and prejudices.

The remake

There is nothing that divides film-goers more than a remake of a much-loved 'classic'. While there have been some notable critical and commercial successes (*The Departed*; *The Thomas Crown Affair*; *Ocean's 11*) other remakes have been met with indifference, mirth or even outrage (*The Italian Job*; *The Wicker Man*; *Psycho*). The most successful remakes are probably those that stay broadly true to their predecessor (perhaps with some oblique references to the original for those in the know) yet which also add something new. If a story is compelling, yet would benefit from a modern treatment or change of context, so much the better. Some film buffs will always argue that remakes are inferior, but that doesn't mean that the majority of current cinema goers won't prefer them. In part, the attraction of a remake to modern audiences lies in the quickened pace of action, the special effects and computer generated wizardry, and the inclusion of familiar A-list stars. But what can remakes of classic crime films tell us about changing social attitudes to crime over the decades?

At a fairly superficial level they may tell us that film-goers have a greater appetite for violence (including sexual violence) and verbal profanity than their forebears; and they certainly indicate more relaxed censorship laws than in previous eras. The remake usually highlights that ours truly is a celebrity culture and that sometimes movies become vehicles for high-profile stars even if some critics question the appropriateness of a particular actor in a role. Equally, stars are now more able to move between quite diverse roles as heroes, anti-heroes or downright villains and are more willing to play psychopaths, killers and characters who have few, if any, redeeming features. Hollywood movies fully exploit all the technological tools at the film-maker's disposal, creating spectacular, eye-popping, explosive action and underlining the fact that the film industry is a multi-billion dollar enterprise. But can movies help us chart deeper historical transitions; for example, changing social fears and anxieties? Let us consider one film, *The Taking of Pelham One Two*

Three (1974), and its remake, *The Taking of Pelham 123* (2009) to see if it can shed light on this interesting proposition.³

The Taking of Pelham One Two Three and The Taking of Pelham 123

The Taking of Pelham 123 (directed by Tony Scott, 2009) stars John Travolta as Ryder, a sociopath and leader of a kidnap gang who take over a train on the New York subway, but also (somewhat implausibly) a former financier on Wall Street who was convicted of fraud and has come out of prison with comic-book prisoner characterizations: shaved head, poor complexion, a handlebar moustache and a lot of tattoos. His demands are succinct: he wants \$10 million in 60 minutes or he'll start killing the hostages (18 passengers and a conductor) one-by-one. His adversary is Walter Garber (Denzel Washington); a train dispatcher who happens to be on duty at the time and becomes an unwitting hostage negotiator. As the film unfolds, we learn that the quiet, modest and well-meaning Garber has a back-story which Ryder learns of. He has been demoted while an investigation is conducted into allegations that he took a bribe (which, later, he is forced to confess when Ryder threatens to kill a young man onboard the train – his defence is that it was to pay for his kids' college education). The focus of the film is the relationship formed by Ryder and Garber, as they engage in a psychological chess-game.

In the 1974 original (directed by Joseph Sargent), the villain's adversary and 'avenger' was not a train dispatcher but a policeman, Lieutenant Zachary Garber, played by Walter Matthau (Zach Garber became Walter Garber in the remake, in homage to Matthau). A natural curmudgeon, Matthau's character is terse, cynical and 'hard-boiled' in the classic tradition of cinematic cops and private eyes who have seen it all before. The fact that modern cinema audiences bring to their viewing ambivalent, even hostile, attitudes to law enforcers might be partial explanation for the decision to make Garber a train dispatcher in the remake. In contrast to Matthau's character, Denzel Washington's Garber is a much softer, more sensitive character; presumably intended to elicit sympathy, but universally panned by film critics for being far less interesting than his predecessor. As the *Independent's* movie reviewer, Geoffrey Macnab, put it:

We are lumbered with details about his private life: we hear him promising his wife he'll pick up some milk before he gets home in the evening and we learn how he may have had his hand in the till to pay for his daughter's college fees. The remake creaks under the weight of its sentimentality. (*Independent*, 12 June 2009)