
Article

Excitement lies elsewhere: Teenage film-makers and popular culture

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Abstract

When teenagers are given access to digital media equipment, their teachers and film club leaders may hope that they will take the opportunity to make films of personal significance. Instead, young people often choose to engage in a parodic dialogue with popular culture, in a process which feels more familiar and/or comfortable to them, providing as it does a creative space unburdened by expectations of sincere expression. From a survey of numerous short films made in Scotland, it is evident that the use of pastiche and parody facilitates both progressive and reactionary perspectives, often within the same film. Exploring a series of detailed case studies of films made by young people in Scotland in the early 2000s, this article argues that parody can provide for young people an aesthetic distance from personal expression, which, ironically, is unexpectedly revealing of generalised teenage sociocultural attitudes.

Keywords media literacy; parody; pastiche; digital media; popular culture; teenage film-makers; Scotland

When teenagers are given access to digital media equipment, their teachers and film club leaders may hope that they will take the opportunity to make films of personal significance. Indeed, certain media scholars have envisaged youth media production as an activity that encourages self-exploration. Michael Hoechsmann and Stuart Poyntz (2012: 22) argue that:

... as childhood itself changes, young people seem to be turning to media as a space for freedom and exploration, a relatively safe and secure environment that offers them resources

and opportunities to explore their identities and sense of freedom beyond the gaze of adult mentors.

This article will focus on three films made by Scottish teenagers to explore how they utilised this opportunity and to attempt to understand whether they were able to establish a sense of freedom from their adult mentors. These digitally produced shorts are initiatives that were – in significant part – developed and produced by teenagers. Rather than making short films exploring issues that others might think are important, they often choose to parody well-known forms of popular culture.

The first section of this article looks at young people's engagements with popular culture from both Hollywood and Bollywood, which serve as the focus of documentaries that arguably present a positive view of the influence of film entertainment: *Sabrina's Bollywood* (Morag Hood, 2002), in which a teenage girl communicates her love of Bollywood films, is interspersed with her parodies of dance sequences, while *It's Only a Movie...* (Young Filmmakers Falkirk, 2005) explores the 'effects' of screen violence by reworking *Fight Club* (David Fincher, 1999) and *Reservoir Dogs* (Quentin Tarantino, 1992). Following this, the majority of the article is devoted to an extended analysis of *Fit Like, Dude* (Hannah Robinson, 2003), a science fiction film which evidences a more critical attitude towards ideas around national identity, and which in the process articulates a characteristically youthful desire to escape the cultural traditions of previous generations. The use of tropes and themes from genre films, which are often perceived to have a low cultural status, is here used as a framework to satirise 'grown up' attitudes in an indirect fashion. This generational struggle is confronted most clearly in films which at first glance might appear to be merely light-hearted entertainments.

Celebrating Hollywood/Bollywood in digital documentaries

Film educators working in Scotland frequently find that young people tend to cherish established popular genres such as horror, science fiction and certain forms of comedy that are sometimes deemed unsuitable material for use in educational activities. A central dilemma for many film-makers seeking to engage teenagers in film-making workshops can therefore be whether to indulge them in their enthusiasm, or to steer them in the direction of more 'respectable' cultural traditions. While some teachers might feel uncomfortable with devoting time to the close analysis of these types of films, certain scholars have argued that not to do so would be to risk missing an important opportunity to critically engage young people's attention by using the media that is most familiar to their lives outside the school gates:

In truth, there is much media content that is objectionable and unworthy of focused attention in educational settings. But the reality is that the media plays a central role in the socialization, acculturation, and intellectual formation of young people. It is a pedagogical force to be reckoned with, and we ignore it at our peril. (Hoechsmann and Poyntz, 2012: 59)

By making popular culture the focus of sustained attention, rather than superficial derision, it is one of the contentions of this article that teenagers can be engaged in many ideas provoked by these titles. Similarly, by allowing young people to choose these genres to model their own film-making on, the resulting shorts frequently prove surprisingly revealing of the interests and perspectives of contemporary teenagers, which I argue is illustrated by the films discussed here.

It's Only a Movie... (Young Filmmakers Falkirk, 2005) explores the 'effects' of screen violence by reworking famous films. The title alludes to a famous phrase that Alfred Hitchcock would reportedly say to actors questioning the logic of their character's actions. The film was made by Strange Boat (an Edinburgh production company formed in 2004), with funding from Falkirk Council and First Light. Illustrating a certain underlying adult influence, David Barras, the co-founder of Strange Boat, developed the film as part of a loose trilogy on violence, which also included a documentary called *Bullied* (Young Filmmakers Falkirk, 2005) and a horror film called *The Master* (Young Filmmakers Falkirk, 2005). Together, these three

films attempted to explore how violence affects children. This project was pitched to First Light, a UK Film Council scheme which aimed to help young people make their first films. With funding secured, Strange Boat issued an open invitation for teenagers in the local area to attend a weekly film club at Falkirk Town Hall, and around 12 or 13 young people attended on a regular basis.

When I interviewed David Barras in 2013, he explained how roles were assigned across the different groups:

... very quickly, from each of the groups, they will assign their roles. And pretty much amongst themselves, it was pretty good. It wasn't like there was 10 people wanting to be the director, I think there was definitely, for each one of them, I think there was somebody who was going to [be] the director.

Different directors and crew worked on each of the scenes, giving the teenagers the experience of what skills are required in various roles. As the three productions progressed, David noted that:

... everyone else just fell into whatever was their thing: make-up, costume, you know, camera. So everybody had a role, so it's very much about the [adult] film-maker is just the mentor. We're just there to help the young people make decisions and do things. So they're taught by us to use the camera, to do the lighting, to do anything that needs [to be] done. So it becomes their thing. As much as possible, we're in the background.

While David developed the concept and provided technical training, creative control of the films during production was increasingly the responsibility of the teenagers themselves. The films' editing is credited to Strange Boat, indicating that the post-production process was presumably also undertaken by David.

It's Only a Movie... was originally conceived as an exploration of popular culture in general, rather than focusing on films. This approach is perhaps still evident in the promotional postcard for the film, which asks:

Are young people's minds being warped by popular culture?

Why do young people find the dark aspects of life so appealing?

A documentary exploring the impact of pop culture on teens' behaviour.

A film by Focus, young filmmakers in Falkirk.

As *It's Only a Movie...* developed, however, the film became increasingly focused on the effects of Hollywood films. The documentary format provided a relatively educational framework through which to explore these issues. Rather than represent its fictional elements directly, here parody is mediated by the film's documentary structure, which seeks to provide a critical distance to the short sketches. Indeed, David described the finished film as a 'sketch-based satire of Hollywood movies'. The film opens with a scene showing a discussion between two teenage girls as they leave a multiplex cinema, about whether watching a film before committing a crime allows people to blame their behaviour on it, thus taking away personal responsibility for their actions. Throughout *It's Only a Movie...* there are interspersed interviews with teenagers and adults in a Falkirk shopping centre, providing different perspectives on the film's central questions. One of the central motivations behind the documentary, however, appears to be that it provides its young film-makers with an opportunity to re-enact their favourite scenes from Hollywood films, such as *High Fidelity* (Stephen Frears, 2000), *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994) and *The Matrix* (Lana Wachowski and Lilly Wachowski, 1999). *It's Only a Movie...* invokes well-known scenes from these titles, while crucially reworking aspects of dialogue in order to explore the issues of screen violence. When I asked David Barras if he had a say in which films they would parody, he told me:

I had no say at all [laughs]. They decided all that kind of stuff. And as much as possible they went back and looked at the shots and stuff like that. So they did try and actually match them, some of them are fairly well matched shot for shot, I think, especially like *Reservoir Dogs* at

the end. I think they took great care in looking at what the shots were and trying to keep the shots fairly similar.

The penultimate scene of *It's Only a Movie...* again features the two teenage girls from the opening framing device, as they replicate a heated exchange between Mr Pink (Steve Buscemi) and Mr White (Harvey Keitel) in *Reservoir Dogs*. The visual style duplicates the film, with the girls similarly filmed in a medium two shot, while wearing oversized suits (Figure 1).

David Barras noted that storyboards were not so necessary for scenes such as this, 'because the shots were based on existing shots, it was probably more set in stone as to what that was going to look like. Because they wanted to mimic exactly what the original movies were.' In the scene, the girls deliver their dialogue, replicating the distinctive rhythms of Tarantino's writing style (albeit using their own Scottish accents) in order to explore the issues of onscreen violence. Their opening exchange in particular references the social impact of both television news and feature films:

Mr White: It ain't a case of monkey see, monkey do.

Mr Pink: Shut up, White. We flick on the television every day. CNN. What do we see? Shoot this, kill that, stab people. What does that mean?

Mr White: Those are the movies' fault? No, it ain't.

Mr Pink: I'm sure it is.

Like the scene in *Reservoir Dogs*, the characters subsequently have a physical altercation: after pushing each other, Mr Pink falls to the floor and Mr White starts kicking him, before both draw their guns. There is a point-of-view shot from Mr Pink's perspective, which replicates the one in Tarantino's film, before cutting to a wide shot. Mr White says, 'Violent movies don't affect teenagers', and Mr Pink shouts back, 'Yes, they do!' The camera slowly retreats from this stand-off until a third character can be seen. Now we see the back of Mr Blonde, played by a teenage boy. While in the original, Michael Madsen's Mr Blonde held a paper cup from a fast-food restaurant, here Mr Blonde is holding a soft-drink bottle. He takes a

Figure 1. Visual recreation of a shot from *Reservoir Dogs* (source: Scotland's Moving Image Archive)



sip of the drink, then throws the plastic bottle away, while walking towards the camera and the other characters. In a Scottish accent, he muses that, 'We can't say what's what because it's not up to us. It's up to whoever watches the movie.' Mr Pink and Mr White stand up. Mr Blonde continues, 'People make their own opinions on the movie, we can't stop that.' The actor takes off his sunglasses and, just like Harvey Keitel's Mr White in another scene, the teenage Mr Blonde says, 'I'm hungry. Let's get a taco.' This film therefore has a double address: while the image track is a visual pastiche of professional productions, the dialogue comments on wider social issues, while still attempting to establish a believable fictional world.

The overall thesis of *It's Only a Movie...* is that violent films have no effect on real life. During one scene, filmed in front of a theatre rehearsal, the presenter argues that we often apply different censorship criteria to films than we would to literature or stage plays, such as those by Shakespeare. The film raises a number of issues, but it seems significant that it is only American films that are parodied. David Barras observed that, 'you can tell that the writers were very much into Tarantino at the time. Probably before they really should have really seen any Tarantino, but never mind.' The script of *It's Only a Movie...*, by C.J. McNally and Laura Hotchkiss, gives the actors the opportunity to adopt American accents and to approximate the mannerisms of Brad Pitt and Samuel L. Jackson. In this way, the pleasure of performance that the teenagers get from this process is consistent with Becky Parry's (2013: 164) observations on workshops in which young people 'experimented with new accents and use of dialect and again they were drawing both explicitly and intuitively on the language, content, dialects and accents they have experienced in film'. One actor in *It's Only a Movie...* – Andrew Rothney – is particularly accomplished at this, and it is perhaps significant that Rothney subsequently went on to play the lead role in the Scottish feature drama *Blackbird* (Jamie Chambers, 2013), as well as roles in Scottish television shows such as *Shetland* and *The Victim*. Rothney's pastiche of Tyler Durden in *Fight Club* is a confident performance which demonstrates his ability to inhabit Brad Pitt's acting style and to invoke aspects of American culture, such as accents, clothing and behaviour, familiar to Scottish teenagers through their regular consumption of American popular culture. Duncan Petrie (2004: 205) notes that 'it is certainly the case that as an indisputably core culture, the United States of America has exerted a major influence on Scotland'. Short films such as *It's Only a Movie...* certainly confirm the influence that what might be considered core cultures have over the imaginations of teenagers in peripheral cultures such as Scotland.

The privileged status that international forms of popular culture have in the imaginations of Scottish teenagers is also evident in *Sabrina's Bollywood* (Morag Hood, 2002), where a teenage girl presents her love of Bollywood films, interspersed with her pastiches of dance sequences. This documentary attempts to reveal the popularity and pleasures of the world's *other* significant mass-produced entertainment industry, which – Sabrina tells us – also has one of its biggest fans in Scotland. Sabrina begins the film by interviewing Nadeem, the owner of a video rental shop specialising in Bollywood films. While Bollywood is a hugely popular industry worldwide, and is growing in popularity in the United Kingdom, with screenings in mainstream multiplex venues, films which celebrate this popular cinema tradition are still relatively unusual in Scotland. While the documentary was filmed in Edinburgh, it looks outwards to other national traditions, indicating that these cultures have strong resonance for people living far away from sites of production. Similarly, Sabrina herself points out that Bollywood films feature a mix of different languages and cultures in order to reach large international audiences.

Sabrina's Bollywood presents a personal perspective on its director–presenter's favourite films and stars and, like *It's Only a Movie...*, it features scenes which pastiche the conventions of the genre, supplemented by documentary conventions to explore the reasons behind the huge popularity of Bollywood. A scene which incorporates both these approaches shows Sabrina dancing with her female friends in Princes Street Gardens. They are holding colourful fabrics, which heighten the visual impact as they dance together. In this sequence, we hear an instrumental song on the film's soundtrack, reminiscent of popular music from Bollywood films, which then cedes focus to Sabrina's voice-over:

Music and songs are very important in Bollywood films. Music directors hold great power in the industry, and so do the playback singers, who sing the songs, as opposed to the stars

themselves. Before the film comes out, the songs are played on the radio as kind of trailers for the film and become extremely popular in the streets of India.

In this sequence, visual aspects, song and voice-over converge to highlight the importance of popular music to Indian cinema. As the scene continues, there is a cut to a shot of a teenage boy watching the dancers from behind a nearby bush, and he lifts his hand to his chin and affects a dreamy stare. There is then a cut back to Sabrina, who appears to return his gaze while hiding a smile behind her hand. Her voice-over continues, 'Women in Indian film are usually represented as the main love interest of the hero, and pop up in the middle of the song. But nowadays women are getting a more central role.' The two are then seen on either side of a nearby tree, with Sabrina smiling at the boy while he plays up to the camera by holding a flower in his mouth. In a wide shot, they run towards each other, with Sabrina explaining that 'men in Indian film are portrayed as action heroes, or as the lover, desperate to prove to the world that his love is true'. As they reach each other, they pretend to freeze like statues, while they turn their gaze to the camera, just before they would have embraced. Like *It's Only a Movie...*, this scene employs a double address, wherein visual pastiche is supplemented by a didactic voice-over. This dual engagement effectively incorporates the parodic/fictional elements into the more educationally conventional format of a documentary, which is arguably more acceptable to adult sensibilities. The film also includes scenes with Sabrina's direct address to the camera, a conversation with one of her friends, and concludes with her meeting Shah Rukh Khan, who she calls the 'Tom Cruise of Bollywood'. Sabrina meets the star after his press conference at the 56th Edinburgh International Film Festival, which he attends to promote his new film.

Sabrina's Bollywood was made through Scottish Kids Are Making Movies (SKAMM), a film-making club set up in Edinburgh by Shona Wood and Mark Cousins in 1997. A short article published in 2003 reveals some behind-the-scenes information about the production of *Sabrina's Bollywood* (Presley, 2003). The BBC documentary film-maker Brian English was a mentor to the teenagers on this project. He is quoted as saying that when the SKAMM participants were on location, 'I'll teach them about shots and framing and about set protocol, perhaps edging them towards what might make a better shot, but they do everything themselves' (Presley, 2003: n.p.). This comment suggests that there was some creative collaboration between the teenagers and the mentor, especially regarding shot selection. Jamie Chambers (2019: 29) has suggested that this sort of collaboration could be considered 'co-creation', in terms of decisions shared between the mentor and the students:

... student film productions represent a complex, multimodal tapestry of decisions, some of which have been made by 'the students themselves', alongside decisions made collaboratively or dialectically, and still further decisions made either explicitly or implicitly by supervising or senior adults in the process.

While Brian English is credited as Technical Advisor on *Sabrina's Bollywood*, it appears he also contributed to creative decision-making at different stages of the production. Regarding post-production, completed on editing equipment at Media Base Edinburgh, English said that, 'I'm pretty much hands-off' (Presley, 2003: n.p.). However, while the teenagers might be the ones operating the editing machines, Denyse Presley (2003: n.p.) noted that English tends 'to sit back and relay instructions', which might be seen to somewhat undermine the rhetoric of creative autonomy for the young participants in the rest of the article.

Sabrina's Bollywood embodies a different cultural identity than was seen in *It's Only a Movie...*, demonstrating the influence of the Indian film industry on countries around the world, and a transnational fandom. Towards the end of the film, Sabrina states that she would like to see Bollywood and Hollywood as one big industry, along with the integration of actors from both in starring roles. This would suggest a cinephilia that crosses borders, a cultural perspective that may be particularly exciting for teenagers as they become increasingly aware of the multiple sociocultural and national identities that they often

inhabit. Duncan Petrie (2004: 204) suggests that professional novelists and film-makers in Scotland have tended to utilise a wide range of reference points from around the world:

The meaningful connection with influences and inspirations drawn from the wider sphere of international culture has played an important part in helping Scotland to find its own independent voice, with Scottish writers and filmmakers drawing upon this international dimension in a variety of ways.

A similar process can arguably also be seen at work in the digital productions of Scottish teenagers. These young film-makers too have drawn upon a variety of international influences, with a heavy leaning towards popular forms made familiar through American cinematic culture. While such productions often demonstrate an uncritical celebration of young people's favourite genres, *It's Only a Movie...* and *Sabrina's Bollywood* have a distinctly educational mode of address, combining documentary conventions with visual pastiches of popular culture. Both films were funded by the First Light initiative, and they were both conceived as part of a trilogy of films made by the same group. Presley (2003: n.p.) confirmed that '*Sabrina's Bollywood* was one of three films made with National Lottery funding through the Film Council's First Light initiative and Edinburgh City Council.' *It's Only a Movie...* was similarly funded by Falkirk Council and First Light. The process of applying for funding to run film-making workshops through local councils and charities may well have exerted an influence on the types of films that were made, and the adult priorities articulated therein. This may have pushed both films towards incorporating an educational mode of address and, indeed, the question of how the films were mediated by broader institutional priorities is a subject requiring further research. When completed, *It's Only a Movie...* was screened at Falkirk Town Hall and in schools, so audiences from both inside and outside school classrooms were able to appreciate the playful use of documentary and popular culture conventions that the teenagers utilised in their film. *Sabrina's Bollywood* was voted the Best Documentary at the 2003 First Light Film Awards and, a couple of years later, *The Master* was nominated for Best Horror Film.

Another production from the same era which explicitly explores issues of cultural identity is examined in the following section, which details the work of a group of Aberdeen teenagers and their reworking of the established tropes of the science fiction film.

'Inferiorism' and imagination

Fit Like, Dude (Hannah Robinson, 2003) is a science fiction parody filmed in Aberdeen, a city in the north-east of Scotland with its own distinct dialect of the Scots language known as Doric. The title juxtaposes the local Doric expression for 'How are you?' with American slang, for comic effect. Along similar lines, the actors in the film frequently use Doric words as dialogue. For example, at numerous points, characters ask each other, 'Fit like?'; 'Nae bad, yourself?' is the reply, to which the other says, 'Ach survivin'. *Fit Like, Dude* was made specifically for audiences in Aberdeen who would 'get' the sense of humour, in-jokes and local references.

Like both *It's Only a Movie...* and *Sabrina's Bollywood*, *Fit Like, Dude* was made outside the school curriculum as part of a youth initiative called The Big Film Project, with funding from New Opportunities Fund and Scottish Screen. The DVD cover of The Big Film Project states:

Led by Aberdeen City Council's Arts Education Unit, a total of 934 young people between the ages of 3 and 18 years took part in a range of film related workshops during the summer holidays of 2003. The organisations who provided workshops included Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Youth Theatre, Citymoves, Peacock Visual Arts, Aberdeen Art Gallery & Museums, The Arts Development Team, The Belmont and The Lemon Tree.

A 'making-of' documentary titled *Fit Like, Dude: Behind the scenes* (The Big Film Project, 2003) provides a first-hand insight into the making of the film, and shows the crew and cast between takes on the set.

The documentary demonstrates the substantial commitment, in terms of effort and time, made by all involved during that summer. It charts the course of the production over four weeks, initially following the art department based at Aberdeen City Galleries, where Claire O'Hagan talks about making props and costumes. The next week, various children are seen auditioning, while the third week focuses on the pre-production work on the special effects, in particular the floating potato, which represents the alien planet at the beginning of *Fit Like, Dude*. Also documented is the contribution of Jillian Thomson, a dance instructor from Citymoves, who provided training to the cast at the local grammar school. The shoot is shown in the fourth week, as filming takes place on Aberdeen beach and at other locations nearby. During the requisite scenes of the children messing about and playing up to the camera, there are also shots of some of the teenagers operating the camera and sound equipment. Here, the crew appears to be a mixed production team of children and adults. Significantly, however, the director and the key creative heads of each department are adults, with the teenagers restricted to acting and technical duties. The director, Hannah Robinson, was an experienced film-maker who had previously made several short films, including *Relax* (1994), *Candy Floss* (1997) and *Night Swimmer* (2000). She was invited to become involved in The Big Film Project by staff at the Aberdeen Arts Centre. The credits of *Fit Like, Dude* further list four names who comprised the directing team working alongside Robinson: Martin Bearne, Findlay Duncan, Simon Feist-Wilson and Samantha Robertson. Hannah Robinson explained to me that:

Our directing team was a small but brilliant group of volunteers. We discussed our approach and then took turns to direct different scenes, though it didn't always go according to plan. It turned into the biggest film shoot I'd ever been on – chaos, but brilliant.

This suggests that the directing process was a collaboration between the adult leading the team and the children and teenagers who formed most of the cast and crew. Jamie Chambers (2019: 35, emphasis in the original) has argued that 'film-making remains at all times *dialogical* – a dialectic between a designated authoring voice (or voices) and the other interlocutors (both junior and senior) involved in the process'. In this regard, it could be argued that in *Fit Like, Dude*, there is a co-creative interaction between adults presenting their interpretation of teenage subjectivity, drawing on aspects of contemporary popular culture, within a largely adult-led film production, and the perspectives and creative contributions of the young people themselves. Unfortunately, this documentary does not show what happened during post-production, or at the red carpet premiere of the film at the Belmont Cinema in Aberdeen.

The cataloguing team at Scotland's Moving Image Archive summarise the plot of *Fit Like, Dude* as follows:

A sci-fi comedy. Visitors from planet Maris Piper go to Aberdeen to find the Northern Lights. They discover instead that Aberdonian youth live under the control of 'The Crofter' who brainwashes kids to make 'young fogeys' like him. Aliens unite with outlaws to free young fogey's minds, using the power of music.

As is evident from this short synopsis, *Fit Like, Dude* is suffused with a comic tone, which delights in overturning conventional narrative expectations of the alien invasion genre. Following a title sequence which parodies the equivalent openings in low-budget science fiction films from the 1950s (using the aforementioned potato for the planet Maris Piper), the film's alien inhabitants are introduced. The children in this scene speak in a mixture of Doric and standard English, a creative decision that proves thematically significant as the narrative unfolds. Two aliens, Tubor (J.T. Baird) and the Duke of York (Adetunji Kasim), are then dispatched to Earth to search for the Northern Lights. The two are seen emerging on Aberdeen beach from a spaceship in the form of a garden shed, where the natives are shown incongruously farming cabbages in the sand. Whenever the aliens speak to the locals, they try to ingratiate themselves by saying 'It's a sad day we left the croft.' The two aliens decide to explore this curious new place, and they wander into Aberdeen city centre (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Tubor and the Duke of York explore Aberdeen (source: Scotland's Moving Image Archive)



They find the Northern Lights, which is actually the name of a cinema. These scenes were filmed in the Belmont Cinema. The aliens are mistaken for Young Fogeys, and an outlaw film buff in the audience proclaims, 'You can take our freedom fogeys, but you'll never take our films' – a reworking of the famous line from *Braveheart* (Mel Gibson, 1995). Tubor subsequently manages to defeat them with his kung fu moves. One outlaw girl explains to the two aliens that:

The Crofter is a leader of a terrible cult. He and his Young Fogey Crew have banned all youthful activities, such as ours, and have brainwashed everyone who resists into believing they're Fogeys – old before their time. Us film buffs are the only real teenagers left.

This opening establishes the comic tone of the film, in which the perceived cultural gap between young and old people is transfigured into the conflict between the outlaws and the Fogeys. Throughout the remaining story, numerous references to other films are employed as knowing in-jokes, in the manner of contemporary animations such as *The Simpsons* (1989–present), aimed as it is at both children and adult audiences.

Not only does *Fit Like, Dude* subvert the usual alien invasion narrative trajectory, in that its aliens are the film's heroes, it also playfully makes fun of the Crofter. As a symbol of rural Scotland, this media mogul is built up as the all-controlling ruler of a dystopian Aberdeen that is kept in line by the manipulative broadcasting of his Radio Fogey station. As the aliens from Maris Piper explore the city for the first time, his voice is relayed to the population via loudspeakers and public-address systems which transmit his deep, adult-sounding voice to his subjects, along with the traditional Scottish country music which he sees as keeping the population in their place. However, when the Duke of York visits the radio station, he discovers that, despite the imposing voice, the Crofter is not in fact what he initially appears to be. In a reveal that is reminiscent of the famous scene in *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming et al., 1939) when

Dorothy discovers that the great and powerful Oz is merely a man behind a curtain, the Duke first glimpses the Crofter from behind as he is speaking into the radio microphone. However, when he turns around in his swivel chair to face the alien, the viewers can see that he is a fellow child (Andrew Cummings), rather than the usual evil adult typical of many children's stories (Figure 3).

With his incongruous adult voice, the Crofter is symbolically old before his time. Indeed, with his tartan trousers and oversized woollen V-neck jumper, he even cuts a slightly ridiculous figure – one unlikely to terrify his subjects if they only knew the truth about him. The story then charts the overthrow of the Crofter's tyrannical regime, in which he forces traditional Scottish culture onto his enslaved masses. Overall, it could be argued that the story contrasts the excitement of youth-oriented transnational popular culture with the perceived dullness of traditional Scottish culture, illustrating what has elsewhere been termed the 'cultural cringe' (Phillips, 1958).

The cultural cringe was originally defined by A.A. Phillips (1958: 89) to describe the tendency that constantly compares Australian to English culture, something he saw as 'a disease of the Australian mind'. He especially took issue with the idea 'that, in any nation, there should be an assumption that the domestic cultural product will be worse than the imported article' (Phillips, 1958: 89). While chiefly an attack on the tendencies of Australian critics and intellectuals, Phillips (1958: 90) usefully continued that, 'the Cringe mainly appears in a tendency to make needless comparisons'. This sort of cultural comparison is perhaps evident in a scene in *Fit Like, Dude* where one of the captured young aliens is being force-fed 'mince and tatties' (minced meat and potatoes, a popular dinner in Scotland), before having his head pushed into a large bucket of Scotch broth (soup). His torture, at the hands of two fellow children dressed up to resemble policemen, is a comic variant of similar scenes from James Bond films. In this story, the Crofter stands over the policemen as he supervises these state-supported acts against an enemy of his totalitarian state. In his over-sized V-neck jumper and tartan trousers, he is made to appear as a traitor to his own generation as he oversees the suppression of the people. In this scene, the children explicitly

Figure 3. The Crofter is revealed (source: Scotland's Moving Image Archive)



associate having to consume Scottish food with being tortured, while presumably they would celebrate pizzas and hamburgers. This perspective is further underlined by the use of traditional Scottish music as the events unfold onscreen. When watching this scene, a viewer might ask if the film's status as a comedy means that this is only satirising stereotypes of Scotland, or if it is really indulging them, and displaying the so-called cultural cringe.

One of the supposed benefits of media production outside school-based systems of evaluation, for both children and teenagers, is that 'such spaces afford opportunities for educators to help young people become conscious of their own *situated-ness* in the world' (Hoechsmann and Poyntz, 2012: 154, emphasis in the original). Many school-based projects in particular attempt to engage children in the history and geography of their local community through both fiction and non-fiction narratives. Elsewhere in Scotland, the Understanding Cinema project, established by the Centre for the Moving Image in 2012, has sought to introduce school students to filmic techniques similar to those favoured by Italian neorealist film-makers (Chambers, forthcoming). This school programme, based on the French precedent *Cinéma Cent Ans De Jeunesse*, aimed to capture teenagers' 'voice' or 'dialect' through a series of film production exercises. As Jamie Chambers (forthcoming) explains:

One of Understanding Cinema's defining characteristics as a school-based programme of film education is the manner in which it encourages participants to make films about their own lives, and thus voice a sense of their own particular 'dialects': an articulation of 'film language' mediated by children's own sense of location and identity and thus a sense of their own, located filmic 'voices'.

In order to achieve these outcomes, emphasis was placed upon students using a realist or naturalist aesthetic to reconcile cinema with their own lived experiences, a pedagogical process which sought simultaneously to broaden the students' knowledge of world cinema and to make them more sensitised to the places and people with whom they lived. In contrast to this school-based programme, the three digital films analysed in this article were made in workshops outside the school environment. It might be argued, therefore, that while after-school programmes often have their own learning goals, these voluntary opportunities potentially offer recreational spaces in which more playful approaches to practical film work can be adopted. Indeed, Hannah Robinson told me that the screenwriters of *Fit Like, Dude* were asked to develop an imaginative story set in Aberdeen:

The Lemon Tree Writers Group were mainly young teenagers, led by Brian Ross, who worked with the group to develop their ideas into a screenplay. My remit to them was to write something imaginative, fun and specific to Aberdeen – not some kind of hard knocks social realism, which was the predominant genre of the time, but to unleash as much of the kids' imagination as possible. They had a great time; I think of all the groups, they may have got the most out of it.

These teenage writers – Isla Newcombe, Ryan Beattie, Jessica Yong, Campbell Howitt and Ben Hunter – were recruited from a creative writing club, and they developed the screenplay in collaboration with their group leader. The adults who led the workshops examined in this article were not necessarily acting as educators, but this desire to make their participants reflect on their place in the world is still more than evident, especially in *Fit Like, Dude*.

The sequence described above resonates with critical writing on Scottish culture which explores the recurrence of themes of split and divided natures. For example, David McCrone (1992: 176) has written that the 'image of Scotland as a divided and unhealthy society is a common one in Scottish literature, which has acted as a key carrier of Scottish identity'. For the purposes of thinking about the implications of *Fit Like, Dude*, the argument put forward by Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull (1989) in *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture: Inferiorism and the intellectuals* is especially provocative. Drawing on the work of

Frantz Fanon about the cultural effects of colonialism developed in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), they explain that:

According to Fanon, a colonised people is subjected to a process of mystification. Central to this process is a sustained belittling of the colonised culture, which is depicted, by the coloniser, as impoverished, backward, inferior, primitive. Fanon writes: 'Every effort is made to bring the colonised person to admit the inferiority of his culture ...' (Beveridge and Turnbull, 1989: 5)

Beveridge and Turnbull further argue that such attitudes are often seen in the approach of Scottish intellectuals – especially those with an Oxbridge educational background – towards native cultural and philosophical traditions, because of their desire to appear sophisticated in metropolitan circles. The trickledown effect of this process is that 'the native comes to internalise the message that customs are inferior to the culture of the coloniser, a theme which runs through cultural production in the colony' (Beveridge and Turnbull, 1989: 1). This concept of 'inferiorism' could be especially useful in this context, as the oppositions illustrating the themes of *Fit Like, Dude* suggest (Table 1).

The thematic oppositions which this narrative structure employs therefore make for a thoroughly negative assessment of the potential of more indigenous variants of Scottish culture. Parry (2013: 165) has argued that imaginative fiction can function as a prism, or a 'process of placing at a distance ideas which are difficult and uncomfortable'. In *Fit Like, Dude*, science fiction is rendered more innocent and even pleasurable, and arguably this fun framework has the effect of defusing some potentially controversial cultural attitudes.

Recalling *It's Only A Movie...*, the narrative of *Fit Like, Dude* continues to incorporate jokes which would appeal to a cine-literate audience. Indeed, at one point, the film buff character is told, 'Keep it simple, no more film references.' The film-makers have no intention of obeying this command, however, as the story hurtles towards its conclusion. Following his torture, the Duke of York is detained in the Fogeification Centre as punishment for his innate differences and perceived threat to the established order. Once inside, the Duke of York tells his fellow prisoners what he has found out about the Crofter's regime ('There's no croft. It's all lies.'). and urges them to rise against him. In line with many other prison films, the alien survives by managing to ingratiate himself with his initially hostile fellow inmates. He listens to modern dance music via his antenna, and dances with the de facto leader of the outlaws, a female teenager known as the Boogiemani. By demonstrating his skill at this staple of then-contemporary urban American street culture, the Duke gains the confidence of the outlaws and encourages them to confront the Fogeification Centre guards more directly. The climactic sequence features the newly bonded prisoners lined up to the camera in a wide shot, performing a complex Capoeira-style dance, intercut with slow-motion close-up shots of the dancers at canted angles (Figure 4).

With its thoroughly modern and internationalist credentials, it is no surprise that the Young Fogeys hate this dance, and cover their ears to the sound of the music that accompanies it. The clothes worn by the characters also work to emphasise the cultural differences which this sequence is placing into contrast. The Duke of York has been dressed by the Young Fogeys in an unfashionable striped shirt and

Table 1. Oppositions represented in the film *Fit Like, Dude*

Scottish culture	Transnational culture
Traditional	Modern
Boring	Exciting
Aimed at older people	Aimed at younger people
Restrictive	Liberating

Figure 4. The Fogeyfication Centre escape dance sequence (source: Scotland's Moving Image Archive)



grey trousers that are held up by braces, covering his oversized, stuffed belly. On the other hand, the Boogiemans and her fellow outlaws are wearing T-shirts and cargo pants more appropriate to their age group. Needless to say, the Young Fogeys are clothed in oversized Harris Tweed waistcoats and jackets, neckties and flat caps. In short, the conflict between the generations is fought on the cultural grounds of music, fashion and dance. The previously imprisoned outlaws emerge victorious from this stand-off, and secure their freedom from the monocultural oppression that had been inflicted upon them up until this point. They celebrate their liberation by continuing the party on Aberdeen beach, the Duke of York dancing ecstatically at the centre of the crowd, as they clap along to the dance music. An edit to the cabbages being discarded, as the waves pull them out to sea, puts a full stop on the reign of the Crofter and his 'Kailyard'-inspired ideals. In the final shot, the camera zooms in and out on the planet, but the image of the dreary potato has been replaced by the glittery facade of a disco ball.

Fit Like, Dude explicitly thematises the perceptions of traditional Scottish culture versus the excitement of international popular culture. A less lenient critical interpretation might argue that this narrative displays many of the hallmarks of the inferiorisation that Beveridge and Turnbull (1989: 5) had previously located within intellectual discourse of the past:

The concept of inferiorisation, developed by Fanon in his account of the strategies and effects of external control in the Third World, seems to us to yield valuable insights and perspectives on the Scottish predicament. Fanon uses the idea to describe those processes in a relationship of national dependence which lead the native to doubt the worth and significance of inherited ways of life and embrace the styles and values of the coloniser.

The external control described here potentially includes the way the news media in Scotland is dominated by organisations and corporations based outside the country (Hutchinson, 2008). From this perspective, it is not at all surprising that Scottish teenagers, after consuming so much international popular culture, might in the process develop a low opinion of the Scottish culture of their parents and grandparents. The end result of this is when 'the native internalises the estimation of local culture which is propagated by the coloniser, acknowledging the superiority of metropolitan ways' (Beveridge and Turnbull, 1989: 6). The final dance sequence could therefore be interpreted as an illustration of the results of this cultural colonisation, in which the outlaws reject the inherited traditions in favour of modern consumer lifestyles.

Interestingly, the positive or negative impact of the popular cultural industries seems to be a subtext in all three films discussed above. In this respect, David McCrone's (1992: 13) comment that 'while media representations of Scotland are often simplistic and distorted, the search for a pure, national culture as an alternative is doomed to fail in a complex modern, multinational world' may perhaps point usefully towards possible alternative perspectives. Ultimately, I would argue that an analysis of *Fit Like, Dude* premised upon notions of the cultural cringe or intellectual inferiorisation might risk overlooking the film-makers' satirical attitudes towards 'traditions' in twenty-first-century Scotland.

Beveridge and Turnbull (1989: 60) argue that 'Fighting for a culture means finding it a valuable inheritance.' This concern with the importance of national canons has been more recently critiqued by Eleanor Bell (2004: 89), who notes that many scholars of Scottish literature have failed to take account of the implications of theories developed around postnationalism, and 'have been more concerned with asserting tradition than in contemplating its potential demise'. Many scholars in the social sciences, such as Anthony Giddens, have begun to refer to a 'post-traditional society', of which he writes that 'social bonds effectively have to be *made*, rather than inherited from the past – on the personal and more collective levels this is a fraught and difficult enterprise, but one that also holds out the promise of great rewards' (quoted in Bell, 2004: 93). This modern move to constructing identity through the consumption of popular culture, rather than through a cultural inheritance, is evident in the digital films discussed above. The first two digital documentaries in particular illustrate what Bell (2004: 85) identifies as 'This new focus on the personal, on consumer spending at the individual level, and on consumer control at the wider multinational level, [which] therefore challenges the former dominance of the nation-state as *the* organising principle of human societies.' The introduction of this methodology attempts to explain the proliferation of modern consumer culture, which crosses national boundaries. However, it is important not to interpret such perspectives as implying that sensitivity to local, and indeed national, distinctions are no longer vital to acknowledge in any account of cultural activities. Nation-states, and the regional variations within them, are still often key signifying factors in the subject matter of non-professional film-making. In addition, it has even been argued that such outside cultural influences are a welcome contribution to the development of national cultures. Duncan Petrie (2004: 204) has noted the following in relation to professional novelists and film-makers based in Scotland:

Within the broader nexus of political, economic and cultural change that has transformed Scotland's sense of itself, the appropriation of external cultural influences has clearly been highly significant. The very idea of outside influence has been changed from being regarded as primarily negative – at best, a dilution of indigenous traditions, at worst, a process of colonisation – to being celebrated as not only positive but necessary.

In this light, considering the broader cultural processes of absorbing numerous external influences, the fictional narrative of *Fit Like, Dude* represents something altogether more ambivalent. The film does not incorporate the Fogeys into its new liberated society, but sees them overthrown and displaced from the city, much as transnational popular culture now occupies a central position in contemporary life in urban Scotland. However, it is worth stressing that this film is simultaneously both a subversion of the alien invasion subgenre of science fiction and a comment on national cultural identity. For example, a scene in which a romantic kiss is interrupted is either a clever joke about the recurrence of variations of

this scene in 1950s B-movies, or is a giveaway that it is aimed at a young audience. It possibly works on both levels, for either teenagers or adults. Indeed, the same summer workshop out of which *Fit Like, Dude* emerged also produced *Affa Scary Movie* (The Big Film Project, 2003), a horror/comedy about a madman who takes over a film workshop, indicating that the film's creative team were obviously more than comfortable with these self-mocking satirical scenarios which address different audiences simultaneously. While it is thus most probable that this making fun of so-called 'Kailyard' clichés was an aspect of the film developed by the adult group leaders rather than by the teenage participants of *Fit Like, Dude*, it still offers valuable insights into changing perceptions of local culture at the turn of the century.

Media literacy advocates frequently express the hope that involving teenagers in film-making production in various capacities will result in a wide range of highly personal expressive work, and they may consequently be somewhat disappointed in the instances in which young people do not seem to grasp the perceived opportunities presented to them. However, as this article has argued, these paternalistic best intentions are perhaps sometimes misplaced. For example, in an interview filmed during *The Making of It's Only a Movie...*, one of the participants said, 'It was fun, and we enjoyed it, and if no one else enjoys it, at least we loved it.' Indeed, teenagers are repeatedly drawn towards the use of pastiche and parody in their cultural production, it would seem, both because it avoids personal expression altogether (which could potentially prove embarrassing in front of their peers), but also due to what pastiche and parody allow them to say about the world around them. In the examples examined in this article, these ideas included the lack of proven impact of screen violence on real-world behaviour, the possibility of a global entertainment cinema enjoyed by all, and the restrictive influence of national traditions on a sense of identity. These are by no means trivial ideas. Indeed, such films arguably provide an important barometer of contemporary attitudes among young people that are often ignored or marginalised in other public spheres. In relation to the consumption of mass media in its various forms, Hoechsmann and Poyntz (2012: 67–8) have asserted that it 'might best be thought of as a distorting mirror, one that reflects back to a society and culture many of the values and ideologies in circulation in that society'. What this case study has shown is that rather than a 'distorting mirror', digital media production which employs pastiche and/or parody might be more accurately thought of as a prism that refracts teenage subjectivity into a rainbow of highly revealing lights.

Conclusion

This survey of three digital short films made in Scotland suggests that teenagers craft imaginative scenarios that tend to express their view that faraway cultures are more imaginatively exciting than local variants. Often teenage film-makers exhibit valuable insights about the predicaments of young people, in particular their in-between or liminal status. Teenagers are on the verge of becoming fully responsible citizens with their own ideas, opinions and sense of identity, yet they are hesitant as to whether they consider the adult world to be sufficiently secure in the journey forward. The safe space of film-making can provide an opportunity to play with conflicting emotions and thoughts through characters and stories in a spirit of exploration. As Becky Parry (2013: 157) has noted, 'Just as playing popular culture is important to identity exploration in the early years (Marsh, 2005; Pahl, 2006), it is equally important to older children as they begin to construct new versions of themselves.' As we have seen, experimentation with cultural identities through popular genres has proven especially popular with Scottish teenagers. This article has explored these issues by framing such questions as a dialogue between nationalism and postnationalism, albeit from the perspective of young adults, rather than the usual focus on the established literary, historical and philosophical canons. Cultural critics such as Beveridge and Turnbull (1989: 15) consciously attempt to recover and encourage scholarly work influenced by a notion of the distinctive contribution of the Scottish tradition, arguing that 'a central task of cultural nationalism is the recovery of Scottish cultural practices (like these native philosophical traditions) which have been

submerged by the intelligentsia's adoption of English cultural modes'. Yet, scholars such as Anthony Giddens have tended to reframe the debate by being increasingly aware of the simultaneous pull of both local and international factors:

The dissolution of the local community, such as it used to be, is not the same as the disappearance of local life or local practices. Place, however, becomes increasingly reshaped in terms of distant influences drawn upon the local arena. Thus customs that continue to exist tend to develop altered meanings. (Quoted in Bell, 2004: 90)

These creative collisions between local and international cultures are clearly visible in the work of teenage film-makers in Scotland, to an extent that the existence of the national question might be seen to be almost displaced entirely. Eleanor Bell (2004: 94) does not advocate abandoning the study of national traditions, asserting that she 'does not aim to undermine the importance of the Scottish tradition', but instead calls for 'more reflection upon what tradition might mean in a present and future context'. Along these lines, this case study has detailed how young people (and their mentors) co-opted popular culture in order to assert their generational identity against what they might see as stifling national traditions. It is clear, however, that the local topics and features of these films can be seen as a recognition that globalised popular culture can be reworked to explore issues of identity in particular countries. Therefore, this article has argued that pastiche and parody provide an aesthetic distance from personal expression which, ironically, is unexpectedly revealing of generalised attitudes towards adolescence. While cultural excitement may indeed lie elsewhere, the fruit of these fandoms did not fall far from these young trees.

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Data and materials availability statement

All the digital films mentioned in this article are available from the Moving Image Archive, National Library of Scotland, Kelvin Hall, 1445 Argyle Street, Glasgow G3 8AW, United Kingdom (www.nls.uk/collections/moving-image-archive/).

Declarations and conflicts of interest

Research ethics statement

The author declares that research ethics approval for this article was provided by the University of Glasgow ethics board.

Consent for publication statement

The author declares that research participants' informed consent to publication of findings – including photos, videos and any personal or identifiable information – was secured prior to publication.

Conflicts of interest statement

The author declares no conflict of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently blind the author during peer review of this article have been made. The author declares no further conflicts with this article.

Filmography

Affa Scary Movie (GB 2003, The Big Film Project)
Blackbird (GB 2013, Jamie Chambers)
Braveheart (US 1995, Mel Gibson)
Bullied (GB 2005, Focus, Young Filmmakers Falkirk)
Candy Floss (GB 1997, Hannah Robinson)
Fight Club (US 1999, David Fincher)
Fit Like, Dude (GB 2003, Hannah Robinson)
Fit Like, Dude: Behind the scenes (GB 2003, The Big Film Project)
High Fidelity (US 2000, Stephen Frears)
It's Only a Movie... (GB 2005, Focus, Young Filmmakers Falkirk)
The Making of It's Only a Movie... (GB 2005, Focus, Young Filmmakers Falkirk)
The Master (GB 2005, Focus, Young Filmmakers Falkirk)
The Matrix (US 1999, Lana Wachowski and Lilly Wachowski)
Night Swimmer (GB 2000, Hannah Robinson)
Pulp Fiction (US 1994, Quentin Tarantino)
Relax (GB 1994, Hannah Robinson)
Reservoir Dogs (US 1992, Quentin Tarantino)
Sabrina's Bollywood (GB 2002, Morag Hood)
The Simpsons (US 1989–present, various)
The Wizard of Oz (US 1939, Victor Fleming et al.)

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