TEXT A

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/may/26/scarlett-johansson-james-franco-queerbaiting-queer>

‘People raised hell’: why shouldn’t Scarlett Johansson and James Franco play queer characters? Mon 26 May 2025

If big names can get films telling fascinating queer stories green-lit, does their own sexuality really matter? In this extract from his new book, Ryan Gilbey takes a fresh look at the ‘queerbaiting’ conundrum.

I first met Justin Kelly in 2008, when I flew to Los Angeles to interview director Gus Van Sant. As I walked into the screening room where Van Sant was watching an early version of his film Milk, I tripped over his dog, Milo, who was sleeping on the floor. Justin Kelly, who was looking after the dog, witnessed the whole thing. I’ve always blamed him a little for that embarrassing moment.

At the time, Kelly was working as an editorial assistant on Milk, a film starring Sean Penn as Harvey Milk, a gay politician who was assassinated, and James Franco as his partner. Later, Kelly became a director himself and worked with Franco again on two films where Franco played gay men based on real people: I Am Michael and King Cobra. Because of this, Kelly has been part of the conversation around whether straight actors should play LGBTQ+ characters.

“People criticized James, but he helped make these films possible,” Kelly says during a video call from his mother’s house in Arizona. “Some journalists didn’t like it, but I thought he did something good by supporting queer stories.”

The term “queerbaiting” wasn’t widely used when I Am Michael came out in 2015. But Kelly strongly disagrees with the idea. “Since forever, queer people have wanted to be accepted,” he says. “Now we have famous people supporting us, and some people are angry about that? It doesn’t make sense.”

He brings up the case of Scarlett Johansson, who was cast to play a transgender man in a film called Rub & Tug. After backlash, she dropped out and the movie was never made. “That film could have inspired people,” says Kelly. “Big names help get indie films made. We need visibility.”

Kelly later directed Kristen Stewart in JT LeRoy, a film based on a true story about a woman who pretended to be a male author. Stewart plays Savannah Knoop, a non-binary artist who took on this false identity. At the time she joined the film, Stewart had not come out publicly. “She brought her girlfriend to our meeting,” Kelly remembers. “I knew she was gay before everyone else did.”

Stewart has since chosen many roles that explore identity and queerness, like her characters in Certain Women, Spencer, and Love Lies Bleeding. In JT LeRoy, her performance shows the struggle of hiding one’s true self. Kelly says Stewart understood this deeply because she was going through something similar in real life.

Kelly believes her role in Love Lies Bleeding is the closest to who she really is. “She plays a strong, confident queer woman,” he says. “I think she had been waiting to show that side of herself.”

Looking back, Kelly sees that both I Am Michael and JT LeRoy are about identity and public image. “I’m not sure if James Franco is gay,” he says, smiling. “But honestly, I think everyone is a little bit gay.”

Adapted from the Guardian. 500 words

TEXT B

<https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2025/may/26/holland-the-netherlands-new-wave-of-golf-clubs>

‘**I thought it was a yuppie sport’: Holland’s new wave of golf clubs**

Jan van de Minkeles, 25, never thought he would play golf. He comes from a small village in the Netherlands and used to see golf as a sport for wealthy businesspeople. “I thought it was for yuppies,” he says with a smile. But now, he’s taking lessons and enjoying the game.

Van de Minkeles is part of a growing group of young Dutch people who are changing golf’s image. In the past, golf in the Netherlands was seen as a sport for older men in exclusive clubs, wearing formal clothes. Today, that’s starting to change.

According to the Royal Dutch Golf Federation (NGF), around 430,000 people in the Netherlands now play golf. Still, many players are older, so the NGF launched a campaign called “Welcome to the Club” to attract younger people and more women between the ages of 25 and 50.

“We have something really special with our golf courses, but we haven’t shared that enough,” says Niki Wijnen, a spokesperson for the NGF. “People often think golf is only for rich old men, but in the Netherlands, that’s simply not true. If we want golf to stay popular, we need to attract young people and new talent.”

One club taking this seriously is Hollandsche Golfclub Almkreek. Owners Hans Schaap and Joris Slooten are older, but their goal is to make golf more open and modern. “We don’t have a dress code,” Slooten explains. “You can wear normal clothes and just have a good time. Our motto is gewoon gezellig – just good fun.”

Schaap bought the club in 2018 and also runs 23 others. Together, they manage hundreds of machines to keep the courses in good shape. They made changes to make golf more welcoming. Now, people pay only for what they use, lessons are more affordable, and clubs can be borrowed for free. “Most people love it,” says Schaap. “Only a small group had to pay more or leave.”

He believes golf’s image is improving, especially compared to the past. “When I used to say I worked in golf, people thought it was all snobs and checkered trousers,” he says. “But now it’s more relaxed and accessible.”

Golf also has clear health benefits. Dr. Andrew Murray, a researcher at the University of Edinburgh, says golf is great for people of all ages and fitness levels. “It helps people stay active, connect with nature, and improve mental and physical health,” he explains.

Some clubs are trying other creative ideas too. In Limburg, one course added a golf museum and opened paths for walkers and tourists. Local historian John Ott says the Dutch were already writing about golf-like games as far back as 1545.

Back at Almkreek, things feel lively. Young workers cut the grass, the restaurant is full, and people wear casual clothes instead of the traditional golf outfit. Carin Lankhaar, 65, is new to the sport. “I love the nature and animals, not just the game,” she says. “Everyone is welcome – it’s not elitist anymore.”

She laughs, ready to play more: “Nou, hupsakee!” – let’s go!

Adapted from the Guardian 500 words

TEXT C

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/23/integrated-british-society-immigrants-elite>

***The least ‘integrated’ part of British society isn’t the immigrants – it’s the elite*** by Andy Beckett

Keir Starmer’s recent comments on immigration have sparked a political storm. Yet despite all the disagreement, there was one point most people seemed to support: the idea that newcomers should integrate. Starmer said, “When people come to our country, they should also commit to integration.” It’s a view many hold, even if few question what “integration” really means — or who it applies to.

The concept sounds simple and positive. Mixing with people different from ourselves can enrich lives, reduce loneliness, and make society more equal. But if integration is so widely valued, why does British society remain so divided?

Britain has always had strong internal divisions — by class, wealth, education, geography, even by accent or clothing. Since the 1980s, inequality has grown further. Wealth has become more concentrated, especially in the south of England, while northern regions have fallen behind. According to the Economics Observatory, England now has some of the worst regional inequalities in the developed world.

These divides go beyond geography. Inside cities, too, communities are often separated. People feel isolated — a recent poll showed 44% of Britons sometimes feel like strangers among their neighbours. Much of modern life promotes separation: cars, phones, headphones. The wealthy increasingly live behind gates and walls, using private services and avoiding contact with the wider population.

In this context, it is odd that “integration” is only demanded of immigrants. Politicians rarely ask the wealthy or the socially isolated to mix more. Starmer’s promise to build “a nation that walks forward together” includes some encouraging policies — like ending tax breaks for the rich and taxing private schools. But his message on integration still targets newcomers alone.

This overlooks a key point: immigration is already an act of integration. Moving to another country means adapting to a new language, culture, and environment — whether you like it or not. Even if some immigrants keep to themselves at first, most end up mixing with locals over time, whether through work, school, or daily life. The idea that immigrant communities are closed or unwilling to engage is largely a myth — especially compared to the self-isolation of some native-born Britons.

Starmer, who has spent his life in multicultural cities, likely understands this. He has said that migration is part of Britain’s history and that diversity is something to celebrate. But politically, Labour still seems to follow the narrative set by right-wing voices: that immigration causes division, and that the solution is for immigrants to try harder to fit in.

Yet the government’s own surveys suggest a different picture. Every year, the “Community Life Survey” asks Britons whether people from different backgrounds get along. The answer has consistently been yes: over 80% agree. So while the media often paints a picture of a divided “island of strangers,” reality tells a more hopeful story.

Last summer, in Brexit-voting King’s Lynn, the author stumbled into a Portuguese café serving tea and spirits. It wasn’t a picture of full integration — but it was a symbol of peaceful coexistence. And sometimes, that’s enough.

Adapted from the Guardian – 500 words

TEXT D

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/24/ai-britain-creative-industries-government-data-bill>

***We have a chance to prevent AI decimating Britain’s creative industries – but it’s slipping away*** by Beeban Kidron

The government has doubled down on a plans that would allow mass cultural theft, but we are fighting it at every stage.

For months now, legends of music, literature, product design, the visual arts and more have been sounding the alarm about the British government’s plan to undermine copyright law. The fight kicked off when the government launched a consultation into regulating artificial intelligence with its own “preferred” outcome: letting AI companies steal copyrighted work by default unless the owners of that work “opt out”. But opting out is impossible to do without AI transparency. The plan is a charter for theft, since creatives would have no idea who is taking what, when and from whom.

When the government stoops to a preferred outcome that undermines the moral right to your work and income, you might reasonably be angered. As Elton John said last weekend: “The government have no right to do this to my songs. They have no right to do it to anybody’s songs, or anybody’s prose.” His is just one voice among the thousands of British creators who are crying foul.

My colleagues and I from all sides in the House of Lords have acted where the government has refused, adding emergency transparency measures to the legislation – the data (use and access) bill – that is passing through parliament. Our amendment would allow existing copyright law to be enforced: copyright owners would understand when, where and by whom their work was being stolen to train AI. The logic being that if an AI firm has to disclose evidence of theft, it will not steal in the first place. These measures, voted for in ever-increasing numbers by lords from all parties – and notable grandees from the government’s own backbenches – were voted down by a government wielding its significant, if reluctant, majority.

But the Lords’ resistance did finally bring the secretary of state for technology, Peter Kyle, to the dispatch box on Thursday. Here, he bewilderingly admitted that “much content has already been used and subsumed by AI models, usually from other territories and under the current law” – meanwhile taking out the Lords’ provisions that would prevent that very theft. He mentioned his love for Kate Bush, one of more than 400 people, along with Paul McCartney and Ian McKellen, who signed a letter to the prime minister asking for a change of policy. But his policy resolutely remained unchanged. No transparency, no timeline and no help for creatives.

Again, this week, the government missed its chance to get this right. To support one of our greatest industrial sectors, which provides 2.4m jobs and contributes £126bn and a whole lot of joy to the UK’s four nations. Not one MP from any side came to the government’s rescue. On the contrary, Kyle was subjected to a barrage of interventions that expressed an emergency he was failing to deal with. As one MP told me afterwards: “One of our greatest industrial sectors is on fire and ministers are having a picnic on the lawn with the arsonists.”

With its enormous majority, the government will be able to bully its way to victory on any given bill. But a win for the government is a catastrophe for the creative industries and Britain’s indigenous AI economy (which, incidentally, has been critical of the government’s approach for the way it favours the larger US players).

Britain’s creative industries embody our history, they hold our shared truth and they tell our national story. A nation that gives away its capacity to tell its own story is a fragile place indeed. But the fight isn’t over yet – the data (use and access) bill returns to the Lords on 2 June.