

Teacher Resource Bank

GCE Communication and Culture

Coursework Guidance:

- Exemplar Portfolios and Commentaries



Introduction

These 'readings' were commissioned in July 2008. The author had previously taken GCE Communication Studies and was, at the time of writing, at the end of his first year of university where he is studying Media and Communication.

The writing style is therefore not that of an AS student and many of the references (theoretical or otherwise) he makes would not necessarily be expected from a student studying the AS course. Teachers are therefore advised to concentrate on the address, subject matter and presentation rather than the references to authors in support of the propositions or the relative sophistication of the writing.

Portfolio 1

Investigation

Chosen Topic: Site A – Looking good, feeling fit

Title: Size Zero: Fashion statement or disease

Exploration

Chosen Topic: Site B – ‘Don’t forget the songs that saved your life’

Title: Music in the Postmodern Age

Size Zero: Fashion statement or disease?

I investigated the recent 'size zero' phenomenon, looking at how body-image relates to self-identity and self-esteem. I did this by questioning a thin friend of mine and looking at media coverage of fashion models, and applying communication theory to them. These are my findings.

I am a 16 year old girl, and am therefore confronted with issues of body image every day. In magazines and newspapers, on the internet, on the TV, in films and music... it's hard to escape. Whether I want to be or not, I am a receiver of body-image-fixated messages. And right now all of the messages are about being thin.

My best friend, Amy, is a lot thinner than me. I interviewed her about her opinions on 'size zero' and the results were interesting. She said that when she sees a thin supermodel or pop star, she only thinks about how good they look and how much she'd like to be in their shoes. The act of 'gatekeeping' is taking place. Out of all the possible connotations and denotations that skinny pop star holds, Amy filters only the positive (beautiful, sexy) and rejects the negative (unhealthy, obsessed). She does this subconsciously.

Self-esteem is also a big factor in issues of body image. Coopersmith defined self-esteem as 'a personal judgement of worthiness', but really our self-esteem relies as much upon our perceptions of others as of ourselves. Dimpleby and Burton outlined four factors involved in the development of a sense of self: the reactions of others (Cooley's 'Looking-Glass Theory'), our comparisons with others, our identifications with others, and the roles we play. We constantly compare our self-perceptions with our perceptions of others, and with our 'ideal self'. But in such a size-obsessed media environment, the standards we judge ourselves by are moving ever further away. According to the BBC, a size zero figure is that of an eight-year-old. And this, we are told by the media, is the model to strive towards!

My investigation of Amy's size issues also touched on Gergen and Gergen's 'Self Maintenance Strategies'. They said we protect ourselves through mixing with people inferior to ourselves, disbelieving other people's criticisms and doing our best to shape others' perceptions of us, among other things. Amy does all of these; few of her friends are as thin as her (which makes her feel better about her body), she doesn't pay attention to people who say she's too thin and she dresses in the latest, most fashionable clothes to make herself look good.

I finally looked at whether gender plays a part in 'size zero'. Feminists say that women are often 'objectified' by men and the 'male gaze'. But I found that men are concerned with body image too – a boy in my form is a self-confessed anorexic. Although the pressure on men to look good isn't as strong as on women, it is still present in some form or another. Many of us have low self-esteem based on perceptions of the media, our peers and ourselves. And I think it's this insecurity that is at the heart of the size zero problem.

515 words

Music in the postmodern age

I admit it; I'm a huge fan of electro music. What sounds like repetitive noise to some people is music to my ears. I think it's really expressionist and groups like CSS and Simian Mobile Disco keep taking the genre in new directions. But my all-time favourites have to be Daft Punk. I love how they can sample something old and make it into something new. So I decided to explore Electro's other postmodern qualities and ask what these traits say about us as a society. This is what I found...

What some might call 'Fusion' or Cultural meltdown, I'd call sampling. This is when an artist or DJ will take the best bits of an existing song, alter them, loop them and layer them to make something new. For Daft Punk, the samples can come from anywhere; from experimental Funk to gospel to even Barry Manilow. This results in a seamless combination of genres, new and old. In fact, when it's done right, it becomes hard to tell what's sampled and what's original material. I find that really exciting, but many other people find it worrying. In her online article "Daft Punk, Daft Plagiarists?", Liz McLean Knight says sampling is "a bit of a let down... ugh, it's like... [Daft Punk] don't have that technical and musical ability, they are just pretending they do." She admits that "we're in the age of mash-ups", but she's not too keen on the way artists are recycling old material. But, if you ask me, musicians have been 'borrowing' each others' riffs and lyrics for years. And, as Kyran commented after Liz's article, Daft Punk "actually improved most of the tracks they sampled." I think AJ, who left another comment after the article, hits the nail on the head when he says "I get a bit cranky when a bunch of Year Zero musical purists get on a legless high horse about sampling... This anti-sampling attitude is essentially rockist. It's like those 'No Synthesizers!' stickers that dinosaur bands would put on their albums in the 70s."

What AJ's talking about is cultural change and the way some people hate it, and other people love it. It's like the High and Popular culture debate all over again. You've got established Rock bands still hammering away at their guitars and drum kits – elitist and essentially neo-high-culture. And suddenly these neo-pop-culture upstarts begin sampling and remixing and stealing bits of old songs to make new ones. No wonder the "dinosaur bands" were angry. These Electro upstarts are musicians for the postmodern age, and bricolage and intertextuality are what they deal in.

At the same time, Electro doesn't hide its dirty tracks. Electro is self-reflexive. The loops are clearly sampled; the synthesisers aren't trying to sound like 'real' instruments. Even the lyrics to their song *Technologic* are self reflexive – "Write it, cut it, paste it, save it / Load it, check it, quick – rewrite it / Surf it, scroll it, pause it, click it / Cross it, crack it, switch – update it." – full of references to cutting and pasting (the tools of plagiarism!), parodying exactly the sort of work Daft Punk does, while also suggesting that we all do these sorts of things every day, making us not that different to computers ourselves.

Even Daft Punk's look is self-reflexive – when they're in public, they wear "complicated helmets capable of various LED effects and metallic finger gloves" (Wikipedia), suggesting that they're just as robotic and mechanical as their music. As a funny aside, they parody Sci-Fi classics like *The Fly* and even *Frankenstein* with their account of the helmets' origins:

"We did not choose to become robots. There was an accident in our studio. We were working on our sampler, and at exactly 9:09 a.m. on September 9, 1999, it exploded. When we regained consciousness, we discovered that we had become robots." (Wikipedia)

We're not expected to believe them. We all know it's rubbish, and because Daft Punk is postmodern, we don't mind. It's all a bit of fun.

Electro music plays with simulation and hyperreality, a culture that is ‘more real than real’. Daft Punk, with its edited voices, crisper-than-crisp sound, and seemingly-infinite variations on a theme, is the epitome of the hyperreal. They construct a sound that seems perfect, that has lost all of the transience of human speech or roughness of live instruments, something mechanical and engineered. Even their robot helmets are hyperreal – androids doing the job of humans, the impossible goal of Science Fiction, is brought to life in all its shiny gold and chrome glory, LEDs a-flashing.

The Postmodernist Jean-Francois Lyotard said that “We live in a cultural Disneyland where everything is parody and nothing is more or less valuable.” That statement holds true for music in the postmodern age. Music is stripped down to its most basic function – entertainment – and we realise that it’s all just for fun, nothing serious, nothing concrete. And what does that say about us, the consumers of that culture? That we are happy to be fooled by rehashed samples pretending to be original, as long as we’re entertained?

Not quite. To me, it looks like we’re learning to take ourselves less seriously. Just like Adam Ant in his highwayman jacket and glammed-up facepaint, Electro is reminding us that this *is* Disneyland, and any distinctions between old and new, high and popular, are irrelevant. And then it goes one step further, telling us that we’re pretty irrelevant too. With its reliance on technology and glorification of machine-like repetition, Electro music decentres us all. Man is no longer at the centre of the universe, technology is. Someone could plug Daft Punk into a solar-powered CD player and it’d outlast us all. And that’s why we love it – suddenly we’re dealing with something just that little bit alien and inhuman, and that excites us.

References:

BBC music review, “Daft Punk, Human After All”, 14 March 2005

Daft Punk on Wikipedia

“Daft Punk, Daft Plagiarists?”, createddigitalmusic.com, 31 August 2007 and responses to this.

Teaching notes: ‘Culture: a Postmodernist perspective’

Daft Punk website at www.daftpunk.com

Daft Punk, *Technologic*, from the album *Human After All* (2005)

974 words

Some general guidance

The two readings are assessed using AO1, AO2 and AO4. The specification informs us that these reward the following:

AO1: the ability to communicate in the register of communication and culture

AO3: the ability to apply knowledge

AO4: the ability to work with relevant resources drawn from a range of sources.

AO1 and AO3 carry equal weighting across the two readings. AO4 is rewarded for the exploration only. The maximum mark for Section A is 40. It is recommended that the two readings are assessed together using what the specification calls “The *Principle of Best Fit*” in assigning marks to AO1 out of 12 and AO3 out of 20. AO4 can then be assessed separately, awarding a mark for the exploration out of a possible score of 8 marks.

This approach has been used to assess the following readings. Commentaries accompanying the work discuss how the marks have been assigned.

Finally, it is important to remember the eight key concepts which underpin both COMM1 and COMM2. These are:

- Communication
- Culture
- Context
- Representation
- Value
- Identity
- Power
- Code

You are also reminded that these key concepts continue through the A2 units along with an additional five key concepts which are cited on page 5 of the specification.

Portfolio 1

Investigation title: *Size Zero: fashion statement or disease*

Exploration: *Music in the Postmodern Age*

There is evidence of a strong personal voice in the investigation which is exemplified by the prevalence of the personal pronoun. The specification clearly states that the focus of the first reading must be on personal identity and this is clearly achieved here. The clear opening sets up the investigation which is informed by work on image and intrapersonal communication. Whilst not overly complex, the candidate writes clearly and fluently and is able to use a technical code. Already we can begin to see where we can reward both Assessment Objectives 1 and 3.

There is good use of personal experience in the third paragraph to develop an argument which is presented clearly and supported by application of theory (AO3). This is continued in the fourth paragraph which provides an example of how useful links can be forged with theory and everyday life. The final paragraph moves the argument on and at the same time provides a conclusion to this investigation which overall, is clearly organised and purposeful.

The exploration is well chosen and provides evidence of clear progression in both the student's ability to work with more complex material and in written expression. The engaging opening paragraph immediately sets out the aim and scope of the work. The second paragraph continues in this vein, demonstrating critical thinking and a sophisticated handling of secondary sources which helps us to begin to formulate a mark for AO4. The student provides a range of material to develop argument and the sources are well integrated and in some instances, challenged. There is a genuine sense of secondary readings being used in order to explore and develop an argument which is continually informed by an understanding of a relationship between music and its cultural context.

Awarding marks across the two readings

The first reading was judged to fit clearly in L3 whilst the stronger exploration demonstrates the standard expected at the top end of L4. In terms of AO1 and AO3 both readings carry the same weighting which results in a best fit of L4-. Alternatively, or to check this, we could mark them separately and then aggregate the marks. So the investigation being a solid L3= would be awarded marks of 8 (AO1) and 13 (AO3). The exploration, being L4+ would then be awarded 12 (AO1) and 20 (AO3). Remember that AO4 is awarded for the exploration only. Final marks awarded to the pair of readings are as follows:

AO1: 10 AO3: 16 AO4: 8

Total: 34/40

Portfolio 2

Investigation

Chosen Topic: Site A – Speak that I might see you

Title: Elocution & Identity

Exploration

Chosen Topic: Site B – The Writing's on the Wall

Title: A passenger-height reading of the tube

Elocution & Identity

My investigation is into the link between spoken language and identity. I did this by considering how ‘cleaning up’ your language, through elocution lessons or otherwise, might mean losing some part of your own identity. Here are my findings.

It’s often cited that ‘language makes us human’, and through this investigation I’ve confirmed that the way we speak and the things we say are fundamental aspects of our identity. From someone’s accent, you can tell where they live or where they were brought up. Similarly, they might have a regional dialect, a certain vocabulary tied to a certain place. And even more specifically, we each have our own idiolect; our own individual variations of the language we use.

How then does changing your accent, dialect or idiolect affect your identity?

Elocution is the process of learning ‘proper’ English, of replacing your regional or personal accent with ‘Received Pronunciation’ (or RP). RP is more recognisable as the accent of vintage BBC presenters or the Royal family. It is associated with London and the South East, but most of all, with a certain class. Semiotically, we could say RP holds connotations of the upper class, earl grey tea, cricket stumps and bushy moustaches. Speaking RP, it was suggested, gives you the passport into high society. Unsurprisingly, elocution lessons were very popular at my *private* primary and secondary school!

It’s ironic that, even after those lessons, many of us still spoke with a Black Country accent – albeit a less harsh than many of my current college peers. However, one of my friends from that same school, only two years higher, went on to study at Cambridge university, and even after a six months there, his accent has already started to change. His vowels are more open and rounded (“Ookay, yahh”) and his pitch slightly lower, more understated and, I suppose, sophisticated. Where elocution lessons failed, immersion in a world of RP has succeeded. In summary, language is often absorbed rather than learnt. And he has ‘absorbed’ a new identity, with the Received Pronunciation and Standard English lexicon to match.

But if elocution overwrites your regional accent with a new one, and teaches you Standard English over regional variations – effectively giving you a new identity – what happens to your old one?

My Cambridge pal certainly hasn’t transformed into a different person. His underlying identity is, for the most part, the same as a year ago. But there is a new *side* to his identity, given away by the fledgling RP accent and fuelled by his inner ambition to be part of a higher class. The change hasn’t been made by elocution alone, but a combination of factors including his context, peers, and desires.

In conclusion, although language and identity are so closely linked, it takes more than a change in accent to rewrite your identity. Like layers of paint on a wall, you just add a new face (a ‘persona’ – *Goffman*), but the foundations remain.

491 words

A passenger-height reading of the tube

When anybody mentions ‘London Underground’ and ‘design’, they always think of Harry Beck’s famous map. But there is more to design on the underground than one map. “With over 4 million passengers every day,” says London Underground’s customer relations manager Charles Monheim, “Transport for London runs one of the busiest and most complex transportation systems in the world.” And every aspect of each passenger’s journey is designed according to set rules and hierarchies to help make the whole system more efficient. My exploration is into how Transport for London (TfL) uses public printed media to communicate with their customers.

An obvious starting point is the one common element in every piece of London Underground (LU) printed material: the font. Originally designed in 1916, Edward Johnston’s typeface “P22 Johnston” has been refined over the decades into “New Johnston”, LU’s primary typeface. It has a large x-height (eg: the hump of the “h” and cross-bar of the “t” are very high up the overall letter) which improves legibility at small point-sizes. The perfectly round “o” and “Q” characters formed the inspiration for the now infamous “Gill Sans” type face, and hold connotations of wheels and machinery (and even the open white circles that define stations on the LU map). It is a beautiful font that is used on every piece of LU signage, from the famous red and blue station roundels (the red circle with the blue line through) to the directional signs and information panels in the stations, to the LU publicity and notices on the platforms, to the warning stickers inside the trains.

This has the effect of creating a brand which is “coherent, well co-ordinated and of a high graphic standard” (Charles Monheim). Passengers find this reassuring because it presents TfL as an open and professional business, and applying the ‘halo and horns’ formula, an attractive brand is likely to persuade them that the rest of the LU experience is of a high quality too. LU’s use of simple typography and strong colours also has a practical advantage: it reduces ‘noise’ in the process of communication. As Shannon and Weaver suggested, when a message moves from source to its destination, it is subject to noise which can alter the message’s meaning or interfere with the way it is received. The strong design of LU signage helps reduce the effect of any noise in the process, while the repetition of the same elements (same font, same layout, same colours, same logo) over and over again makes the message more ‘redundant’ and more likely to get through without any interference.

There is also a hierarchy of importance in LU’s signage systems. Station names, for example, are very important pieces of information. Without them, passengers would easily find themselves lost in a maze of nameless tunnels. So, they go in big, bright roundels, with the name in capital letters inside a blue bar across a red circle. And those roundels are repeated all the way along the platform so every passenger can see at least one through the train’s windows. To me, these are top of the information hierarchy.

Second in importance are the ‘Way Out’ signs throughout the stations. Every passenger will want to leave a station or platform at some point in their journey, and especially if that’s during an emergency, they need to get out quickly and safely. So “Way Out” signs are set in bold yellow type on a black background, beside a large yellow arrow, and repeated all along the platform wall, and all throughout the stations’ tunnels.

Slightly less important but only because they concern a more precise issue, are warning or informational signs/stickers on the trains and throughout the stations. They are all set in the same New Johnston font, in white on a red (warning), blue (information) or green (first aid) background. Here, the designers have used colours which already hold connotations with the public: we all know red means ‘danger’ and green means ‘hospital’ or ‘health’, and any

driver will know that blue road signs signify instructions (eg: the one way arrow) or non-urgent information (eg: parking). The wording on these signs is short and in a declarative tone: “No entry”, “Lower window for ventilation” and “In an emergency” (followed by instructions and finally...) “Do not take any risks”. These are often accompanied by *symbols* (Pierce) such as an exclamation mark in a blue circle alongside the blue informational signs, or a simplified image of a walking man crossed out by a red circle and a red diagonal line (an *icon* and *symbol* combined) to accompany a “No entry” sign. These, again, use common rules that we have all learned previously through our socialisation.

Lastly, there are the information posters and LU publicity which sit alongside the commercial advertising in the station walkways and platforms. They have to stand out from their commercial neighbours, because they often have something important to say about passenger health or safety. They normally feature large, simple headlines which are often arranged on the poster with one word per line, left-aligned with plenty of breathing space on the right. Simple contrasting colours and of course only one font are used. Compared to the nearby adverts where as much information is packed onto an A1 sheet as possible, the LU posters stand out as spacious and reserved. Simple visual puns are often used to attract passing customers’ attention (such as the common phrase “Mind the gap” presented, one word per line, in a huge point size, with a double space between ‘the’ and ‘gap’ – ha! – followed by some statistic on platform-side injuries).

Signs like the ones I have mentioned are taken for granted by the majority of the Underground’s passengers, sitting there with their iPods plugged in or heads in a LondonLite. But they are always there when needed, quietly (and often very stylishly) performing their job of keeping the Underground running smoothly. I just think that people should give them a second look once in a while.

References:

TfL “Corporate publications standards” dossier (issued February 2003)
Field notes and photographs

999 words

Some general guidance

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- Value
- Identity
- Power
- Code

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Portfolio 2

Investigation title: *Elocution and Identity*

Exploration: *A Passenger-height reading of the tube*

Once again we have a well chosen investigation which fits perfectly with Site A. The opening paragraph sets up the scope and direction of the investigation with a clear focus on the relationship between language and identity. There is a good application of knowledge and the use of a rhetorical question as a tool to develop an argument helps us to think of where we should be placing both AO1 and AO3. A technical code is used with some confidence and the candidate is able to forge good links with theoretical concepts and everyday life. This investigation is continually flavoured with what the specification calls *an informed personal response*. Whilst the use of the course material is not overly sophisticated, this candidate is producing good work and we should be thinking of placing it at the top end of L3.

The exploration has a narrow focus which is fine in itself and the body of the work is taken up with semiotic reading of signage. The candidate adopts a systematic approach to this deconstruction of the printed media used by London Underground but it is descriptive in parts and whilst relevant comments are made, they offer only a beginning to active and analytical readings. Similarly, sources used tend to support points already made as opposed to expanding the argument presented. In terms of best fit across the readings this is judged to be performing at L3=/- or at the bottom half of L3.

Awarding marks across the two readings

Using *best fit*, the first reading of L3+ and the second reading of L3=/- needs to be aggregated which would fall around the middle of L3. To double check this, if we award marks for the first reading of 9 and 14 (AO1 and AO3) and 7 and 11 (AO1 and AO3) to the second reading, this gives a score of 16 and 25 which when halved results in a total mark of 8 for AO1 and 12 for AO3. AO4 for the second reading is awarded a mark of 5.

AO1: 8 AO3: 12 AO4: 5

Total: 25/40

Portfolio 3

Investigation

Chosen Topic: Site A – Looking good feeling fit

Title: The Trinny & Susannah Effect

Exploration

Chosen Topic: Site B – Retail therapy

Title: Retail therapy: Why sex sells

The Trinny & Susannah Effect

My investigation is about whether our tastes are actually defined *for* us, especially by the media. I did this by looking at TV 'make-over' shows like Changing Rooms, What Not To Wear and Ten Years Younger. Here are my findings.

Firstly, I found that make-over shows all follow a common formula. The viewer is shown a 'before' example like an ugly, depressing room or a badly-dressed, overweight person. Then we see the agents of change: the interior designers, nutritionists or style gurus. Then the transformation takes place, shown in all its gory detail, and finally we are shown the outcome of the show: a fashionable, aspirational room, or well-dressed, tummy-tucked person. This made me think about two questions: how does that shallow message fit in with our theory of identity, and what happens if we change our identity like they suggest?

A key theorist I used was Rogers. He said there are three parts to our identities: the public self, private self and core self. The public self is what everyone else sees. The private self is shown only to very close friends and family. And the core self is completely private so only you know what's in there. Just like a face-lift on Ten Years Younger, make-over shows attempt to make your public self more appealing, so people will think you are pretty or successful (or both!). The interior designers or nutritionists on these shows can't change the participant's private self or core self though... that is beyond their reach.

What annoys me is that their idea of 'what's hot and what's not' is based on fashion (temporary) rather than style (immortal). The show's subjects (and the viewers too) are told how to look good this year, given temporary fixes like Botox injections and just left to their old ways. They are not told the basics of what looks good and what doesn't, so in a few years they might be just as unfashionable again. This comes back to changing to public self, but not the core self. They are not taught how to know what looks good (core self), only to do what they're told and wear what they're told looks good.

And what happens when we listen to what Trinny or Susannah says? If we change our appearance and our public self, we are changing a lot of our identity (at least the identity that other people perceive). What happens to our old identity? Does it remain within us, but never shown, now we've been taught how ugly and unfashionable it was? I'm very interested in the idea that picking up one or two signifiers from a person's actions or advice (like the fashion tips Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen gives out), we could literally assume their identity. If I look like Trinny, act like Trinny and dress like Trinny, how can people tell I'm not Trinny? It looks like identity isn't as set-in-stone as I originally thought.

488 words

Retail therapy: Why sex sells

My exploration is into the role sexuality plays in retail culture or more specifically advertising. I'll conclude with my opinion of what this says about us as a society of shoppers.

As a topical case study, I've chosen Emporio Armani's adverts for their Autumn/Winter 2008 underwear collection. You've probably seen them already, very sexy, moody stuff with David Beckham lounging around in nothing but a tight pair of white briefs. Not only have the images been featured on billboards and magazine spreads, but their sexual nature has made them the subject of numerous magazine editorials and websites. The initial unveiling of a six-storey-high banner featuring one of the images, on the frontage of the flagship Macy's department store in New York this June, resulted in a packed-out Union Square full of hundreds of excited fans and nearly as many photographers and journalists.

What I find most interesting about all this, isn't Beckham's lovely body (though I'm definitely not complaining), but the fact that this is an advert for pants. Buying pants. It's the sort of thing you leave right to the end of your shopping trip, you pick a couple of pairs out at random, bung them into the basket, and hope the cashier doesn't giggle at you when you put them on the counter. Or maybe that's just me.

Either way, Armani has turned shopping into something completely different. These ads tell us that buying pants isn't just a menial task, something you have to do unless you want to go commando. No, says Mr Armani, it's a sensual and erotic experience, and that means you really should buy only the best. And if you want to look like Beckham, and have New York grind to a halt just to catch a glimpse of your broodingly sexual image, then (surprise surprise) only Armani underwear will do.

When you think about it, sex has always been used to sell stuff. As far back as the early 1900s, when print advertising was still in its infancy, curvaceous women adorned adverts for such erotically charged items as gas cookers and tire valve caps. They wore a lot more than current fashion models (uncovered ankles were about as risqué as it got back then) but they still got the buyer's attention. As skirts got shorter and models got barer, sex was an established part of the advertiser's tool kit. Interestingly, men have only recently been objectified like this in adverts.

While that poster of Becks in his Armani briefs might gain my attention through denotation, the real work is done through connotation. The subdued lighting connotes intimacy, while the white highlights along his face and body suggest he's either hot, sweaty and seductive, or oiled up and silky smooth. The image is in black and white, connoting sophistication (this ain't no gaudy page 3 photo shoot!). If you're a woman (or a gay man; Beckham's a self-confessed gay icon), he looks sexy, exposed and vulnerable but macho at the same time... in short, you *want* him. If you're a man, he's handsome, successful and virile (those packed briefs have probably been photoshopped, but who cares, he has a pop star wife, three kids and an army of adoring female fans)... and you want to *be* him.

17

This is proved by the comments left after an article about Beckham's adverts on news and chat website buzznet.com. Jess simply exclaims "Damn! He looks amazing!" and William suggests "He should sell his undies on e-bay, I would bid any amount to own briefs worn by him!!!!" ... and while you can't buy those exact pants, you certainly can buy into the Armani brand. It's people like William that Armani are banking on. Whether it's out of lust or admiration, they'll want to replicate Beckham's look, and to do that they have to buy the pants. And the sunglasses. And the trainers. And the jeans...

The fact that sex-as-spectacle is used to sell us goods doesn't reflect well on us as a society. What, are we so gullible that we'll shop at whichever establishment the sexy man or woman on the poster tells us to? Well, yes actually. After Beckham's first advertising campaign for Armani last year, Selfridges' sales of men's underwear rose 30% and the same is set to happen again this Autumn. Perhaps the messages the fashion media is transmitting are just too strong. They appeal to our hearts rather than our heads, associating brands with abstract qualities like 'beauty, 'sex appeal' and 'success' that we all aspire to having.

I'd counter that argument with one finding I made during my exploration: we're not all gullible, passive receivers. Alongside Jess and William's statements of adoration towards Beckham's photos, other readers seemed less enthralled. "The Beckhams try too hard", says one. "He obviously stuffed another pair of Armani underwear down there" suggests another. "Yup, stuffing," agrees DQ, "Can you imagine how embarrassed his kids must be?" Mac sums it up nicely: "This man seems to be whoring himself out to anyone who'll pay to see him in his underwear. I'm already over this – old news!!"

They just go to show that no matter how simple the message, how shocking the photo, or how well-paid the advertising executive, you can't always secure a single meaning to your message. Sex sells, but it can backfire too. With every fashion house pulling the same stunt (Armani, Calvin Klein, Abercrombie & Fitch...) it's not going to be long until adverts that use sex to sell just look tacky and unoriginal.

References:

<http://justjared.buzznet.com/2007/12/10/david-beckham-armani-underwear-ad/>

"David Beckham strips off for Giorgio Armani, again", The Telegraph, 19 June 2008

"Great tackle, Becks - but have the Armani airbrushers pumped up your lunchbox?", The Daily Mail, 19 June 2008

951 words

Some general guidance

The two readings are assessed using AO1, AO2 and AO4. The specification informs us that these reward the following:

AO1: the ability to communicate in the register of communication and culture

AO3: the ability to apply knowledge

AO4: the ability to work with relevant resources drawn from a range of sources.

AO1 and AO3 carry equal weighting across the two readings. AO4 is rewarded for the exploration only. The maximum mark for Section A is 40. It is recommended that the two readings are assessed together using what the specification calls “The *Principle of Best Fit*” in assigning marks to AO1 out of 12 and AO3 out of 20. AO4 can then be assessed separately, awarding a mark for the exploration out of a possible score of 8 marks.

This approach has been used to assess the following readings. Commentaries accompanying the work discuss how the marks have been assigned.

Finally, it is important to remember the eight key concepts which underpin both COMM1 and COMM2. These are:

- Communication
- Culture
- Context
- Representation
- Value
- Identity
- Power
- Code

You are also reminded that these key concepts continue through the A2 units along with an additional five key concepts which are cited on page 5 of the specification.

Portfolio 3**Investigation title:** *The Trinny and Susannah Effect***Exploration:** *Retail Therapy: Why sex sells*

This investigation, whilst a little superficial is generally clearly expressed and it tries to use the course material in order to put together and communicate an argument. The opening paragraph outlines the aim and context of the investigation in a straightforward manner. Use is made of the personal voice in linking television make-over programmes with theory of identity. The candidate describes the formulaic nature of such programmes and attempts to make some useful points in formulating a hypothesis. However, the scope of the argument is limited and repetitive. There is a lot of assertion and opinion in this work which is not supported or illustrated with evidence from the course. Paragraph three provides a good example of this. The final paragraph perhaps acts as an indicator of the conceptual level at which the candidate is operating. This work is judged to be competent with some evidence of the use of a subject specific vocabulary and is placed in L2.

The exploration does not achieve what it sets out to do. The opening paragraph states that the key aim of the work is to explore the role that sexuality has in the culture of shopping. Instead, what is presented is a reading of advertising texts which in itself does not have shopping as a cultural practice as its focus. Page 10 of the specification makes this very clear and account has to be made of this in assessing what the candidate has completed here.

The second paragraph introduces the case study of the Armani underwear advertising campaign. The candidate recounts the unveiling of the campaign and although writing is fluent, little credit can be given here for the use of a subject specific vocabulary. The third paragraph demonstrates use of a personal voice in a narrative manner, but as of yet we have no explicit use of references to expand the argument.

The fourth paragraph begins to touch on how the practice of shopping can influence and shape ideology. If this agenda has been pursued by the candidate then credit would have been given for it. Unfortunately, attention returns to a reading of print advertising. The exploration develops by making some use of sources which are integrated with competence to formulate argument. However, even as a reading of a text, relatively little use is made of theories to inform readings presented. In conclusion, this candidate has clearly underachieved here but this serves to remind us of the importance of the focus of shopping as a *cultural practice* as opposed to a reading of the cultural texts we might encounter. So the issue here is one of relevance; advertising as in-store ambience or even as a broader influence on our perceptions of what we are doing is feasible. Reading advertising texts without this is not.

Awarding marks across the two readings

Using the principle of best fit this work was judged to be competent with AO1 and AO3 both placed in the middle of L2 and AO4 at the top of L2. Marks awarded are as follows:

AO1: 5**AO3: 8****AO4: 4****Total: 17/40**

Portfolio 4

Investigation

Chosen Topic: Site A – Good Taste/Bad Taste

Title: Fan representation online

Exploration

Chosen Topic: Site B – Retail Therapy

Title: How Apple sells a cultural experience

Fan representation online

In my investigation I've looked at the website MacDailyNews.com and the comments left by readers at the end of the articles on the site. MacDailyNews is a blog which covers news on iPod and Apple Mac hardware and software. It has a large reader base, and some very loyal readers who actively contribute in the comments section at the end of each article. Really, it's a little community, and I thought it would be interesting to see how that group communicates.

There is even a special dialect on the website, which might confuse a new visitor. After one news story about the release of Mac OS X 10.5.4 (a really minor update) it isn't long before someone asks "Is it snappy?". The use of 'snappy' goes on and on until one confused reader asks "Why do people keep on using the word 'snappy'?" An older poster replies that ever since the first OS X update (10.1) came out five years ago, they always rate how 'snappy' OS X updates are. It's a fun ritual that forms part of what it means to be in that group. If you're going to share the group identity you need to know the language of the tribe!

And on this site you're either in the Mac group or not. If you're not, then you must be a supporter of Microsoft (or 'Microshaft', 'Micros**t' etc!) and that's not a good thing to admit. Every now and then a poster called "ZuneTang" turns up, shouting about how rubbish Macs and iPods are, and how superior Windows PCs and Zune MP3 players are... "In a desperate move to sell the dinosaur iPods, the retailer stuck them on top of the hot selling Zune display. Probably still won't work. Truth hurts, doesn't it iPod lemmings?" ... The truth is they're all as bad as each other.

The people on these forums are happy to be geeks, because I suppose there is strength in numbers. The internet has really changed fan behaviour and partly attitudes towards it. This is because 'fandom' is essentially a solitary isolated activity for people with collections of memorabilia in their homes with the occasional convention at which to display it. Now the internet unites these individuals into a self-encouraging group who egg themselves on to even greater loyalty and commitment. Also this reduces the sense of embarrassment, even shame that used to be associated with collecting Star Wars figures or learning to speak Klingon. Or, in this case, being devoted to one corporation's technology rather than another's! They have made a community with shared interests but really I think they all overstep the line between being a fan and being obsessed about it all.

450 words

How Apple sells a cultural experience

I can't help feeling like Apple (makers of the iPod, iPhone and Mac computers) has transformed itself into one big, positive self-fulfilling prophecy. The better it does, the more it sells, the more people love it, and the better it does all over again. While the rest of the PC market is slowing down in the face of the credit crunch, Apple's sales have risen 50% so far this year. How do they do it?

That was the aim of my exploration: to find out how Apple's retail stores are so successful at selling their wares. And ironically, the first discovery I made was that Apple doesn't sell products, they sell a cultural experience. Everything in every Apple store has been thought-out with the sole aim of selling you not just software or hardware, but a lifestyle.

Starting from the outside, Apple stores make a good impression. Clad in bead-blasted stainless steel panels, the American stores look like big wrapped presents or something. User experience designer Jesse Garrett rightly points out that "with all the brushed metallic surfaces ... you can't help but feel as if you're walking inside a product that came off the same assembly line as a PowerBook or an iPod." The stores even have a big Apple logo stuck in the centre of their frontage, just like the logos embossed into the centre of iPod and iMac backs. A store that looks like what it sells. That's pretty postmodern.

The key word is simplicity – the concept that's always at the core of the 'experience' Apple is selling. The Regent Street store in central London is the flagship of Apple's presence in Europe. Set inside a 1890 stonework façade, it's a true cathedral to consumerism, with four two-storey arched glass windows surrounded by gold-leaf friezes. The store front connotes more of a precious ecclesiastical monument than one in a chain of many computer shops. A glowing white Apple logo hangs in each window, while a fifth is printed on a tall black flag hanging above the entrance. The brand is printed all over the façade, without a word being said ("Apple" doesn't appear anywhere), and somehow that makes it seem less flashy and more sophisticated. Simplified and sophisticated? What a coincidence, that's what the Apple cultural experience is all about.

Once you step inside, you could be in any one of Apple's 220 stores worldwide. It's open and spacious, even when it's packed out. Ahead lies the grand glass staircase that forms the centrepiece of so many Apple Stores. "It's difficult to resist the temptation to set foot on the first solid glass step," admits Garrett, "[but] once you're there, you can catch a glimpse of the demo theatre at the top of the stairs... And the next thing you know, you've been swept up to the top level". The staircase embodies Apple's design ethos: pure, glossy, minimalist and seemingly impossible. Continuing the cathedral metaphor, at a glance it, looks like customers are ascending into the heavens on thin air. Sleek but sturdy wooden tables, glass and steel displays and Italian marble flooring contribute to what its designers Eight Inc. call a "simple, efficient, and inviting space... true innovation for retail presentation and construction." Products are spaced out equally along surface spaces, headphones hanging neatly alongside iPods, iPods sitting neatly alongside iMacs. And products are organized by the context in which people use them, so "customers can envision using these products in their own lives" (Garrett).

While most stores on the high street load every available space with posters and placards shouting about reduced prices and extended warranties, minimalism rules in the Apple store. "The typical retail store is a cacophony of messages: packages, signs, and promotional material are crammed into the customer's field of vision... The visually sparse Apple Store is strikingly different" explains Garrett. A large banner hangs on the wall behind each section of the store: well designed, with the same font used in Apple's packaging, adverts, website and software, a well-photographed product shot of the item in action and

that's it. No patronising smiling models, no flashy price tags and no *asterisked disclaimers at the bottom. "Instead of having to find a place for every message, Apple focuses on the handful of messages that count." (Garrett again). It's all about transmitting only the messages that matter, without noise or distraction, to a receiver who's normally used to fighting to find meaning.

Above all, the customer comes first. Standing at the foot of the staircase is the store's 'Concierge' in an orange t-shirt. He's a study in NVC: a smiling face, friendly gestures and relaxed but smart clothing like all Apple employees. Goffman would point out the iPod on his belt and earbuds round his neck: props (or 'staging') that imply he doesn't just work for Apple but *lives* the lifestyle Apple is selling its customers. Staff are allowed to express their own personalities through their appearance, wearing jeans and Converse trainers, or baggy combats and boots. The idea is that, as long as they look friendly and creative, they'll be prime ambassadors for the Apple cultural experience.

Meanwhile, you can book free personal shopping appointments, where you'll get as long as you like with a dedicated Mac specialist (they're not 'salesmen', they're 'specialists'; remember, this is the soft sell) who will help you find the best solutions (not 'products', 'solutions'; they're selling an experience not a box) for you. There's a free Genius Bar too, where you can bring troublesome iPods, iPhones or Mac computers, and have a 'Genius' give it a once-over. And because the Apple experience is all about freedom, openness and cutting-edge technology, they broadcast an open wireless network from each store, allowing anyone with a wi-fi laptop or mobile to surf the net for free within a dozen yards of the store. Really it's capitalism masquerading as socialism – Apple has a bottom line to fund and charges hefty profit margins on its products, but by presenting the image of a free, easy-going, approachable company, it can better advertise the lifestyle it's selling.

In summary, the Apple Store is an example of entropic coding, completely at odds with the 'redundant' code presented by its competitors. While they *'pile 'em high and sell 'em cheap'*, Apple has realised it can sell quality products at high prices, as long as it fits them into an enviable lifestyle. Walking down the street listening to an iPod is a cultural experience. Editing home movies with iMovie on your iMac is a cultural experience. The stores are a cultural experience in their own right. In the end, Apple hopes that, once you see the high quality of the store's interior, you'll apply the 'Halo and Horns' theory: "Luxurious and well-thought-out store, their products must be pretty good too." And then they've got you... you've been sucked into the Apple lifestyle.

References:

"Six design lessons from the Apple store", Jesse Garrett, July 2004

Eight Inc. website, www.eightinc.com

Apple retail website, www.apple.com/retail

1145 words

Some general guidance

The two readings are assessed using AO1, AO2 and AO4. The specification informs us that these reward the following:

AO1: the ability to communicate in the register of communication and culture

AO3: the ability to apply knowledge

AO4: the ability to work with relevant resources drawn from a range of sources.

AO1 and AO3 carry equal weighting across the two readings. AO4 is rewarded for the exploration only. The maximum mark for Section A is 40. It is recommended that the two readings are assessed together using what the specification calls “The *Principle of Best Fit*” in assigning marks to AO1 out of 12 and AO3 out of 20. AO4 can then be assessed separately, awarding a mark for the exploration out of a possible score of 8 marks.

This approach has been used to assess the following readings. Commentaries accompanying the work discuss how the marks have been assigned.

Finally, it is important to remember the eight key concepts which underpin both COMM1 and COMM2. These are:

- Communication
- Culture
- Context
- Representation
- Value
- Identity
- Power
- Code

You are also reminded that these key concepts continue through the A2 units along with an additional five key concepts which are cited on page 5 of the specification.

Portfolio 4

Investigation title: *Fan Representation Online*

Exploration: *How Apple sells a cultural experience*

The investigation selects an appropriate title which explores Fandom and which sits well under Site A. The opening sets out the scope and direction of the work and the writer can communicate clearly and securely at times. The last sentence in the first paragraph is an example of this. However, there are some technical flaws in this work which would have benefited from a further proof reading.

The writer is clearly fascinated by this area of on-line group communication and there is a strong personal voice present throughout. In the argument presented the writer demonstrates a competent understanding of both group dialect and the impact of the internet on fan membership. As a result, in terms of best fit this work is judged to be at the top of L2.

The exploration is a stronger piece of work and provides an excellent example of the range of opportunities offered by this site. The title is well chosen and has been executed with skill. There is genuine evidence of real exploration here and an intelligent and close understanding of the course material.

The work begins in a very assured manner with a clear sense of the personal voice. The aim and direction of the exploration is presented with insight. The writer uses sources to inform argument early in the work and in doing so demonstrates an ability to engage and assimilate well selected references. A lot of use is made of the work of Jesse Garrett, but selections are apposite and integrated with confidence. The personal voice resonates through the work as the writer takes up and shares his/her position to references quoted. The exploration provides a fascinating reading of the store and best fit places it securely in L4.

Awarding marks across the two readings

There is an imbalance between the readings and this needs to be recognised. The investigation was judged at L2+ and the exploration L4=. This results in an overall performance at L3+ for AO1 and AO3 with AO4 marks awarded for the exploration remaining at L4=. Let's see if we can double check AO1 by marking separately and then aggregating. So AO1 at L2+ would equal 6 and at L4= would equal 12. Added up and divided by 2 gives a mark of 9 which equals L3+. Final marks awarded to the two readings are as follows.

AO1: 9 AO3: 14 AO4: 7

Total: 30/40

Portfolio 5

Investigation

Chosen Topic: Site A – Good Taste/Bad Taste

Title: Attack of the metrosexual!

Exploration

Chosen Topic: Site B – Songs that saved your life

Title: Emo: How music creates group identity

Attack of the metrosexual!

My investigation is into issues of body image, self-presentation and sexuality, looking at the term 'metrosexual' to define a man who takes more care of his appearance than our cultural rules would normally allow. Here are my findings.

Firstly, let me confess that I am a lad who considers looking good is worth the extra time in the bathroom. I'd been called many things but 'metrosexual' needed some looking into. The word itself was originally coined by a journalist in *The Independent* in 1994, and is a combination of city life sophistication ('metro') and issues of gender and sexuality. In the quality press it has holds connotations of shopping, male beauty products, toned muscles, tailored suits and David Beckham, perhaps the archetypal metrosexual. So far, so good. However there are problems!

If Basil Bernstein described socialisation as 'a process for making people safe', then metrosexuality is a dangerous influence. A whole generation of boys were brought up thinking that *proper* men had unkempt moustaches and hated shopping. Perfume was for girls. This is the socialisation that brought us the 'retrosexual' 1980s macho men. Yet less than one generation later, I was being taught through my peers and the media, that actually, it's a crisp stubble you want, and shopping isn't all that bad. Even perfume's allowed.

The work of Erving Goffman also aided my investigation. For example, it's clear that the 'metrosexual' is a *persona*; one of many façades we adopt in different social situations. David Beckham (or his PR agent!) spent time crafting his metrosexual persona that we see in the media. In *staging*, Goffman deconstructs another aspect of the metrosexual's toolkit: props. Sunglasses, diamond stud earrings, the shiniest, slimmest gadgets – the paradigmatic choices go on and on, but all are there to reinforce the persona. Even the *role* of a metrosexual is important; independent, but not necessarily single, male, professional, urban and middle-class.

Actually the more I consider it, the more I realise that 'metrosexual' is nothing more than a media-created label which allows the media to justify yet more coverage of a select set of celebrities. The serious side however, is that role models and style setters like David Beckham do provide important clues to cultural shifts and movements because they are publically expressing what many men are thinking, feeling and doing in today's society. Males, like me, of all classes are rejecting the old stereotypes and are finding healthy self concepts which include skincare products, if not sarongs (because we're thankfully not all married to Posh Spice!).

Oscar Wilde, who would most certainly have been labelled a metrosexual were he around today, once said that "One should either *be* a work of Art, or *wear* a work of Art." Now *that's* what metrosexuality is about; using the human body as an expressionist canvas, wearing Goffman's 'personal style' on your sleeve, because 'you're worth it'!

480 words

Emo: How music creates group identity

It was Gahagan who said that, “A group of people is significantly more than the sum of its parts”, so it’s not surprising that we often form groups throughout life to do more and do it better. Groups give us a sense of belonging, amongst other peers who share our values. Music, in particular, is often the basis of a group’s “common goals or interests” (Dimbleby & Burton). I want to explore the way that music can form group identity.

To do this, I’ve picked the specific context of the ‘Emo’ music, made popular over the last three years by bands like My Chemical Romance, Panic at the Disco and Fall Out Boy. Emo is a hot topic in terms of music-centred youth groups; media attention surrounds their look, their supposedly introverted private lives and the ‘trend’ of self-harm and even suicide amongst Emo fans. I’m going to explore how that group identity, with its morbid connotations, has formed.

A contraction of the musical genre ‘emotive hardcore’, Emo is most often associated with ‘emotional’ music and fans. The lyrics of Emo songs deal with quite serious topics – loneliness, broken families, troubled childhoods, or more simply, death and love. These common traits form the basis of Emo group identity. A BBC news article from this May described them as “a gloomy if essentially non-violent youth tribe”, while only a few days earlier, the Daily Mail described it as “a sinister teenage craze that romanticises death.” While death features heavily in many of My Chemical Romance’s songs, it is presented in an ironic and fantastical, rather than morbid or dangerous, light.

Indeed, My Chemical Romance front-man Gerard Way works a wry sense of humour into many of his songs. “Teenagers”, one of the songs from their latest album, pokes fun at the media and society that despises Emos; phrases like “They’re gonna clean up your looks” and “they got methods of keeping you clean” refer to the normalising process of socialisation, “making people safe” (Bernstein). “They said all teenagers scare the living shit out of me” begins the chorus, parodying the moral panic created around Emo youths. In a way, these lyrics are just another mode of communication between group members, reinforcing the group’s norms and values.

Norms are also evident in the Emo ‘look’. Emo is now as much about fashion as music. There seem to be solid rules governing the appearance of a proper Emo kid. For boys, tight-fitting (often girls’) jeans, t-shirt and badges with strong graphics, patterns or band logos, and checkered Vans or Converse trainers. For girls, pretty much the same, maybe with some star tattoos, a tight, striped top and lip piercing or two. For both sexes make-up is a must – eyeliner, mascara – just none of the pallid Gothic facepaint. This is what Goffman would describe as the Emo’s “staging”. His other areas of interest in self-presentation included “personae” – the quiet, sensitive, introverted, fiercely loyal, spiritual persona of the archetypal Emo – and “teams” – the groups of Emo kids, boys and girls, at gigs or just around town, all aged between 14 and 18 and with the same look and interests.

During my exploration it became clear that I was in fact dealing with a subculture, more than just a group of music fans. Emos deal with “rules, norms and expectations” (O’Sullivan et al.) that form outside mainstream culture. They feel let down by modern society, and music offers them an escape from the stress and mundanity of life as a teenager. The more I thought about it, the more musical subcultures I could name: Punks, New Romantics, even the infamous Mods and Rockers... speaking of which, as a BBC article wrote, “Emos have never gathered on Brighton Beach to ruck with mods or rockers. Emo fans instead emphasise their sensitivity and thoughtfulness.” So why are portrayed as a new and

dangerous strain of youth culture? One mother of an Emo girl featured in a Daily Mail article admits she used to be a punk in her youth, “but I don't feel it is like the punk rock movement. That was about a zest for living... We didn't harp on miserably about dying.” At the same time, www.emo-corner.com (an information site and forum for Emo kids) explains that “Emo is just about being sensitive and expressing how you feel about something.”

It's this misunderstanding that has made the Emo trend such a contentious topic. “Some describe it as a cult or sect”, states the Daily Mail, actually referring to itself. Emos are “naïve, misguided or just plain stupid” they say. “No child is safe” from the cult's corrupting influence. And this all from just one of a chronology of articles published by the unashamedly right-wing paper. In fact, within a few weeks of those statements, thousands of Emo kids marched on the Daily Mail's London headquarters, singing My Chemical Romance songs, waving placards stating “MCR saves lives” and “Not afraid to keep on living”, and giving out free hugs to passers-by. A red-faced Daily Mail maintained that its “coverage of the 'Emo' movement has been balanced, restrained and above all, in the public interest.”

The media focus was attracted in May 2008 when a 13-year-old Emo follower, Hannah Bond, committed suicide in her bedroom. It was also revealed she'd been self-harming. And, of course, she was a My Chemical Romance fan. That was enough to give the Emo group its 'dangerous' and 'morbid' connotations. Online networking sites like Bebo and Myspace were also blamed for helping spread the 'sinister cult'.

But really, the internet was just one “network of relevant communications” (O'Sullivan et al.) which helped hold these disillusioned youths together. Through online profiles and message boards, they created and maintained their group identity. This, along with their love for music, and goal of an 'alternative' lifestyle, created the group which we all recognise as 'Emo'.

979 words

Some general guidance

The two readings are assessed using AO1, AO2 and AO4. The specification informs us that these reward the following:

AO1: the ability to communicate in the register of communication and culture

AO3: the ability to apply knowledge

AO4: the ability to work with relevant resources drawn from a range of sources.

AO1 and AO3 carry equal weighting across the two readings. AO4 is rewarded for the exploration only. The maximum mark for Section A is 40. It is recommended that the two readings are assessed together using what the specification calls “The *Principle of Best Fit*” in assigning marks to AO1 out of 12 and AO3 out of 20. AO4 can then be assessed separately, awarding a mark for the exploration out of a possible score of 8 marks.

This approach has been used to assess the following readings. Commentaries accompanying the work discuss how the marks have been assigned.

Finally, it is important to remember the eight key concepts which underpin both COMM1 and COMM2. These are:

- Communication
- Culture
- Context
- Representation
- Value
- Identity
- Power
- Code

You are also reminded that these key concepts continue through the A2 units along with an additional five key concepts which are cited on page 5 of the specification.

Portfolio 5**Investigation: *Attack of the Metrosexual*****Exploration: *Emo: how music creates group identity***

The opening paragraph is succinct and clearly sets up the investigation which follows. There is no specific formula for an introduction but it is important that there is a clear sense of the perspective adopted, which in itself is indicative of critical thinking and an ability to work with a specialist register. The title chosen is an excellent example of the range offered by Site A topics and allows the candidate to work closely with the content and key concepts of the course.

The second paragraph is informed by direct observation which already helps us to evaluate the work under A03. It is worth noting that whilst the candidate does make use of the practice of referencing sources, this is not required for the investigation. In the third and fourth paragraphs, the candidate is using concepts from the course to formulate an argument about a construction of identity and credit can be given for this under A03. Furthermore, the writing itself is fluent and accurate with evidence of a technical code. The conclusion is perhaps irrelevant and would benefit from an increased focus on the relationship between metrosexual and personal identity.

L3+

This is a confident and well controlled reading which demonstrates the candidate's confidence with the subject matter. The title has focus and is an excellent example of the opportunities offered to students by Site B topics to use their culture as a context to engage with key concepts and debates.

The opening paragraph quickly sets the scene and introduces the aim of the exploration. Already the candidate is using a technical register and is adept at making pertinent reference to theorists (think about A04 here). The writing is fluent with a clear sense of a personal voice which is sustained throughout the body of the work.

In the body of the work, concepts from the course are used to create arguments about the relationship between a music genre and group identity and points made are evidenced using a range of examples. Specific references are integrated into the argument presented with confidence and their status acknowledged. Whilst maintaining focus on the title of the exploration, the candidate provides useful examples to support a well balanced argument which demonstrates ability to apply knowledge.

L3+**Awarding marks across the two readings**

For both readings the L3+ placement enables us to assign marks for A01 and A03 which carry equal weighting. A01 is awarded a mark of 9 and A03, a mark of 14. A04 is only rewarded for the exploration and has to be assigned a mark out of 8. With the placement of the reading at L3+ this warrants a mark of 6.

A01:9 A03: 14 AO4: 6**Total: 29/40**

Portfolio 6

Investigation

Chosen Topic: Site A – Speak that I might see you

Title: Good txt/Bad txt

Exploration

Chosen Topic: Site B – Writing on the wall

Title: Graffiti: Leaving your mark

Good txt / Bad txt

My investigation is into how my writing style changes depending on the medium I use. I'm looking at what my language says about me, and how I use it to create an identity. Here are my findings.

I chose two examples of my own written communication: a text message to a friend from my mobile phone and the written letter which accompanies my CV. I compared the two media on four different levels:

Length:

It's probably not surprising that the letter was longer than the text message, filling an A4 page rather than just 100 characters. If I wrote a letter that was only a few sentences long, I might give the impression that I didn't care about the job that I'm applying for. Also, 100 characters really wouldn't give me enough space to talk express my identity to the employer. Equally, if the text message spanned four paragraphs with an address at the top and signature at the bottom, my friend wouldn't be bothered reading it all, not to mention the extra cost to me of sending all of that data!

Form:

There are rules to letter-writing. The form of a letter is already defined; you have their address in the top left, with the date under it, and then you start with "Dear..." and a comma and then end with "Yours Sincerely" or "Yours Faithfully" and your name and signature. If you set your letter out right, the recipient will perceive you better, something that's very important in formal situations. The text message is very informal, but there are still some rules: mine starts with "Hi Tom" followed by the message and then I end it with "C ya 2moz"... these 'felicity features' make sure that my message doesn't sound like a load of orders barked at my friend.

Standard English:

The end of my text message is an example of non-standard English. Rather than "See you tomorrow", I write "C ya 2moz" because it's quicker to type and it takes up less characters. This requires the recipient to know how to decode my message, but since he's used to sending text messages, it's no problem. I'd never write that in a letter, because it's just not formal enough. The letter uses standard English and a formal register because I want to make a good impression.

Role-playing:

Goffman talked about the 'roles' we play when we communicate, and each of my written examples presents a different role. In the letter I am subordinate to the reader, polite, asking for them to do something for me. But in the text message I assume the role of a friend and an equal. Goffman said we take on many different roles each day, and this is true even in my written communication.

461 words

Graffiti: Leaving your mark

My exploration is going to explore the difference between graffiti artists and vandals, because I think there is a difference, even if politicians don't. I think they are different people, communicating the different things in the same context, and that's why people get them confused. First I'm going to look at a famous graffiti artist, Banksy, who uses 'vandalism' to make a political statement. Then I've found an article about tourists vandalising a church in Florence, and being tracked down by their government. And then I'm going to compare these to an article suggesting graffiti art is actually a good thing.

Banksy is a British graffiti artist, but nobody knows exactly who he is. His artwork is satirical of politics, culture and ethics, and it is thought that he took his initial inspiration from French anarcho-punk artist Blek-le-Rat, who stencilled graffiti over the London Underground in the 70s and 80s. Banksy's art has appeared all over the UK: from "We're bored of fish" written in six-foot letters above the penguin enclosure of London Zoo, to the famous 'Naked Man' image in Park Street, Bristol, which has now become a local treasure. In one famous piece of street artwork in London, Banksy found a wall with a wet splash down it, and stencilled in a royal guard, in the iconic red uniform and black furry hat, with his back to the viewer, seemingly peeing against the wall. His gun is laid against the wall next to him, and Banksy's own logo appears in the bottom corner. Hear Banksy has carefully chosen his syntagm (the signs used – a royal guard, a wet splash) and his paradigm (how they're arranged to make a statement), and that gives the artwork a political subtext. You could suggest that he is implying the uselessness of the royal guard, how they're peeing on the country they're meant to protect. Or maybe he's pointing out that they're not as superhuman and immovable as we're led to believe, taking a quick break from standing outside Buckingham Palace to pee in an alley. As with any artwork, the exact meaning is open to debate.

Banksy might be famous for his artwork, but most graffiti artists are tracked down as criminals; even if that trail leads abroad. In June this year, a hunt began to find Japanese tourists who had defaced Florence cathedral in Italy. An article in the Guardian says how another tourist took photos of the vandalism, and from there Italian and Japanese newspapers worked together to find the people responsible. Some students who left their initials on the cathedral walls were caught red-handed back at their Japanese university (where they did the same sort of graffiti) and given two-month suspensions. Students from another university could be expelled, and a teacher who also scrawled on the stonework could lose his job. And why is all this happening? The cathedral already employs "staff whose sole job every day is to rub out pierced hearts, declarations of love and travel graffiti", but in this case, the graffiti meant something more than writing on a wall. The Japanese authorities saw it as a black mark against their image abroad. The tourist's attempts to exert their own personal identities were ruining Japan's national identity.

We can use the process approach to analyse graffiti too. Using Laslo's formula, we can sum graffiti up like this:

- Who (vandals, people with something to say, even anarchists)
- Says what (normally nothing useful, tags, swear words, rude images)
- To whom (anybody who'll look, people going about their lives)
- In what channel (graffiti, public writing)
- With what effect (make the artist feel more important but annoy everybody else)

But people like Banksy don't quite fit into that (he 'says' more creative, motivated things than most graffiti artists), and the Japanese tourists aren't really 'vandals, people with something to say, anarchists', they just wanted to put an "X woz here" marker on somewhere they'd been. So either Laslo's formula is too restrictive, or we're dealing with two different activities – vandalism and art.

Euan Ferguson (writing for the Observer earlier this year) said two very interesting things that fit into this debate. He likened graffiti to blogs (people getting stuff off their chest in public) and while blogs are becoming more and more popular, graffiti is a criminal offence. The only difference is their context, on buildings rather than online. And that led him to his second point; what are graffiti artists really spoiling? He describes "A conference centre... built from Kleenex and grey spit, on the shore of the Thames" and "A car park built hugely, monstrously out of anthracite and wheezing cardboard" as the 'victims' of graffiti in London, and he asks "How could you possibly make them uglier?" Really, he's suggesting that graffiti art is actually creative and visually pleasing and far better than the "industrial graffiti" we see all around us in the form of ugly buildings. He obviously doesn't account for the vandalism of Florence cathedral (not at all an ugly building).

In conclusion, it looks like graffiti art is big business (especially if people like Banksy can make a living selling watered-down graffiti to celebs like the Beckhams). And when it's done properly, it has some creative merit, especially when it's trying to say something specific or comment satirically on the state of society. But when it's in the wrong place, or when it's made with the wrong intentions (to ruin a building rather than better society) it becomes vandalism and a criminal offence. The problem is, defining what's art and what isn't is very difficult; so until then, graffiti artists will still fall foul of the law.

References:

"Japan gets tough on graffiti - in Florence", The Guardian, July 2 2008

"Lessons in graffiti", The Observer, February 17 2008

970 words

Some general guidance

The two readings are assessed using AO1, AO2 and AO4. The specification informs us that these reward the following:

AO1: the ability to communicate in the register of communication and culture

AO3: the ability to apply knowledge

AO4: the ability to work with relevant resources drawn from a range of sources.

AO1 and AO3 carry equal weighting across the two readings. AO4 is rewarded for the exploration only. The maximum mark for Section A is 40. It is recommended that the two readings are assessed together using what the specification calls “The *Principle of Best Fit*” in assigning marks to AO1 out of 12 and AO3 out of 20. AO4 can then be assessed separately, awarding a mark for the exploration out of a possible score of 8 marks.

This approach has been used to assess the following readings. Commentaries accompanying the work discuss how the marks have been assigned.

Finally, it is important to remember the eight key concepts which underpin both COMM1 and COMM2. These are:

- Communication
- Culture
- Context
- Representation
- Value
- Identity
- Power
- Code

You are also reminded that these key concepts continue through the A2 units along with an additional five key concepts which are cited on page 5 of the specification.

Portfolio 6**Investigation: *Good txt/Bad txt*****Exploration: *Graffiti: Leaving your mark***

The central argument of this investigation has potential; however it remains a relatively straightforward piece of work which begins to forge links with the course material. After introducing the title, the limited scope in the argument presented quickly becomes clear. Whilst the use of side headings are by no means prohibited, in this instance it does not help the continuity and fluency of the points made.

The candidate unwisely spends too much time on comparing length in the second paragraph. As such it is largely descriptive and use of assertion is unsupported. However, credit can be given for some evident knowledge of communicative codes and conventions and their impact in the third paragraph. This extends to a useful discussion of Standard English and the language of text messaging. The candidate is using some subject specific vocabulary here.

In the final paragraph there is an attempt to apply theory. Goffman's work is clearly relevant here, it is just a pity that this discussion of role has been tagged onto the end rather than being integrated into the main argument. As such, the candidate is unable to explore and develop the scope it offers to the investigation.

In conclusion, this is judged to be competent work, with some evidence of knowledge of the course which the candidate tries to apply and use.

L2+

The candidate begins with an attempt to set out the aim of the exploration and in doing so expresses a personal point of view. The opening paragraph helps to begin to locate the level at which the candidate is operating at A04. The sequential approach offered to referencing and flags up a straightforward and rather pedestrian understanding of how sources can be used to develop argument.

The second paragraph is descriptive of the work of Banksy, the graffiti artist using secondary sources which have not been referenced, nor always assimilated into the body of the work. The candidate is unable to link this paragraph with the aim of the exploration. However, there is some use of a technical vocabulary and the course material which is used to provide a reading of Banksy's work.

The exploration continues with a summary of a story found in *The Guardian* to illustrate an episode of graffiti vandalism. However, the candidate is unable to use this material as a point of comparison or challenge. The use of the Lasswell formula (referenced inaccurately) is used crudely and does little to move the argument forward.

The next paragraph is stronger and takes us back to the focus of the exploration. The reference to the writing of Euan Ferguson is relevant and the candidate does try to comment on the point of view expressed.

In conclusion, this is competent work and the candidate does succeed in making a statement about the use of and attitudes towards graffiti.

L2+

Awarding marks across the two readings

Both readings are judged to be placed at the top of L2. With equal weighting being applied to both A01 and A03, the marks of 6 and 9 have been awarded respectively. A mark out of 8 has to be assigned to the exploration for AO4 and with a placement at the top of L2, 4 marks have been awarded.

AO1: 6 AO3: 9 AO4: 4

Total: 19/40