

Outline the specific visual and narrative devices employed by Chris Morris and how they feed into his overriding agenda.

Chris Morris is a media terrorist and used his Channel 4 television series *Brass Eye* to broadcast his ideas. To look at the visual and narrative devices used within *Brass Eye* that feed into Morris' overriding agenda, I will focus on the *Brass Eye Special* in 2001, *Paedophilia* (Morris, 2001). This special episode caused the most controversy of all the *Brass Eye* programmes, which makes it all the more appealing to analyse.

Paedophilia (Morris, 2001) was broadcast by Channel 4 on 26th July 2001 and was even repeated the next night despite a record number of complaints. '*...more than 2,000 people had complained to Channel 4 about the show, which was first shown on Thursday night and repeated early yesterday morning.*' (Arlidge, 2001). *Paedophilia* (Morris, 2001) aimed to satire the climate of fear over paedophiles. '*...parodied the excesses of current preoccupations with paedophilia.*' (Macdonald, 2003, p.127). Michael Jackson, Chief Executive of Channel 4, at the time of broadcast, defended this episode of *Brass Eye*, saying that it '*sought to challenge the inconsistencies in the way the media approaches and sensationalises paedophile crime.*' (Arlidge, 2001).

The DVD extras will also be discussed, as I believe these to express Morrisian excess. While analysing *Paedophilia* (Morris, 2001), I will discuss how Morris dupes celebrities and what this suggests about the individuals involved. I shall explain how *Brass Eye* is satirical and the different ways satire is expressed (irony, innuendo). I intend to analyse how Morris pokes fun at media created moral panics and how the conventions of news media are satirised by Morris.

First of all I want to argue that Chris Morris is a cult icon.

'Possibly the most significant difference between the icon or celebrity and the cult icon relates to the distinction between commodity manufacture and contingency. The celebrity is often considered to be a synthetic creation, made for the purposes of audience appeal and subject to the transient and fleeting touch of 'fame.'' (Hills, 2002, p.138).

Instead, Morris is not concerned with being famous *per se*. *Brass Eye* is auteuristic in style, which is closely linked to the ideologies of romanticism, uniqueness and art that give Morris cult icon status and his work cult TV status. He has much reticence and

unwillingness to be made into a celebrity himself, refusing to conduct most interviews without being in some form of character.

'Auteurism brings with it an ideology of quality: if much mass culture is supposedly unauthored – supposedly being generated according to formulaic industrial guidelines – then 'high culture' reading strategies intrude on this space through the recuperation of the trusted Creator.' (Hills, 2002, p.133).

Where Morris' anger and desire to be a media terrorist comes from is an enigma. He experienced a pleasant - some would say idyllic - childhood, with loving doctor parents. He did a Degree in Zoology before working for short stints in local radio - *Radio Bristol* and then *GLR*. However, he was in a *Catch 22* - equally excited by the possibilities of the media and bored to distraction by its conventions, which he now takes great pleasure in satirising.

'Brass Eye also helped split the country into those who 'got' him and those who didn't, a valuable service in a time of confused political polarities. Either you thought Bad Things - death, disease, loss - were to be skirted at all costs or you thought we should talk about them. Either you simpered over the symptoms or you wondered about the causes. Either you were Nick Ross or Chris Morris.' (Ferguson (a), 2001).

The publicity hungry celebrities and politicians who were deceived into appearing in this *Brass Eye Special*, obviously did not get Morris, perhaps only after seeing the programme broadcast and having it explained to them. So why does Morris have any justification in fooling these people? *'Because they aren't real people any more they're hyperreal. They've made the Faustian pact of being that oxymoronic incarnation, 'television personalities!'* (Self, 1997) and *'...the reason why it's legitimate to gull people like Rayner into making silly asses of themselves on television is that, in a very important sense, they aren't real at all.'* (Self, 1997).

Dr. Fox - Radio DJ can be seen commenting that paedophiles *'have more genes in common with crabs than humans.'* Richard Blackwood - comedian (!) tells us that if your children are being harassed by paedophiles, *'your children will smell of hammers.'* As well as these two, Gary Lineker - sports presenter, Gerald Howarth MP Conservatives, Nicholas Owen - ITN reporter, Philippa Forrester - broadcaster, Kate Thornton - broadcaster and journalist and Syd Rapsm MP Labour all took part in this programme, showing little intellect due to being duped by Morris.

Brass Eye is without a doubt satirical. *'Chris Morris' Brass Eye turns satire into art of a very high order indeed.'* (Self, 1997). The best satire does not seek to do harm or damage by its ridicule, rather it seeks to create a shock of recognition and to make vice repulsive so that the vice will be expunged from the person or society under attack or

from the person or society intended to benefit by the attack (regardless of who is the immediate object of attack). Here, it is paedophiles and the medias coverage of this taboo that are under attack by Morris. The basic mood of attack and disapproval needs to be softened to some extent and made more palatable. Morris does this by using wit and humour to make his criticisms entertaining, and even attractive. *'...performing a vital service to the country as its one true satirist, the only one vivaciously unafraid of what governs so much of what we do, and say, and think.'* (Ferguson (a), 2001).

Let us look in more detail at how Morris achieves this in *Paedophilia* (Morris, 2001). Innuendo is a valuable tool for the satirist because it allows him to implicate a target by a completely indirect attack. Morris uses innuendo terms to describe paedophiles, for example *'bush dodger'* and also uses indirect terms to describe paedophiles sexual excitement, for example *'gets his rocks off'*. So, without being direct and blunt with terms, Morris uses indirect innuendo, which some will get and some will not. Maybe as a safety net, if any young children happen to see the programme.

Since irony is the overriding and guiding principle behind satire, Morris uses this to achieve his agenda. The mock image of a paedophile disguised as a school is ironic. The made-up story of *'Sydney Cook'*, a paedophile, who was blasted into space in a *'prison vessel'* so he would not be harmful to children on earth, ironically also had an eight-year-old boy put on the vessel by accident.

'Well, in part, of course, for every Brass Eye spoofs the media, - but it had two other main intentions. Firstly, to make people laugh. Morris is an anti-polemicist: if he sets out to make a Big Point, he has insisted, then tries to make it funny, it won't work; the recipe must be reversed. Secondly, the intention was to make us think not about the media, but our own laughably confused attitude to children.' (Ferguson (b), 2001).

Morris does indeed make people laugh with this *Paedophilia Special* (Morris, 2001). With such props as the *anti-paedophile canisters*, which are fitted to children and release sewage over them to deter paedophiles attacking them. *A doll with a dildo in her face* – not strictly the usual topic for humour, yet Morris dares to show this image, lets us laugh, then makes us think about the real issue behind it. *Trust Me Trousers* are another prop used by Morris, apparently sold on the Internet so paedophiles can hide their erections in playgrounds.

In a mock art gallery set-up, in character Morris, dupes another individual of authority, showing him art work of a girls head on a naked woman's body, a boys head on a dog with a huge genitals hanging down and a doll with a penis sticking out

of her nappy. Morris asks the duped man which of these would be allowed in advertising and which would be disallowed for being obscene. The point here? The duped decisions seem inconsistent. There is ambiguity about what is taboo now a days and his opinions suggest we are somewhat desensitised now. Morris also highlights the confused and over protective attitude society has to its children, as we see him lock his on screen children in a filing cabinet for the night, to keep them safe.

This *Brass Eye Special* satires programmes like *Crimewatch* and news media conventions. Before the advert break within this programme, Morris adds in a mock advert for the programmes *Pedo-File*, with a voiceover saying it will be broadcast after *Paedophile Island*. Morris seeks to leave few media conventions untouched, even how programmes enter and exit advert breaks.

Morris' use of word play is also part of this satirical agenda. Using *Nu-Ass* instead of *Nu-Metal*, *JLb-8* (jailbait) for a paedophile rap artist – satire of real rap artist *Eminem*, *No Offenc* and *Nonce Sense* for anti-paedophile organisations. For comical effect and sensationalism, Morris makes sure the camera stays frozen on duped celebrities faces for that little bit too long, dramatic use of over-extended freezes. '*David Lynch used the same technique of dramatically over-extended emotion to telling effect in Twin Peaks.*' (Self, 1997).

Channel 4 postponed transmission of the paedophile spoof, scheduled for 5 July 2001, because of the Danielle Jones story. '*...a wicked satire on the media hysteria surrounding the reporting of child abuse.*' (Flett, 2001). It used spoof scenes of paedophilia to poke fun at the media's treatment of the issue. This *Brass Eye Special* lets Morris express his attitude to media created moral panics.

'Moral Panic – term first used by Stanley Cohen (1972) for a process whereby 'a condition, episode, person or group.... emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylised and stereotyped fashion by the media, the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians.' (Branston & Stafford, 1996, p.405).

'Moral panics at least generate a sense that once the source of deviance is dealt with, tranquillity and order can resume.' (Macdonald, 2003, p.107). However, Morris does not seem to suggest all paedophiles should be killed so tranquillity and order can resume, yet he does highlight this is wrong. He is not condoning it, however he seems to want to suggest how it has all been blown out of proportion, that society has become paranoid of children's safety like never before and children can no longer enjoy playing outside

unless their parents watch them (through which they could get accused of being paedophiles themselves!) and wrap them in cotton wool.

'The dedicated commitments of cult TV fans typically continue long beyond the cancellation of their favoured programmes.' (Hills, 2002, p.28). This is true with *Brass Eye*. After these programmes were broadcast, the discussion, controversy and enjoyment of Morris' work continues. The main reason why this is possible is because fans can buy the DVD. ' ; we are presented with a view of fans as (specialist) consumers, whose fandom is expressed through keeping up with new releases of books, comics and videos.' (Hills, 2002, p.29).

On the *Brass Eye* DVD, the extras – that most recent DVDs offer – continue Morris' media terrorism agenda. Partly, Morris seems to be taking the mick out of DVD extras but equally giving fans extra titbits of Morrisian excess. The menu for the DVD is done using *Panorama* style sensationalised graphics and a soundtrack that connotes urgency and importance. The colours chosen are brash and bright blues and oranges. The first DVD extra offered to the Morris fan is the *Sound Bin*. The name itself suggests Morris thinks this is useless and surplus to requirements – *bin*.

In this section the fan can watch a music style video of made-up paedophile rap star *JLb-8* with song title being '*Little White Butt*', *Funny Eyed Guy* – a strange song set to close ups of duped celebrities and MPs, zooming in on their eyes, *Cake Music* is offered, taken from the *Drugs* episode (Morris, 1997). This is in music video style again; a fast-forwarded version of the *Drugs* episode (Morris, 1997) is intercut with flashing images of *Cake* (the made up drug) to suggest being on a trip caused by taking *Cake*. The choice of using *Cake* as the made-up drug's name could also be a Morrisian statement, possibly saying that it is unhealthy foods that are the main problem and addiction in society today. The final item in the *Sound Bin* is a song in Jarvis Cocker style called '*Me Oh Myra*' a satirical track about Myra Hindley.

Alternative clips and trailers are also offered to the fan. *The Hippo Interview* from the *Animals* episode is a satire of pointless topics being debated to death on TV by so-called intellectuals. *Extended Elephant* shows a made-up campaign to help an elephant in a sexually perverse situation, satire of the mass of somewhat trivial campaigns and charities that now populate the social domain. There are also trailers for the *Paedophilia Special* (Morris, 2001) and *Science*. But the area Morris has put most effort into for the DVD extras is the *Drugs Commentary*. This is conducted by speakers who themselves sound high on drugs and might even be taking drugs during their commentary. Morris

also uses this commentary extra to ensure people are getting him. With comments from the commentators such as 'why read something on TV if you know nothing about it?' Morris is able to verify to the viewer, the fan, that this is not real and that the personalities they see were duped for satirical purposes. The *Brass Eye* logo itself is a globe squashed and distorted, to connote that *Brass Eye* is taking a look at the world in a different way to what is typical.

Journalism can usually be split into hard and soft news. Hard news is usually concerned with international news stories, rich in information, appealing to our citizenship identities and highly valued with typically male journalistic presence and readership. Soft news is usually snippets of gossip, human interest stories that kill an idle moment and address our consumerist selves with typically female journalistic presence and readership. Morris wishes to be seen as hard news – rich in information and produced by a male journalist (disguising his media terrorist persona).

'The newsreaders themselves must have a social identity and accent which makes trust socially appropriate...even now, only certain regional accents are permitted in newsreaders on British national television...[they] are always located as middle class in the accent system. Dress is also middle class, and conservative.' (Graddol & Boyd-Barrett, 2004, p.149).

Morris makes use of the newsreader/presenter conventions by appearing himself (in character) with a middle class accent and dressed in a suit, shirt and tie. His hair is slicked back and when not in the mock studio, he is shot from below to appear a figure of authority – a cinematic device. All of the conventions are used in real news media and programmes like *Crimewatch*. There are a couple of female presenters used in this *Brass Eye Special* as well. Morris seems to be conveying the fact that females are used as eye candy, they dress showing a little cleavage and sit and stand in sexualised positions. Females are not taken that seriously as newsreaders and presenters on the whole – usually only there to accompany the main male presenter who holds the authority.

'Some of the effects of naturalism derive from necessities of production. News teams usually employ a single camera – often hand held – and minimal crew. Important people of the moment cannot normally be persuaded to repeat takes in interviews with different camera angles and shots. Certain kinds of cinematic shot are just not possible: the tracking shot requires elaborate equipment, setting up and rehearsal to accomplish.' (Graddol & Boyd-Barrett, 2004, p.145).

The minimal crew and limited camera angles and shots are conventions Morris uses to give *Brass Eye* authentic and recognisable media news / current affairs programme conventions. "Head Up Display Unit" – a kind of autocue known to politicians as 'the sincerity machine.' This device allowed them to make eye contact with the unseen

audience and appear to be speaking without a script.' (Graddol & Boyd-Barrett, 2004, p.146). This convention and technology is also used by Morris when celebrities and MPs are doing their *to camera* pieces. However, some of them read from notes on paper, Morris seems to be giving the audience a huge clue that these individuals have no idea about what they are discussing.

Other media conventions Morris utilises to give his satire recognisable appearance are: the use of '*reconstructions*' – paedophiles in action, *documentary style realist footage* at the start of the programme – shots of children skipping happily, when a quote is read from someone by the presenter – it is also shown as *text on screen* – similar to programmes like *Points of View* do when reading a letter of complaint. Finally, *mock newspaper front covers* are shown and the headlines are zoomed in on. All of these conventions can be seen in real TV news and programmes like *Crimewatch*. Morris' point here is perhaps to suggest that if he can con people by using conventions then so too can the so-called real broadcast news and other similar programmes. Morris raises doubt in the viewers mind not just about how the media have created a moral panic over paedophiles but also to make us question if we can really believe what we see and hear on the *real* news.

'Brass Eye wasn't easy television. It didn't defend the paedophiles and it didn't endorse their horrible crimes. It sought to challenge the inconsistencies in the way the media approaches and sensationalises paedophile crime. Some might argue satire is the wrong format to engage in serious debate but often it's only when a punch-line has finished that we can see the uncomfortable but serious point behind the joke.' (Jackson, 2001).

I agree with Michael Jackson, who was Chief Executive of Channel 4 at the time of *Paedophilia* (Morris, 2001) being broadcast. Satire may not have been the best format to tackle this serious subject. However, no one but Morris was brave enough to bring this taboo to the spotlight. Yes, there was huge uproar, mainly in the press, but these were case study stories of actual incidents - instead of looking at paedophilia itself. Morris sought to make us question the moral panic surrounding paedophilia. He is not saying it is correct to have sex with the underage. Just because someone discusses a taboo does not mean they endorse it, more over it suggests quite the contrary.

Brass Eye is not this media terrorist's only work. His tomfoolery began back when he was working in radio. He would quietly fill his rivals' studios with helium. He gathered many P45s in a short space of time. Later, Morris became the talent behind radio's sublime

On the Hour and its TV sister *The Day Today*. Later came the darker radio series, *Blue Jam*, the surreal TV spin-off, *Jam*. The one that made his name though, was *Brass Eye*. Since *Brass Eye*, *Nathan Barley* – his first TV sit-com has come to our screens. This sit-com includes a coffee shop called *Grind Zero*. Morris has also doctored George Bush speeches on his website - thesmokehammer.com. Morrisian homages appear in Channel 4's *Green Wing* - sweet surrealism in similar vein to Morris' *Jam*. Also the exceedingly pleased-with-itself nihilism of *Nighty Night* borrows ideas from everything Morris has ever done.

As we have seen, Morris uses media recognisable conventions – both visual and narrative to feed into his overriding satirical media terrorist agenda. He is a cult icon and his works are cult TV classics, with huge fan following. So much so, his style appears in other media works as homages to the man himself. Let us hope he makes more satirical masterpieces in the near future.