

# Take Me to the Moors: Mediatised Murder 40 Years on — An Analysis of Granada TV's *See No Evil*

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**Abstract**—The Moors Murders were one of, if not the most high profile murder cases in Britain in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In 1966, Ian Brady and Myra Hindley were convicted of the abduction, sexual assault and murder of Lesley Anne Downey (10), John Kilbride (12) and Edward Evans (17). The victims' bodies were buried on the bleak unforgiving Saddleworth Moor outside of Manchester. The Moors themselves have become central to the on-going fascination with these brutal crimes – they are a site of memory negotiated through the remorse of horrific events, *Lieux d'horreur*; places which recall past events with the violence and horror still present, linking the monstrous with a particular place. A prime example of mediatised murder, there are a number of cultural products which re-present the case. This paper will provide an analysis of *See No Evil* (2006), a dramatization of Brady and Hindley's crimes, trial and conviction made 40 years on from those events by Granada TV in the UK, establishing the centrality of place to the ongoing fascination and combined cultural impact of these crimes.

**Index Terms**—Moors, murders, evil, mediatised, place.

## I. INTRODUCTION

“Over the moor, take me to the moor

Dig a shallow grave

And I'll lay me down

Lesley-Ann with your pretty white beads

Oh John, you'll never be a man

And you'll never see your home again

Oh Manchester, so much to answer for” [1]

Take me to the Moors: Mediatised Murder 40 Years on – an Analysis of Granada TV's *See No Evil*

The Moors Murders are one of, if not the, most high profile murder cases in Britain in the 20th Century. They were murders which according to the BBC “shocked the nation and remain the benchmark by which other acts of evil are measured”. In 1966, Ian Brady and Myra Hindley were convicted of the abduction, sexual assault and murder of Lesley Anne Downey (10), John Kilbride (12) and Edward Evans (17). The trial judge, Mr Justine Atkinson, described them, in his summing up, as two sadistic killers of the utmost depravity [2] with newspaper reports of the trial describing Hindley as the most evil woman in Britain [2]. The victims' bodies were buried on the bleak unforgiving Saddleworth Moor outside of Manchester, England. Saddleworth Moor is an area of the Pennines in Northern England, historically part of Yorkshire but nearer Greater

Manchester. Wessenden Moor and Wessenden Head Moor where the bodies were found, form a boundary with West Yorkshire. Two other children Pauline Reade (16) and Keith Bennett (12) had gone missing in Manchester in the period when Hindley and Brady had committed these murders. It was always felt that Pauline Reade and Keith Bennett had been victims of the Moors Murderers but despite a huge search their bodies were not found in the initial investigation of the case. In 1985, Brady and Hindley eventually confessed to the murders of Pauline Reade and Keith Bennett. In a huge police operation, they were taken back to the Moors in an attempt to find the missing bodies. Pauline Reade was found, but at the time of writing the body of Keith Bennett has never been found.

Hindley, remained in prison until her death in 2002. Brady was transferred to Ashworth Special Hospital in 1985. He is now Britain's longest serving prisoner. The Moors Murders and its aftermath has been a persistent feature of the media and wider cultural life in the UK for nearly 50 years. The pictures of Brady and Hindley taken at the time of their arrest must be among the most reproduced images in modern media. The picture of Hindley – with her dyed blonde her part of a tribute to her lover's obsession with Nazi atrocities has become an iconic image, forever associated with her evil-ness. The picture, with a caption “the woman Britain never forgave” appeared at the top of her BBC obituary in 2002 [3]. The case has been a stable feature of the UK news media since Brady and Hindley were arrested. There are many contributory factors here: the brutal horror of the murders, the fact that a woman was involved, the continued search for the bodies of Keith Bennett and Pauline Reade and the fact that Hindley and Brady were on remand when the House of Commons effectively abolished the death penalty means that this is a story that has never left the news media cycle. Brady was sent to Ashworth Special Hospital in 1985. He appealed against this hoping to be returned to prison in 2014 but the appeal was turned down.

## II. LIEUX D'IMAGINATION

Nora's [4] concept of *Lieux de mémoire* examines the ways in which a “rapid slippage of the present into a historical past that is gone for good” [4] is compensated for by the focus of memory on particular physical spaces. He outlines an idea of a modern world obsessed with the past and in search of roots and identity that are fast disappearing, a loss of collectively remembered values replaced by a socially constructed version of history as a representation of the past. Nora [4] sees memory and history as being in opposition with each other. He states: “History's goal and

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ambition is not to exact but to annihilate what has in reality taken place” [4]. As an example of the ways in which particular spaces become sites of the imagination he uses the battlefields of Verdun as one example, an illustration of the fact that sites where horrific and violent events have taken place have the horror removed as part of a process of becoming a space where people come to remember the past. These ideas about constructed memory, breaking with the neo-Durkheimian tradition of collective memory as organic systems, spawned a number of further studies in France and had been highly influential in Germany and the Netherlands [5]-[6].

Rejinders [7] draws on this concept and uses it in a study examining the TV detective tour. In an ethnographic study of three popular TV detective tours : The Inspector Morse tour in Oxford, UK; the Baantjer Tour in Amsterdam, Netherlands and The Wallander Tour in Ystad, Sweden he develops the concept of *Lieux d’imagination*; places which provide a physical point of reference to an imagined world. Rejinders [7] states: “By visiting these locations and focusing on them, tourists are able to construct and subsequently cross a symbolic boundary between an ‘imagined’ and a ‘real’ world”.

The phenomena of the media pilgrimage to location of film and TV series is well documented [8]-[10]. Couldry [9] in his study of the Coronation Street tour in Granada Studios, Manchester, UK, concluded that the significance of the media pilgrimage is the symbolic boundary between what is ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ the media. In drawing on this work Rejinders[7] introduces the concept of *Lieux d’imagination* in relation to detective fiction tours. As in the case of *Lieux de memoire* [4] the locations are places where horrific acts have taken place, albeit in a fictional sense, and part of what happens on the TV detective tours, according to Rejinders[7], is the sanitizing of this horror, for example, through re-enactment of scenes from particular episodes. Thus, these physical spaces become “a memorialisation of something that never took place” [7]. He also cites Caughy’s [8] emphasis on place in the development of the imagination and Malpass [11], who argues that imagination is connected to concrete, sensory experience of place. Rather than seeing the ‘real’ and ‘imagined’ world as competing concepts, Rejinders [7] argues that *Lieux d’imagination* can be interpreted “as locations where the symbolic differences between these two concepts is being (re)constructed by those involved. This implies a cultural process of appropriation: a practice whereby different social actors ascribe – shared or contested meanings to specific places”.

Bentley’s [12] edited collection *British Fictions of the 1990s* is devoted to exploring this issue of the relationship between fiction and historical context, identifying a trend in British fiction in the 1990s aiming to explore the legacies of historical events and ideas in a new postmodern/post-structuralist approach. He sees place and historical legacy and the relationship between past and present as central to this work with the blurring of boundaries between fiction and reality as a new form of popular postmodernism. He describes this as “A form of psycho geography, the mapping of the psychological effects produced on the individual by physical environments” [12]. This notion draws in the work

of Nora [4] and Rejinders[13] and the analysis of *See No Evil* [14] which follows can be seen as a prime example of the genre. Wolfreys [15], for example, in examining Iain Sinclair’s work on the city of London sees the city as “the site through which wander the ghosts of its dead” a process through which the certainties of the present are undone.

The Moors Murders provide a good example of what Greer [16] has termed “mediatised murder”, events which actually happened in a physical space but have also become well known to the public through extensive media coverage of the events and the perpetrators over the past 50 years. In this sense the events are associated with a specific place and thus provide an example of Nora’s [4] *Lieux de memoire* but the media pilgrimage to events related to the perpetrators, Hindley’s relationship with Lord Longford and her fight for parole in the 1970s and 80s, and Brady’s recent Mental Health Tribunal appearance also give the events something in common with *Lieux d’imagination*, with the Moors themselves as *Lieux d’horreur*. They are known as the Moors Murders/Moors Murderers yet the murders did not necessarily happen in that place. Edward Evans was definitely killed elsewhere and there is no concrete evidence regarding the location of the other two murders for which Brady and Hindley were convicted.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The 2006 TV drama *See No Evil* [14] was viewed and analysed using the approach of bricolage as a research method. Wibberley[17] sees bricolage as a little used method, stating that “bricolage brings together in some form, different sources of data” and that “the consideration of the process by which bricolage is built – however emergent- is an important aspect of the overall work”.Lincoln [18] sees bricolage as “the assembly of mythic elements, motifs, allusions, characterizations and other stock materials to form stories”. In this sense then, Peace’s work also represents the approach of the bricoleur, working with a fiction of the facts and using the past to explore the present.

Works by Levi-Strauss[19] and Freeman [20] talk of making sense of knowing, using a number of sources and this is similar to McKee’s[21] idea of using intertexts about texts as a part of their analysis. Mol [22] sees a blurring of disciplinary boundaries as an essential part of the bricolage approach.

Kincheloe [23] argues that bricolage is grounded in cultural hermeneutics and this locates a research study within a cultural, social and political and his toxical social framework. He states: “Focusing on webs of relationships instead of simply things-in-themselves, the bricoleur constructs the object of study in a more complex framework” [23]. Thus, the method, argues Kincheloe [23], enables the researcher to go beyond the boundaries of particular disciplines in addressing the complexity of the real world, a mingling of material reality and human perception. This active construction of a method which interacts with the object of inquiry may, for example, include the focus (as in the case of this particular study) as a central text (i.e. a particular film text) but may also include what McKee[21] refers to as intertexts about the texts (e.g. the author’s own

thoughts on their work) plus newspaper reports of the events used in the text and written versions of the text itself or the events described therein.

Kincheloe's [23] notion of the object of study as culturally inscribed and historically situated is reflected in *See No Evil* [14]. This approach is supported by Levi-Strauss' [19] ideas on the complexity and unpredictability of the cultural domain and Lincoln's [18] notion of the bricoleur as anthropologist. The use, then, of this method to analyse texts, what Bentley [12] has conceptualised as a post-structuralist approach in his study of 1990s' British Fiction, was seen by the authors as highly relevant and appropriate.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

The Moors Murders provide a prime example of what Greer [16] has termed mediatised murder. In researching an article on Ian Brady's 2014 Mental Health Review Tribunal itself, mediatised by a TV link from Ashworth Hospital to Manchester (unlike Brady and Hindley's trial at Chester Assizes in 1966, which was held in private), an electronic search of UK newspapers (limited to post 2009) produced over 3,000 hits. The continued fascination with the Moors Murders means that there are a wide range of related cultural texts available including the crime accounts [24]-[28], TV dramas [29], novels [30]-[32]. Manchester band, The Smiths, recorded the song *Suffer Little Children* [1] quoted at the beginning of this article, on their debut album, an aural example of the *L'ieux d'horreur* [33] of the Moors in relation to the murders. The lyric "a child is on the Moors" still seems poignant 30 years on, given that Keith Bennett's body has still not been recovered.

The reflexive commentary [17] offered on *See No Evil* [14] then, draws on a number of texts and sources. In viewing the text, a textual analysis approach using a search for specific language, phrases and signs and signifiers were used, based on a framework suggested by Van Dijk [34], Fairclough [35], and McKee [21]. The idea of using core texts separated in time also forms part of the approach of bricolage [17] and resonates with the argument that time and distance is necessary to contemplate events fully. *See No Evil* [14], produced by Granada TV around the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Brady and Hindley's trial is the only real attempt to film the story and thus tells it from the perspective of The Smiths, Maureen, Hindley's sister and her husband, David (the band The Smiths have always denied that their name derives from singer Morrissey's obsession with the Moors Murders).

#### V. SEE NO EVIL

*See No Evil* (2006) is a text which, perhaps, represent the antithesis of the ideas addressed by Nora [4] and Rejinders [7]. *L'ieux de memoire* [4], with its focus on space as a place for remembering specific locations with the horrors of the past removed in order to reclaim a stained history, and *L'ieux d'imagination* [7], with its emphasis on space as physical point of reference for an imagined world, both draw on Dyer's [36] concept of utopian pleasures achieved via consumption of particular texts. In the work of

Nora [4] and Rejinders [7] place is read as a pleasurable text. By contrast, *See No Evil* (2006) is a good example of the TV crime drama as a dystopian world [37]. Drawing on the work of Nora [4] and Rejinders [7], King and Cummins' [33] concept of *L'ieux d'horreur*, encompassing a relationship between the monstrous and geographic location, is well illustrated by the role of the moors in *See No Evil* [14]. The moors – wild, bleak, unforgiving and holding terrible secrets have long been a key feature of the Gothic terror narrative of the reporting of the case. While *See No Evil* [14] uses the images of the moors to create atmosphere and places a visual emphasis on the *L'ieux d'horreur* [33] it also reveals the importance of the role of the moors in Brady and Hindley's relationship and their centrality to the eventual solving of the case.

The film opens with a shot of the moors – wild, dark, yet beautiful and the sound of a howling wind. The moors are thus foregrounded, even before the narrative of the film begins. Four captions appear over this backdrop:

- 1) This is a True Story
- 2) Some scenes have been created for the purposes of dramatization but what follows is based on extensive research.
- 3) Between 1963 and 1965 Ian Brady and Myra Hindley murdered at least five young people
- 4) They buried four of them on them on the moors

These captions function to establish the drama as based in fact, the moors again foregrounded in the final caption.

By contrast, the film then cuts to early 1960s' Gorton in Manchester, smoking chimneys and a rock and roll soundtrack representing a vibrant urban environment. The first person to appear is Hindley's sister, Maureen, pushing her baby daughter in a pram on the way to visit Myra at her workplace. As with the Gothic moors imagery, for viewers with prior knowledge of the story, the next scene in which Hindley holds the baby and Brady appears will draw attention to these events as mediatised murder [16] while for others it provides a piece in a jigsaw which will be completed as the story unfolds. Both the opening shots of the moors and the smoking chimneys and cobbled streets of Gorton establish the film as a Northern text. Although set on the other side of the Pennines, David Peace's *Red Riding Quartet*, filmed as the *Red Riding Trilogy* in 2009 [38] also uses the moors murders (and the moors) as a reference point in creating a story of violence, darkness and evil, Yorkshire Noir [33] as it has been termed.

The choice of cast for *See No Evil* [14] reflects the Northern-ness of the text. Sean Harris plays Brady, also in the cast of *Red Riding* [38] and prior to that as dark and troubled lead singer of Manchester band Joy Division in Michael Winterbottom's [39] *24 Hour Party People*. Hindley is played by Maxine Peake, fresh from Manchester urban drama *Shameless* [40], Joanne Froggatt as Maureen, previously known for her work on long running Granada soap *Coronation Street* [41] and Matthew McNulty as David Smith: pre *See No Evil* [14] work includes Ken Loach's Manchester based *Looking for Eric* [42] and post he has appeared as flawed Northern hero Joe Lampton in a TV remake (opposite Maxine Peake) of John Braine's *Room at the Top* [43].

The first half of the film is structured around the four

main protagonists gathering together in an urban space then heading out to the moors and the eventual entangling of their relationships. In the first of such scenes, set in Brady and Hindley's house, Peake appears in black dress with bleached blonde hair looking strikingly similar to the 'classic' Hindley image which has become the epitome of evil [32]. Brady refers to her as Hessy (a reference to classical pianist Myra Hess but her 'jawoh' responses suggest something darker, linked to Brady's obsession with Nazi atrocities) while he is 'Neddy' (a reference to the Goon Show, popular on UK radio at that time). His strangeness is illustrated by a long diatribe on the theme of "does a dog have a soul?" and we learn of his interest in the Marquis de Sade, something which he eventually encourages David Smith to explore.

They then adjourn to Brady's beloved moors – "I don't get it" says David Smith of his obsession with the place. "This place owns my soul" he tells him. Again there are shots of rustling grass, a howling wind and an atmosphere of darkness and secrecy. Brady takes a picture of Hindley smoking, sitting on a rock. Again, some viewers will know that this is a photograph of a grave, intertexts about the text having been available for nearly 50 years. Brady dances shirtless. Other viewers will be unsure as to why the moors own Brady's soul at this point but, as the plot unfolds, it transpires that Pauline Reade, a girl who lived next door to Brady and Hindley in Gorton has been missing for two years and the next visit to the moors takes place in Myra's Mini Traveller; "you never know when you might need the extra baggage capacity" she tells them. A clue. The trip follows the death of the Smiths' daughter from natural causes and as Brady and David Smith go for a stroll Myra and Maureen discuss death surrounded by the darkness of the moors and Myra states "it's the silence that gets you isn't it?", another revelation as clue.

The next visit to the moors takes place following the Smiths' move to Underwood Court on the Hattersley estate, just outside Manchester, near to where Brady and Hindley are now living in Wardle Brook Avenue. Long ranging shots take in the scenery while Brady and David Smith sit on a rock. "I don't believe in all that sin and mumbo jumbo" Brady tells Smith as he takes pictures with a new camera. Like the previous picture of Hindley smoking the pictures taken on the moors will prove instrumental in their capture and in locating bodies as proof of their acts and part of their voyeuristic activity. In the meantime the police have seen possible links between the disappearance of Reade, a missing girl from Ancoats, Lesley Ann Downey, and a boy from Longsight, Keith Bennett.

As the relationship between the four main characters evolves, particularly that of Brady and David Smith, more is revealed. Again it is the moors that provide the setting. "We love it in any weather, don't we Neddy?" states Hindley as they hold a picnic on what will turn out to be a grave of one of their victims. Brady had been trying to involve David Smith in a scheme to rob a bank and brings a gun, shooting a sheep to illustrate his ability to kill. He tells David Smith that killing is the ultimate pleasure that he has killed three or four and hasn't finished yet. "You stood on the graves" he tells him. "Such shit you talk" is the response. This scene of self-revelation against the backdrop

of the moors brings the first half – pre-discovery – to a close. Brady makes no attempt to explain what he has done what he has done and, despite the intervening fifty years and thousands of words written, their acts are still conceptualised as pure evil or Beyond Belief, to quote the title of Emlyn Williams' [26] book on the topic. Elsewhere [44] the authors have documented the rise of profiling and the production of a taxonomy of serial killers. Modern day serial killer dramas such as *Criminal Minds* [45] place profiling and thus explanations of the hows, whys and motivation of serial killers as central to the text, thus offering a logical explanation for events and providing closure for the audience. The reality of serial killing, it can be argued, is quite different [44] and the lack of public closure and the continued mediatisation of the Moors Murders is a case in point. David Peace's work on the Yorkshire Ripper, for example, attempts to explain why events happened "in that place at that time" [46] but he himself, admits that he came to no conclusion. The late Gordon Burn published *Somebody's Husband, Somebody's Son* [47] in 1984 after extensive research on the Yorkshire Ripper, including spending time with his family and similarly *Happy Like Murderers* [48] was the result of hundreds of hours of interviews and research on the Fred and Rosemary West killings. Again, Burn concluded, in both cases, that he had no idea of motivation or explanation for what happened.

In the information age, the "pure evil" thesis seems like a throwback to the dark ages, yet what *See No Evil* (2006) does is tell a well-known story through the eyes of people who suffered greatly through their involvement (the concluding section of the film documents the struggles of the Smiths to come to terms with their involvement, Maureen eventually dying of a brain tumour aged 34) and juxtaposes the ordinary with the extraordinary, the natural setting of the moors providing a stark stage on which unnatural events play out.

The second half of the film reverts to detective story format, triggered by events of the evening of October 6, 1965, when Myra takes David Smith over to their house under false pretences and he witnesses Brady murdering Edward Evans with an axe. Hindley looks on, the voyeurism at work in their relationship, again emphasised. He helps them clear up, acknowledges Hindley's involvement and then returns home. The Smiths go to Hyde Police Station the next morning and the plot unfolds amidst disbelief and denial by all four of the main characters. The female as child killer and the challenge posed to socially constrictions of femininity [49] is central to the conceptualisation of Hindley as the most evil woman in Britain or, at best, under Brady's spell and is central to the narrative of their story.

However, it is the moors as *L'ieux d'horreur* [33] that provide the central clues to the case. In searching Brady and Hindley's house they find pictures of the moors and the now infamous pictures of Hindley sitting on and looking down at what are possibly graves and, as Smith recounts their trips to the moors to the detectives, they realise that Hindley drives and Brady does not, thus implicating her in the movement of bodies.

The officer leading the investigation, takes David Smith

up to the moors to try and identify the places that the photographs were taken. “You don’t really think there are bodies up here?” asks Smith.

The discovery of a suitcase in a left luggage locker containing pictures and audio tapes of the torture of Lesley-Ann Downey plus further pictures of Brady and Hindley on the moors result in a number of scenes in which officers and volunteers scour the moors using long sticks to poke the ground looking for human remains, initially searching in the wrong place until further photographs help the police to identify Saddleworth Moor as the possible burial site. These are iconic images recreated for the TV drama from news footage and pictures from the 1960s, events referenced in The Beatles’ *A Day in the Life* [50] as Four Thousand Holes in Blackburn, Lancashire. These scenes and those which follow documenting the discovery of the bodies of Lesley-Ann Downey and John Kilbride draw attention to the moors as *L’ieux d’horreur* [33], the long tracking shots of the bleak environment and the howling wind creating an atmosphere of darkness and death.

The final part of *See No Evil* [14] documents the interrogation and trial and then the impact on the lives of the Smiths but the closing scene returns to Saddleworth Moor – it is the last thing we see with a postscript to the story which notes that Pauline Reade’s body was finally discovered in 1987 but that Keith Bennett’s has still not been recovered.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed a cultural text which outlines a series of events once described as the benchmark by which other acts of evil are measured [2], the acts themselves (The Moors Murders) and the perpetrators (The Moors Murderers) being characterised with reference to a particular space and place. Using the approach of bricolage, bringing together ideas from urban geography, sociology and post-structuralist analysis of fictional texts, the authors have used their own concept of *L’ieux d’horreur* [33], a place related to specific horrific events, both real (drawing on Nora’s [4] work) and culturally represented and imagined (drawing on Rejinders’ [7] work on detective fiction). As Brady himself pointed out at his recent mental health tribunal “Wuthering Heights and all that” means that the moors are culturally inscribed with images of darkness and death but Saddleworth Moor in particular will forever remain a site of memory associated with evil, *L’ieux d’horreur* [33] a place which recalls past events with the violence and horror still present.

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