

# Screen Studies Training for Postgraduate Research Students

## Essays on Methodologies and Research Practices

This collection of essays explores critical and methodological approaches to Screen Studies. It includes authored reflections in different styles on research in the areas of textual analysis, practical research methodologies, and advice ranging from producing conference papers to having your work published. This section cannot hope to reflect the wide variety of approaches to PhD research across the diversity of disciplines that make up Screen Studies, however it does aim to offer some critical and practical insights into the research process itself.

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## Textual analysis and film

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Textual analysis – is a film a text? No, I don't think so. Using the words text and textual implies that films are written, but this only works as a metaphor and usually only informally. Colleagues who teach filmmaking sometimes talk about students learning film language or film grammar, but there is no lexicon of film. We cannot point to something as an example of film syntax; a close-up, for example, is different every time depending on what it is a close-up of. Films are made by people, they are filmed; but that does not mean they are texts. It makes more sense to talk of artistic conventions or film conventions.

By saying every close-up is different, I am emphasising the dramatic features of the medium of film. What is the medium of film? Well, answers to this question often focus on photographic representation, but we also need to think about dramatic representation. It can be difficult to separate these two. It is easy to think that we can describe film narration, that is film storytelling, in terms of the properties of the sound and image tracks; we think we can explain film narration by referring to camera angles or framings, camera movements, compositions, editing, etc. However, to do this is to ignore the fact that what is photographically represented is also already dramatically represented. A shot of Gwyneth Paltrow in *The Talented Mr Ripley* is a photographic representation of her; but she is already dramatically representing a fictional character.

When we see characters on screen, we also see actors; and we respond to the actor as much as we respond to the character, which is a way of stating that the character does not exist without the actor. John Wayne's distinctive voice, gestures, postures and presence dominate our understanding of *The Searchers* and the film is built upon our recognizing the relationship between star and character. Why is this important? Because it rejects arguments about film that seek to persuade us that film presents us with an illusion of reality. And there are, as Stanley Cavell notes, theories 'that assume that we do not know the difference between projections of things and real things' (Cavell 1994/1981: 62).

We should not underestimate the importance of this claim. If we are able to remain involved with a film's fictional world – to suspend our disbelief if you like – while staying conscious that it is John Wayne who plays Ethan Edwards, then we cannot accept as accurate theories which oppose films that disrupt the means of representation against films that apparently do not. As Victor Perkins explains: 'Because the [fictional] world is created in our imaginations it need not suffer damage from any exposure of the devices that assist its construction. We can, if we will, glide over inconsistencies and absorb ruptures. It is not difficult to see the image on the screen simultaneously as a world and as a performance. We do it all the time' (Perkins 2005: 17).

The primary area of creating meaning is through the actors and their action. Therefore, analysing the dramatic representation is equally as important as analysing the photographic representation. It is important that you interpret performances and that you try to describe the apparently indefinable things we attribute to actors and their performances. Films record performances and organize performances as part of their thematic patterns and structures. Most performances rely on and transform everyday modes of perception. Patient attention to a film and its actors brings the satisfying rewards of naming our feelings and our experiences; and as Marian Keane argues, the only way to refine this naming of our ideas about what becomes of human beings on film is to examine our experience of and our relation to specific film stars 'as they appear and are studied in particular directors' films' (Keane 1993: 37). In this way, we will be addressing 'film's specific

way of presenting human beings as displaced and its revelation that in our own experience of reality, we cannot escape the knowledge of (our own) displacement' (Keane 1993: 37).

Selecting something as significant from a film involves judging its value in relation to the whole; it involves thinking about part/whole relationships. We automatically make value judgements when we pick out a moment as a significant to us – the next step is to try to articulate why this may be so. There is a difference between quoting from a novel or poem and quoting from a film. Every example has to be described because it is impossible to quote films as you might quote novels or poems – you effectively have to translate from one medium, film, to another, language. Therefore, description needs to evoke enough of the context for it to be effective as an example. In his essay on Raphael's *Madonna della Sedia*, Ernst Gombrich traces the history of the use of 'harmonious whole' as a term and as a criterion of value judgement in art criticism. Of the painting, Gombrich writes: 'We are not aware of confronting a *tour de force* in composition; what we admire is an image of serene and relaxed simplicity' (Gombrich 1985: 70). Gombrich finds the origin of this valuing of unity and integration in Aristotle's metaphor of the organism in his *Poetics*. The idea of wholeness is linked with the idea of visual beauty that belongs to an organism. Gombrich's riposte to this reliance on harmonious whole as a criterion of value is that every wallpaper pattern forms a coherent whole. For this reason, as Gombrich points out, formal analysis risks banality: there are countless paintings organised on simple principles of diagonals or triangles that have little interest. Similarly, there are any number of films which begin with an equilibrium, then disrupt it and finally restore it; but observing that this is the case tells us little about a film's particular achievements.

When it comes to criticism, articulating levels of meaning or describing parts of a harmonious whole risks tearing what Gombrich calls the 'web of ordered relationships'; Gombrich notes that 'as soon as you single out a certain relationship of forms you upset precisely that balance between all the relationships of which you want to speak' (Gombrich 1993: 73). Further on, he emphasises: 'It is partly a matter of taste and tact how far we want to go in articulating these levels of meaning, for they, like all others, can only be singled out at the risk of tearing that miraculous gossamer web of ordered relationships which distinguishes the work of art from the dream' (Gombrich 1993: 79-80). This is important because it suggests the inevitable partialness of art criticism, whether of films or paintings or poems. Another famous critic is equally cautious about criticism. R.P. Blackmur, writing in 1935 in 'A Critic's Job of Work', writes: 'Any single insight is good only at and up to a certain point of development and not beyond, which is to say that it is a provisional and tentative and highly selective approach to its field. Furthermore, no observation, no collection of observations, ever tells the whole story; there is always room for more, and at the hypothetical limit of attention and interest there will always remain, quite untouched, the thing itself' (Blackmur 1961: 378-379).

Blackmur's observations about the purpose of criticism are worth quoting at length. He opens by noting: 'Criticism, I take it, is the formal discourse of an amateur. When there is enough love and enough knowledge represented in the discourse it is a self-sufficient but by no means an isolated art. It witnesses constantly in its own life its interdependence with the other arts. It lays out the terms and parallels of appreciation from the outside in order to convict itself of internal intimacy; it names and arranges what it knows and loves, and searches endlessly with every fresh impulse of impression for better names and more orderly arrangements. It is only in this sense that poetry (or some other art) is a criticism of life; poetry names and arranges, and thus arrests and transfixes its subject in a form which has a life of its own forever separate but springing from the life which confronts it. Poetry is life at the remove of form and meaning; not life lived but life framed and identified. So the criticism of poetry is bound to be occupied at once with the terms and modes by which the remove was made and with the relation between – in the ambiguous stock phrase – content and form; which is to say with the establishment and appreciation of human or moral value' (Blackmur 1961: 372).

My work is inductive, by which I mean that I study films and make notes about things that seem important. I then reason from the particular cases to more general conclusions. Inevitably, this process involves a process of description and it can be hard to separate description from commentary or interpretation. However, it is always worth doing this.

How to get from description to interpretation or commentary is not so simple; but it is better to separate them out. Once you have separated commentary from description, you will be in a position to think about what interpretation your descriptive examples are serving. Description should always serve an argument – it's up to you how much you want to tell your reader exactly what your argument is.

Anthony Pugh, giving advice to students writing about Beaumarchais' *The Marriage of Figaro*, has this to say on the topic:

'One's first experience of a masterpiece should leave one with a feeling that one has encountered something new and important, but that one has absorbed only a fraction of what it has to offer. One's impression of its greatness is genuine, but imprecise. It should be perfectly natural to want to make it more precise, to learn what it is one has glimpsed, and this can best be done pen in hand. Quite apart from any notes made during the first reading, one should try to explore one's own response to the work as a whole so that (to say the least) one is able to share one's enthusiasm with other people ... Advance by asking yourself questions. What incidents and features stand out? Flip over the pages, what else strikes you? When your mind has regained contact in this way, ask another series of questions in an attempt to put some semblance of order into your ideas. These questions can be of two kinds. One kind will be concerned entirely with the text, to ensure that you are genuinely reflecting on the book and not on a vision deformed by your memory (on one reading you can't expect to retain all that much). The other kind can be more critical, and here you might go back to your first untutored reactions and see if you still think it important that the characters are "poor" or whatever. You will now be able to back up your view with precise examples, and probably make it considerably more nuanced. But the task is still not finished. By now you should be asking yourself how far what you say affects the general assessment of interpretation or assessment of the work, and here another series of questions suggest themselves: what moments, what themes, seem really important? what is it all really about? what am I leaving out in my account of it?' (Pugh 1968: 63-64).

Pugh's suggestions are very good: think about what moments and themes seem really important. He makes other relevant observations. First, he remarks that the initial version of one's response to something is very important. Always attempt to write this down. Although you should allow for new ideas and revisions to change this, the existence of a concrete, written-out response to a film or a piece of music or a poem will enable you to use new ideas 'creatively not just passively' (Pugh 1968: 65). Second, think about an opponent's argument – what might his or her argument be? Could it be refuted point by point, or by questioning the premise? Lastly, think about how your own interpretation might be criticised as inadequate.

What about the difficulty of interpreting some things? Contemporary art, for example? Even within works of art that use fragmentation as a key part of their internal or inner logic, one can still ask what the meaning, value or interest is and how might this be found in various resonances in the work of art. One can still think about the consistency with which principles have been worked through. Furthermore, all arguments can be supported with an incisive or detailed reference. You should be able to state your criticism clearly and defend it by argument.

Criticism can be thought of as a process of reminding people of things, drawing attention to a particular way of seeing a film, thinking about the significance of a gesture or a framing. It is not enough in writing about films to identify patterns without saying anything about their meaning or their reference to the world beyond the film. The artistic merit of a film lies not in its properties of

design or technical achievements, but in its 'expressive capacity' (Sharpe 2004: 16).

Don't forget our reasons for writing criticism. Victor Perkins has spoken of a 'grateful criticism'. He reminds us that criticism is not measurement and hierarchy; the critic is not a dictator. Furthermore, he notes, criticism does not fix verdicts; it simply 'acknowledges one's place within a community of film lovers'.

Lastly, here is a quotation from the philosopher R.A. Sharpe's book, *Philosophy of Music*: 'nothing, of course, that a philosopher can do enriches our lives in the way that the best of art does. No philosopher, however eminent, who is realistic about his subject and his achievements would think them worth the value of a minor but lasting lyric, an unforgettable carol or a comic masterpiece in film like *The Blues Brothers*' (Sharpe 2004: 8).

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# Television and Textual Analysis or Television As Television

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## Introduction:

- Contested purposes of television studies; textual analysis in ‘conflict’ with earlier social sciences methodologies in television studies
- John Hartley: ‘textual analysis devolved from the humanities [and it was therefore] criticised by commentators from the social sciences... for not using scientific methods of investigation that relied upon quantitative, generalisable findings’ (2002).
- Is textual analysis really an ‘easy option’? What are the problems/challenges of doing textual analyses of television?
- Why employ textual analysis? There is a great deal to be gained from understanding the television text, how it works, why it is constructed in the way it is, what forms of representation it offers, how it relates aesthetically with other media, etc.
- Lyn Spiegel: ‘I wish people who talk about TV would take TV more seriously, actually watch it, and read the scholarship about it’ (2005)

## Television’s textuality: four key issues

### 1. The fact of flow

- Television cannot be separated into single, finite ‘texts’; ‘the viewing strip’ (Newcomb and Hirsch), the ‘supertext’ (Nick Browne).
- Nick Browne: ‘The ‘television text’ as a concept and as a practice is a unique sort of discursive figure very different from the discrete unity of film. Its phenomenology is one of flow, banality, distraction, and transience; its semiotics complex, fragmentary, and heterogeneous. The limits of the text ‘proper’ – and its formal unity – apt to be broken at any moment by an ad or a turn of the dial – are suspect. Of course, the application of received methods of textual analysis to particular programs, provided that they can be separated from the flow and can be retrieved and held for inspection, can yield a certain kind of result. Allied with generic, narrative, or even ideological analysis, the result of textual analysis of television programs can be generalized in accord with the existing models provided by literary and film study. Yet, the application of these methods or perspectives to the ‘television text’ can only incompletely grasp its specificity of form, force, and signification.’ (1984)
- Do we watch *programmes* as well as *flow* (see Caldwell, 1995)? Do changes in delivery (e.g. DVDs, PVRs, etc.) mean that we pay closer attention to television texts now?
- Renewal of interest in issues of judgement and value as renewal of interest in the text (see Jacobs (2001); Geraghty (2003)).

### 2. Seriality and the messiness of television

- Key questions relating to television’s ‘messiness’:
- How do we deal with the textual vastness of serial television?
- What aesthetic advantages does the serial form have, and how can they be understood through textual analysis (see Creeber (2004))

### 3. The ‘now-ness’ of television and the challenges of television history

- What challenges do television’s textual contemporaneity offer to the scholar wishing to textually analyse historical television?
- Is textual analysis a legitimate historiographic methodology (see Ellis (forthcoming))?
- We need to develop a form of historical textualism: using textual analysis as a historical method of television study paradoxically forces us to look beyond the text to understand its historical *and national* specificity.

### 4. Convergence, new media and the shifting text

- Shifts in certainty about what constitutes the television ‘text’ are brought about by media convergence (television’s convergence with film, the PC and the internet, mobile phone technology, the DVD, etc.) – are we still certain what the text of television is?
- Should we be looking at all of the digital interactive footage of the natural history programme *Walking with Beasts*, or the online streaming of Living TV’s *Most Haunted*, in order to analyse them as television texts, and if so, how should this be done (and, a related question, how should this be archived)?
- Toby Miller (2000) has argued that we are seeing the transformation of television, rather than its displacement.

### Calls for an integrated methodology

- Should we be focusing on combining textual analysis with other approaches to the study of television? A methodology which combines textual analysis with an interest in television production, its industrial or economic factors, and a focus on the television audience and questions of viewing.
- See Georgina Born (2000); Simon Frith (2000); Toby Miller (2000)

### Case Study: analysing *The Blue Planet* (BBC/Discovery, 2001)

- See Wheatley (2004) for a published version of this research.
- This case study shows:
- It is possible to combine textual analysis with other kinds of research methodologies (in this case production research and qualitative audience study); Hartley’s division of television studies into those who are interested in the television text, and those who are interested television economies, technologies, industries and regulation is perhaps a false divide.
- Textual analysis might actually involve a number of quantitative and qualitative approaches to text at the same time (textual analysis as an interpretative activity and a more scientific method).
- Programme makers and broadcasters, broadcasting regulators, and television audiences all engage in forms of textual analysis when debating issues of quality and public service broadcasting (thus the ‘textual analysis’ of television can simultaneously be seen as a specialist critical activity and an essential part of the viewing, producing and regulating process).
- Scholars engaged in textual analysis must rise to challenges of television’s textual transformation; television studies of the future will need to embrace a much broader notion of the television text whilst still holding onto the basic skills of close and detailed analysis (grounded in older disciplines) in order to make sense of television texts and contexts.

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# Using Textual Analysis to Study New Media:

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## NEW MEDIA bring about

- New textual experiences
- New ways of representing the world
- New relationships between subjects (users and consumers) and media technologies
- New experiences of the relationship between embodiment, identity and community
- New conceptions of the biological body's relationship to technological media
- New patterns of organisation and production

## NEW MEDIA might be

- Computer Mediated Communications - e-mail, chat rooms, Muds and Moos, avatar based communication forums, voice image transmissions, the Web, and mobile telephony.
- New ways of distributing and consuming media texts characterised by interactivity and hypertext formats - the World Wide Web, CD-ROM, DVD, and the various platforms for computer games.
- Virtual Reality: from simulated environments to fully immersive representational spaces, and 'cyberspace'.
- A whole range of transformations and dislocations of established media (in, for example, photography, animation, television, film and cinema).

## CHARACTERISTICS OF NEW MEDIA

- Digitality
- Interactivity
- Hypertextuality
- Co-Creativity
- Virtuality
- Simulation

## NEW MEDIA TEXTUALITIES

- Can we treat new media artefacts as 'texts'?
- 'How can we evaluate a text that never reads the same way twice?'
- What is the role of technology, agency and action using games as a limit case?

## GAMES AS A 'LIMIT CASE'

- What kind of media text is this? Is it a text at all or some entirely new object of study requiring entirely novel methodologies?
- Is cultural meaning displaced by activity of gameplay / interaction ?
- What are the new 'immersive' spectator/user pleasures of new media texts like games.
- Ludology vs Narratology

## Enter the Ludologists

Attempt to articulate the structural qualities that distinguish games from other kinds of mediated experience

Emphasise the rule set as a point of departure for understanding computer games as a cultural form and as an experience

Use structural rule base of games in competing attempts to create a typology of games that will account for the similarities within their heterogeneity

‘The sheer number of students trained in film and literary studies will ensure that the slanted and crude misapplication of “narrative” theory to games will continue and probably overwhelm game scholarship for a long time to come. As long as vast numbers of journals and supervisors from traditional narrative studies continue to sanction dissertations and papers that take the narrativity of games for granted and confuse the story-game hybrids with games in general, good, critical scholarship on games will be outnumbered by incompetence, and this is a problem for all involved. ..As more scholars from other disciplines, such as sociology, linguistics, history, economics, and geography, start to do research on games, perhaps the narrativist camp (and the *visualist* camp) will realize more of the many differences between games and narratives, and even contribute valuable analyses using (and not abusing) narratology, but until then the narrativist paradigm will but slowly melt.’ (Aarseth 2004 :54)

A Narratologist writes ...

- ‘Every game, electronic or otherwise , can be experienced as a symbolic drama’..
- In Tetris everything you bring to a shapely completion is swept away from you . Success means just being able to keep up with the flow. This is a perfect enactment of the overtasked lives of Americans in the 1990s – of the constant bombardment of tasks that demand our attention and that we must somehow fit into our overcrowded schedules and clear off our tasks in order to make room for the next onslaught. (Murray 1998:142 - 147)

The Ludologists’ response (<http://gamestudies.org/0101/eskelinen/> )

- games consist in ‘specific procedural rules of how to manipulate the equipment (pieces or tokens or whatever)’
- To play any game is to be caught up in a process of trying to attain goals through actions determined by rule sets, using some kind of equipment (cards, a ball, computer interfaces) which facilitate almost infinite manipulations of the game elements

Stories are not important to interactive texts like games ?

- ‘In abstract games like Tetris there are settings, objects and events but definitely no characters. In addition there are events in games that change situations but do not convey or carry or communicate stories.’ (Eskelinen 2001)
- ‘stories are just uninteresting ornaments or gift-wrappings to games, and laying any emphasis on studying these kinds of marketing tools is just a waste of time and energy.’ (Eskelinen 2001)

So just what is the place of narrative in new media ?

- Applying conventional tools to new media eg
- Barry Atkins *More Than A Game – The Computer Game As Fictional Form* (2003) is interested in ‘questions of narrative practice’, questions of ‘narrative point of view’, the possibility of ‘subversive readings’, ‘closure’, the meaning of terms such as realism ‘ , ‘counterfactual historiography’ and the handling of time within narrative ‘ (2003: 8)

But ...

- ‘Story, such as it is, more often than not provides a wafer thin narrative excuse for the real meat and drink of such game fictions – shooting things to impressive effect’ (2003:57). There exists he argues ‘an unspoken tacit agreement between player and text to make fewer demands of game fictions than of films or novels – no one expects great dialogue in a game fiction; no one looks for depth of characterisation; no one judges the success of a game fiction on the sophistication of its back story ..’ (Atkins 2003: 56).

### **Representation vs Experience**

- The dimensions of Lara Croft’s body, already analyzed to death by film theorists, are irrelevant to me as a player, because a different-looking body would not make me play differently... When I play, I don’t even see her body, but see through it and past it. (Aarseth 2004: 48)
- On a formal level nothing has changed at all: the game remains the same. Of course it goes without saying that the experience of playing Poker with such a deck would be different than the experience a player would have with a standard deck. But the formal system of a game, the game considered as a set of rules, is not the experience of the game.’ (Salen & Zimmerman 2003 : 120 my italics)

### **Narrative To Navigation**

- Lev Manovich (2001: 244-285) ‘navigable space imagination’
- Doom and Myst were two of the most significant creations of ‘the first decade of new media’ because, although both totally different games, they made moving through space the key task of the user.
- Narrative to Navigation - ‘Both are spatial journeys. Navigation through 3D space is an essential, if not the key, component of the gameplay Doom and Myst present the user with a space to be traversed, to be mapped out by moving through it ...narrative and time itself are equated with movement through 3-D space, progression through rooms, levels, or words. In contrast to modern literature, theater, and cinema, which are built around psychological tensions between characters and movement in psychological space, these computer games return us to ancient forms of narrative in which the plot is driven by the spatial movement of the main hero..’(Manovich 2001 246-7)

### **Jenkins on Narrative Architecture**

- ‘Choices about the design and organisation of the game spaces have narratological consequences.’(2004:129)

### **Narrative as space**

- ‘Evocative’ narrative spaces are those which are designed in ways to evoke a known storyworld such as those of *Star Wars* films or Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass* in the Alice books
- ‘Enacted’ narratives depend on the movement of the player as she overcomes obstacles and discovers advantage in the gameworld. (eg online game worlds)
- Embedded narratives make these obstacles and opportunities carry narrative significance as clues or puzzles which relate to some aspect of the larger story world.
- Finally emergent narratives come in the form of simulation games in which space is

experienced as maps within which micro narratives get constructed in response to and in collaboration with the simulation algorithms.

### **‘Spectatorship/Reception’**

- Readers become users?
- Users become players?
- The interactive text only exists as an ‘object for contemplation’ and analysis as and when it is used

### **Spectatorship to ‘Flow’**

- ‘Immersion’ familiar enough from cinema
- But, more intimate mental, emotional and physical engagement with computer media eg games, communications, online worlds
- Csikszentmihalyi’s description of ‘deep flow’ - a total absorption in an activity which is both challenging and emotionally rewarding. (1993, 1997, 1998)

### **Configuration replaces interaction**

- Games – computer games in particular – appeal because they are configurative, offering the chance to manipulate complex systems within continuous loops of intervention, observation, and response. Interest in such activities grows as more people exchange email, surf the world wide web, post to newsgroups, build web logs, engage in chat and instant messaging, and trade media files through peer-to-peer networks. As in various sorts of gaming, these are all in some degree configurative practices, involving manipulation of dynamic systems that develop in unpredictable or emergent ways. (Moulthrop, 2004: 64)
- If we conceive of configuration as a way of engaging not just immediate game elements, but also the game’s social and material conditions – and by extension, the conditions of other rule-systems such as work and citizenship – then it may be very important to insist upon the difference between play and interpretation, the better to resist immersion.” (2004:66)

### **But ... configuration may also cybernetic**

- Cybernetics (Norbert Wiener 1948) ‘the science of control and communication in the animal and the machine’
- The state of any system is controlled through information flow and feedback loops  
Cybertext (Aarseth 1997:21)
- Any text is made from the material object (eg a book), the words and the reader.
- This ‘triad’ constitutes a ‘textual machine’
- This relationship between text/machine and user/player is cybernetic:

### **Cybertext**

- Cybertext, ..., is the wide range (or perspective) of possible textualities seen as a typology of machines, as various kinds of literary communication systems where the functional differences among the mechanical parts play a defining role in determining the aesthetic process. [...] cybertext shifts the focus from the traditional threesome of author/sender, text/message, and reader/receiver to the cybernetic intercourse between the various

part(icipant)s in the textual machine.(Aarseth, 1997:22)

- representative content may only be an interface to the simulation of the computer code
- action might be more significant than connotation,
- textual meaning of the representation may be secondary to compulsive engagement with the technology

### **Play and Meaning**

- Meaning generated by play is different to meaning generated by reading.
- To read is to create meaning cognitively in the encounter with the text.
- To play is to generate meaning, to express it through play.

### **Additional New Media Textual Analysis Questions**

- Genre ? New patterns of signification.
- Platform - physical engagements / activities.
- What does the text ask us to do? What kinds of rules operate to produce what kind of outcomes? What constraints and affordances does the rule set provide?
- How does the text represent the user ?
- What feedback is provided to the text user ?
- What kinds of communities of meaning circulate round particular new media texts

### **SIX BRILLIANT ONLINE ESSAYS FOR RESEARCHERS**

Aarseth Espen J. (1997). *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Introductory chapter :-

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<http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/firstperson/molecular>

Murray Janet (1997) *Hamlet on the Holodeck – The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* MIT

<http://www.lcc.gatech.edu/%7Emurray/hoh/hoh.html>

### **FURTHER READING**

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Atkins, B, (2003) *More Than a Game: The Computer Game as Fictional Form*, Manchester, Manchester University Press.

Bolter J and Grusin R (1999) *Remediation: Understanding New media*, Cambridge Mas., and

London, MIT Press.

Frasca Gonzalo (2001) Videogames Of The Oppressed - Videogames As A Means For Critical Thinking And Debate [www.ludology.org/articles/thesis/](http://www.ludology.org/articles/thesis/) accessed 10/08/04

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Friedman Ted (1999) 'Civilization and Its Discontents: Simulation, Subjectivity, and Space' From *Discovering Discs: Transforming Space and Genre* on CD-ROM, edited by Greg Smith (New York University Press) – excellent essay on Simulation, representation and games at <http://www.duke.edu/~7Etllove/civ.htm>

King, Geoff & Kryzwinska, Tanya (eds) *Screenplay: cinema/videogames/interfaces*, London: Wallflower Press 2002

Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant and Kelly *New Media – A Critical Introduction*, Routledge 2003

Manovich Lev (2001) *The Language of New Media* The MIT Press, <http://www.manovich.net/> Manovich's site with lots of useful essays.

Murray Janet (1997) *Hamlet on the Holodeck – The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*, MIT

Myers D (1991). Computer game semiotics. *Play & Culture*, 4, 334-345.

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Newman, J (2004) *Videogames* London: Routledge

Ryan Marie-Laure, (2001) *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media* Maryland: John Hopkins University Press

Ryan Marie- Laure Beyond Myth and Metaphor: The Case of Narrative in Digital Media, *Game Studies* Vol 1 Issue 1 2001 /[www.gamestudies.org/0101/](http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/) accessed 10/08/04 2001b

Salen K & Zimmerman E *Rules of Play* MIT Boston 2003

Wardrip-Fruin Noah and Harrigan Pat eds, (2004) *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance and Game* Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press

# Using Group Discussions in Screen Studies

By Nick Pettigrew, IPSOS MORI

As part of your screen studies project, you may wish to conduct some primary research and one option may be to carry out a piece of qualitative research. Qualitative research is concerned with understanding rather than measuring - asking the 'why' and 'how' questions to gain an in-depth understanding of a subject. Unlike quantitative research, it is not meant to be representative of the population and utilises much smaller samples, but in far more depth. It is also much less structured in that the researcher has the flexibility to take the topics in any direction should it relate to the research objectives.

Qualitative research can be very useful in screen studies, for example it can be used to examine in-depth reactions to a test screening of a film or explore fans' perceptions of a TV show or the channel brand more generally. More widely, qualitative research can be used to examine policy changes such as the future of public service broadcasting or the need for regional TV, as well as issues of bias e.g. trust in television reporting. It can also be used to explore how people use new technologies such as EPGs and digital services.

A number of different methodologies are utilized in qualitative research. These include depth interviews, observation, workshops and citizen's juries. One method often used are group discussions, also known as focus groups. These usually consist of 5-10 participants (often 8) and generally meet for just one occasion. A group discussion can last approximately 90 mins to 2 hours and is a group of people who have come together specifically to discuss the topic of research. This methodology may be most appropriate where the aim is to generate lots of information and make use of the group dynamic to stimulate debate. Group discussions are often useful when there is a need to make participants think about things they hadn't considered - often the case when discussing something like changes to broadcasting policy.

In any group discussion, it is always important to consider the homogeneity of the participants – for example it may not be a good idea to mix fans and non-fans of a film in the same group discussion. It is also important to think about who should be both included or excluded from the sample- for example people working in the film industry may have an expert view on the content of a film and may inhibit other people from speaking.

Furthermore, consideration needs to be given to how to invite people to take part in a group discussion. This can range from sending letters in advance, to telephone and face to face recruitment. There are also a number of companies who specialise in finding people to take part in research. Whatever method is chosen, it is important to have a recruitment questionnaire which asks a series of questions to help set out the type of people wanted for the group discussion. It is also important to remember that people can be 'pre-tasked' at this stage, for example asking them to watch a television programme in advance of coming along to the group.

Group discussions are always guided by the moderator using a discussion guide. This is different from a standard structured quantitative questionnaire in that it has more flexibility in format. It lists the topics to be covered in the research and some "interviewer guidelines" but it is not comprehensive, although the research questions must be answered. It can include activities - discussion, exercises, and stimuli such as designing a television schedule.

When designing a discussion guide it is important to think of how topics are ordered. To help participants relax into the group it is better to start with more general topics before moving onto more specific topics. Similarly, if there are sensitive or difficult issues to be discussed then these

should not be discussed at the beginning of the group- often there is a natural sequence or logical order to structuring these topics.

When moderating or running the discussion, there are a number of practical things to remember: arrive early to arrange room, refreshments and equipment and also make sure participants are seated in a horse-shoe shape, so that the moderator can see everyone. This also makes it easier to film participants should this be required.

It is important to always try and think of the participants in a group as much as possible- they may be anxious about meeting strangers and spending time with people they don't know. Furthermore, people can be insecure about the value of their opinions and often worry about being judged by others. They may also have a lack of confidence in expressing their views or other priorities on their mind.

Moderating or guiding a group discussion is a difficult skill that requires a lot of experience, indeed the best moderators are the ones who make guiding a discussion look easy. The best way to learn is to watch a variety of professionals moderate if possible.

Good moderators recognise that the beginning of the group is very important to help relax participants and set out the ground rules of the research. The moderator should introduce themselves and the research, explain about the confidentiality and ask permission to audio or video record. The moderator should let people know it's ok to agree or disagree with each other and that they actively want a range of views and opinions. At the beginning of the group, the moderator should involve everyone in order to break the ice. This is often carried out in the form of an introduction with each person being asked something about themselves. It is also good to start with specific, non threatening questions to help the group form.

Group discussions go through various stages. For example, after introductions, there tends to be a stage where the participants are working out issues of power and control. This can be difficult to manage- there may be attention seeking behaviour. After this stage, there is acceptance and agreement where the group finds there are areas of differences/shared perspective. The group will then go into 'performing' mode where the real work of the group is done. This can often be seen in the body language of people where they are sitting forward and working well together.

At any of these stages the moderator needs to set the tone by being informal, relaxed, friendly and interested in what people have to say. The moderator should always use open questions- useful questions are always the 'what', 'where', 'how', 'when', 'who' and 'why' questions. Furthermore, the moderator should always probe answers and should not always just accept the initial answer to an open question. Probes such as "tell me more about that", "how you feel about that?" can really help here.

The body language of the moderator is also important. They should be open, forward, relaxed but at the same time full of energy. Eye contact along with encouraging looks is extremely important. To make sure people join in prompts such as "I notice some of you haven't been saying much - do any of you see it differently?" can help as well as mentioning people's names, perhaps by giving a fairly safe closed question e.g. "Jim, do you agree? ... or do you see it differently?"

When moderating a group, it can be very useful to recall ground rules set out at the beginning of the group. There may be situations where certain participants try and dominate the group discussion or people may go off on tangents on certain subjects. Alternatively people may engage in side conversations with each other. It is always important to pick this up the first time it happens, as it signals the moderator will be managing the group properly.

It is vital to end the group on time, positively and with thanks. Participants often want to know what is going to happen next and so it is important to explain “the next step” in the research process - for example the research will be contributing to a book on film to be published next year.

This is an extremely brief introduction to carrying out discussion groups. If you decide it is the right methodology for your screen studies project, then I recommend reading:

- Good Thinking: A Guide to Qualitative Research by [Wendy Gordon](#) 184116030X
- Qualitative Research in Context by Louella Miles

Recommended websites are also:

- Association for Qualitative Research (AQR): <http://www.aqr.org.uk/>
- Market Research Society (MRS): <http://www.mrs.org.uk/>

## Using Multiple Sources to Study Fans

By Dr Matt Hills, Cardiff University  
(author of *Fan Cultures*, *The Pleasures of Horror*  
and *How To Do Things With Cultural Theory*)

Using a range of different sources to study fans could, of course, mean carrying out face-to-face interviews as well as textual analyses of fan objects and fan-produced texts. It could also mean studying fans' social interactions (say, at conventions) alongside fans' virtual communities online.

However, for the purposes of this section, I shall focus largely on the use of multiple sources *in cyberspace*, as my sense is that contemporary studies of media fandom increasingly tend to begin and end with the analysis of online fan activities, identities and expressions.

### Using the web:

Perhaps one reason for this turn to online fan audience study is the sheer availability and convenience of studying this type of material. Leading writers in the field such as Henry Jenkins have powerfully contrasted this situation with the days of pre-Internet fan study, where researchers sometimes relied on soliciting letters from respondents. The web offers

an incredibly rich resource for audience research. We might... contrast this... with the forty-two letters that form the corpus of Ien Ang's [*Watching Dallas*] (Jenkins 1995:52).

Writers such as David Gauntlett have termed this web-based audience study the "armchair method":

For *The Truman Show*, the site [imdb.com] had 236 reviews written by... users... In sociological terms it seems a poor sample, being... self-selected... the reviews came to about 45,000 words... not a perfect cross-section of the audience for the film, but... infinitely better than the singular, subjective, usually obscure 'reading' of a film by a film studies 'expert' (Gauntlett 2000:85).

Though Gauntlett's negative description of textual analysis is open to challenge – indeed, the skills of intersubjectively-persuasive textual analysis may still be essential to analysing fan postings! – his use of imdb.com has the benefit of accessing fan material which has not been prompted or solicited by the researcher:

In fact, the sample is as good as most used in qualitative research... and the data presented is what they had chosen to write, unprompted, about the movie" (Gauntlett 2000:85).

The use of web-based material also offers another substantial benefit to fan researchers. It means that a far wider range of fandoms can be studied than may have happened in the past:

although early fan work focused largely on fans of cult programming... fan responses to television are not confined to fantasy or science fiction genres. There are [for example] fan Internet pages for... cop shows like *The Bill*... (McKee 2002:68).

This is vital, as it can allow new researchers to access many more self-identified fan cultures than those which have previously been 'canonised' in and through fan studies (e.g. *Buffy*, *Star Trek*

and *Doctor Who* fans). Though ‘canon wars’ may have raged in literary theory of the 1970s and ‘80s, and though such concerns are often assumed to have been overcome by media and cultural studies, it can be argued that some areas of audience studies have reinstated their own canons – albeit of favoured audiences to research, rather than favoured texts to analyse.

If one is setting out to study an online fandom, it is crucial to consider what type of audience you wish to gain access to. Using multiple sources, i.e. multiple websites or message-boards, may mean that you can access different groups of fans, rather than assuming that your chosen fandom is monolithic. You may also gain access to fans writing in very different online venues – sometimes purely for other fans; sometimes addressing a less committed audience of ‘casual fans’ or more general cinephiles rather than fans of a specific text.

If you are interested in more diffuse audiences which may be made up of a range of different interest and fan groups you might want to examine, as Gauntlett did, [imdb.com](http://imdb.com).

If you intend to focus on more targeted fan audiences for specific texts/celebrities etc. then you’ll need to search for relevant message boards and sites. In some cases, this can be as easy as googling specific terms. You may also be able to make use of ‘web-rings’, where fans have linked their sites together.

It is also worth noting that message boards or online Forums can display very different characters of fan debate, depending on whether they are open-access/accessed-by-registration, & if they are moderated/unmoderated. You may thus want to analyse multiple sources in terms of examining and contrasting both moderated and unmoderated sites.

### **Five things to remember:**

*Firstly*, it is important to consider the range of different constituencies and ‘interpretive communities’ which can be present within any given ‘single’ fan community.

For example, my own work on *Dawson’s Creek* ‘shippers (Hills 2004 in *Teen TV*) – fans who focused on character relationships in the diegesis; the term is a contraction of ‘relationshipippers’ – indicated that there were at least two major rival factions of fans. There were those who supported the Pacey/Joey relationship, and those who championed Dawson/Joey. These groups had their own dedicated sites, and also interacted at other fan-sites, frequently tending to attack and devalue the interpretations of the ‘opposed’ faction.

Also, work I’ve done on fans of the original and remake of *The Ring* (Hills 2005 in *Japanese Horror Cinema*) has indicated further lines of tension and conflict within ‘one’ ostensible fan culture. Here, US fans of the original film constructed their ‘underground fan’ identities very much against what they saw as ‘mainstream consumers’ favouring the Hollywood remake.

Additional studies can be cited to support this point, ranging from work on fans of ITV game-shows, who were partly split into aspirational producers and fan-consumers (Hills 2005 in *ITV Cultures*), to further work on online fandom and national identity, e.g. US versus Welsh fans of *Doctor Who* (Hills 2006 in *Media Wales Journal*).

And fan cultures can also tend to be powerfully divided along the axes of gender and age, meaning that it can be important to try to access online sites aimed at different demographics of fans, or to interpret communal message-boards for evidence of fan-cultural dominance and subordination aligned with fans’ generational and gender identities. (Since many fan sites carry such information about their participants – and codes of conduct tend to discourage the creation of avatars or assumed identities – tackling these issues can be less of a problem than some work on cyberculture would lead one to believe).

*Secondly*, whatever online sources one is dealing with, the relevant data doesn't give unproblematic access to 'what fans really think' or 'how fans really behave', i.e. this data remains *performatively* structured in relation to fan-cultural norms (see Hills, *Fan Cultures* 2002).

For example, postings may place an emphasis on psychologising and individualising fans' reactions to a text, thereby ruling out 'sociological' or social-structural accounts of fandom within the group concerned (Hills in *Japanese Horror Cinema*).

Or, postings may sometimes emphasise the positive values of fan community, whilst seeking to down-play and marginalise areas of significant fan-cultural conflict, disagreement (Hills in *Fan Cultures*).

Or, 'tutored' postings displaying high levels of "subcultural capital" (Thornton 1995) and fan knowledge may be especially valued. In this and other senses, fans may 'play to the gallery' of their imagined fan community, as well as implicitly following fan-cultural norms, codes and conventions.

*Thirdly*, whatever multiple sources of online data are being used, these will still require their own *multiple contextualisations*.

For example, are the fans you are studying also fans of other texts? Are there characteristic repertoires of fan objects or 'textual paths'? (Couldry 2000). E.g. fans of *Ringu* were also fans of 'Asian cinema' (Hills in *Japanese Horror Cinema*); fans of *WWTBAM* were also fans of ITV game-shows (Hills in *ITV Cultures*). These *trans-fandoms* could be less obvious – for instance, many *Doctor Who* fans may have 'crossed-over' into *Buffy* fandom, or vice-versa. Treating fan cultures as bounded, single-text communities has blinded researchers to (sometimes serialised) movements which some fans have made across and between different fandoms. Fan cultures may thus need to be viewed precisely in the context of other forms of media consumption.

This can also be true for fandom and *anti-fandom*: i.e. does being a fan of a specific text correlate with 'hating' other genres/texts? (see Jonathan Gray's 2003 work in *The International Journal of Cultural Studies*). E.g. fans of 'cult TV' may disparage fans of soaps & 'teen TV' (Hills in *Teen TV*).

[And though I've been focusing on online fandom, there remains, of course, the larger question of online in relation to offline fandom: do online audiences participate in socially-organised fandom beyond their Internet postings? This issue of 'real life' context can also spill over into the matter of whether researchers can get access to 'lurkers' as well as to regular posters. Linking fandom 'In Real Life' (IRL) to online fandom may not always be an easy research task, but it can meaningfully deepen and complicate one's understandings of media fandom.]

*Fourthly*, there is the question of how contextual issues of cultural value can affect your object of study. An interesting, recent study here is the following:

- Bailey, Steve (2005) *Media Audiences & Identity* Palgrave-Macmillan, London.

This book analyses three very different media fandoms, suggesting that fans of the US rock band Kiss embrace a kind of 'sentimental populism' in their fan activities (using the band's mainstream appeal to validate their fandom), whereas the 'underground' value-systems of cult film fans are very much anti-mainstream, and the 'ironic fandom' of online *Futurama* fan culture is distinctively knowing and self-conscious about cyber-fan stereotypes. In each case, issues of cultural value powerfully impinge on the fan cultures analysed.

*Fifthly and finally*, there is the matter of identifying what counts as ‘the text’ for your fans. Is it bounded in the way you expect? A key academic intervention here is:

- Sandvoss, Cornel (2005) *Fans* Polity Press, Cambridge.

Sandvoss suggests that different fan factions construct borders to ‘the text’ very differently – some fans may include/exclude specific spin-offs, some may include merchandise or trans-media narratives, and some may not even be familiar with ‘all’ of a TV series or film franchise, and may have stopped watching at a certain point. All of this indicates that academic researchers cannot simply assume that ‘the fan object’ is a singular and stable focal point for the fan culture’s activities and emotional attachments.

**In short, and by way of a suggestive conclusion, the contemporary study and contextualisation of fandom – via the use of multiple (online) sources – may tend to consistently demonstrate a ‘micro-fragmentation’ of fan cultures into more specific fan factions.**

# **Interviewing in Screen Studies**

**By Terry Bolas, Middlesex University**

In order to make these comments as generally useful as possible, I have removed any specific references to my own project.

## **Why interview?**

1. Perhaps the most obvious reason for interviewing people is simply that they are still available. If someone has played an important part in the evolution of the project that you are investigating and if s/he is still around, interview her/him. It may tell you nothing, but it might at least provide further confirmation of what you already know or perhaps give you a completely new lead.

2. The main justification for setting up the interview is usually to clarify the record, which means that you must have assembled the get-at-able facts before that interview.

3. As your research proceeds another purpose emerges for conducting an interview - to test out your evolving hypotheses. (See below).

## **The mechanics of interviewing**

It is always best to make an audio recording, rather than notes, but given the portability and flexibility of current equipment, video recording is probably preferable if there is any chance of the recording subsequently becoming part of a permanent archive.

## **Whom to interview and when**

1. Contact potential interviewees at the outset of your research so that they are alerted, even if you know that you will probably not need to interview them for months/years. In this way they can forewarn you of their proposed sabbaticals in distant places, forthcoming retirement etc. But it also means that the word gets about and those you didn't actually think of contacting will contact you. Indeed the greater the number of people who become aware of your project, the greater the chance of something/ somebody unexpected turning up.

2. Although it may seem macabre you need to be aware of the state of health of potential interviewees and use this as a priority guide in organizing your schedule of interviews. People do die and if you are a part time researcher taking five or six years.....

3. If you are trying to do a 'job lot' of interviews in a particular place at a given time that suits you and perhaps suits your 'star' interviewee, be very diplomatic about the scheduling of others...

4. If you're interviewing for information, do it sooner. If you're interviewing to test your hypotheses, do it later.

## **Preparation**

Research the person you are about to interview and make clear to her/him the areas that you are interested in well before the interview itself. Well-prepared interviewees will not only give better answers, they may even have taken the trouble to dig out material for you to loan.

## **Questions**

1. About a week in advance send the interviewee a list of the broad questions you want to ask, but leave yourself room to manoeuvre.

2. There is a value in checking out the interviewee's professional CV with her/him. It can provide a straightforward start to the interview, and more importantly provide a context of connections and professional relationships that may turn out to have a bearing on your investigation.

3. It is useful to have sent in advance or taken along carefully selected material that will help to jog the interviewee's memory.

4. Don't be surprised if the interviewee has only poor recollection of events that you assumed would have a priority in her/his memory. If someone did the same job for years and repeated the same routine annually, the memories will tend to have merged and be unspecific. It is however likely that s/he will have much more detailed recall of one-off occasions.

## **Testing your hypotheses**

1. Frame the questions so that the answers you get have the capacity to demolish your hypotheses.

2. It is always possible inadvertently to frame a question in such a way that you get an answer that supports rather than challenges your thinking. This can happen even if you set out to be rigorous. You can only successfully test a hypothesis by exposing it and so, as you construct the question, think through the range of possible answers your interviewee might give. Make sure that there is at least one potential answer that will present your theory with a problem!

## **Open up the interview**

There will probably have been a gap of several/many years between the events you are researching and the present. It is always valuable to get the interviewees' perspective of then from now. Here the nature of their hindsight can help you to understand the significance that they put on the recollection of events

## **Handling of the material**

Transcribe the recording as soon as possible, but to attempt to produce a verbatim record would be too time-consuming. When you intend to draw heavily on an interview later, and you know in advance which particular issues are up for scrutiny, listen again to the whole of the original recording. You may well find there remarks and references that meant little to you at the earlier stage of your research, but which now have taken on a quite different significance.

## Researching the history of film/TV institutions: some tips

By Dr Christophe Dupin, AHRC History of the British Film Institute Research Project,  
Department of History, Queen Mary, University of London

This is based on researching the history of the British Film Institute at an MA, PhD and post-doctoral level for the last seven years. Apologies if I state the obvious, but these were not things I necessarily knew when I started researching the history of the BFI all these years ago...

### SOURCES:

#### The internet

In recent years, the internet has made researchers' life much easier in a number of ways. Do not hesitate to use search engines to track down people, sources and information. Thanks to the internet I have found a number crucial, yet relatively unknown people I needed to interview, and located personal or institutional paper collections in various specialised archives.

You have probably also realised that more and more libraries/archives offer their catalogue online – not only the national collections (see links to the BFI Library, British Library, National Film Archives catalogues below) but also, increasingly, local and specialised ones. Checking catalogues online first saves you a lot of energy, time and money.

#### The British Film Institute National Library

Online book catalogue: <http://lib.bfi.org.uk>,

General information: [www.bfi.org.uk/filmtvinfo](http://www.bfi.org.uk/filmtvinfo)

Rather than repeat what Phil Wickham [see part 1 of the handbook] has presented, I will focus on some of the sources/tools that I found particularly useful for my 'institutional' history.

- The Library holds a comprehensive collection of **Annual Reports** of British (and foreign) film organisations. You can find them in the general book catalogue. It also holds an extensive collection of official reports, legal texts relating to film and TV, also searchable in the online catalogue.

- '**Subject files**': the Library holds a large number of files on various subjects and organisations. In theory these files only contain press cuttings (some of them dating back to the 1930s), but you can occasionally find other interesting documents relevant to the organisation you are researching. The list of files is not available online. Ask the staff at the Reading Room counter. The Library also holds a separate collection of documents about film and TV festivals, going back to the 1930s.

- The **microfiche** collection (for films/TV programmes and personalities) is another important source of information. Like the subject files, it occasionally contains, apart from the usual press cuttings, other potentially interesting materials.

- References to **articles** in film/TV journals: although you can find lists of references to articles about personalities and films or TV programmes in the SIFT database (only available in the Library's Reading Room), 'members of the public' do not have access to the 'organisations' section of the database. However, you can ask the staff at the Reading Room counter print out the list of references for the organisation you are researching. Readers also often forget – or don't know – that the FIAF database (available on one of the computers in the Reading Room) also indexes large numbers of film and TV journals and can help you find an article you are looking for (and unlike SIFT, it allows you to do a search by author).

- **Special Collections:** The Special Collections section of the Library holds over 500 collections of film and TV ephemera, including working papers from both individuals and organisations. Don't forget that collections from individuals having worked in the film /TV industries (such as the producer Michael Balcon) often contain crucial information about organisations.

Use the database on the Special Collections computer in the reading room, or ask for the paper catalogue at the counter. Note that materials from the collections can only be viewed at the Special Collections study room in the *bfi* National Library, and that the study room is accessible by appointment only.

- The **Bectu History Project**, an oral history initiative which comprises almost five hundred interviews recorded with a wide range of workers in the British film and TV industries, can be consulted in the BFI Library. Note that you will need to obtain clearance from the project at BECTU first. For more information on the project and details on how to access the tapes, see: [www.bfi.org.uk/filmtvinfo/library/collections/audiotapes/bectu\\_details.html](http://www.bfi.org.uk/filmtvinfo/library/collections/audiotapes/bectu_details.html)

- Finally, do not hesitate to contact the **Information Services** of the bfi National Library. The Information officers can help you find facts and figures you need as well as locate other sources of information. For more information and to make an enquiry online: [www.bfi.org.uk/filmtvinfo/library/services/](http://www.bfi.org.uk/filmtvinfo/library/services/)

### **The National Archives (formerly Public Record Office)**

Online catalogue: [www.catalogue.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.catalogue.nationalarchives.gov.uk)

General information : [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk)

If the organisation you are researching is a funded by/under the authority of the government (like the BFI), the National Archives, located in Kew in South West London, are an invaluable source of information. It is free (you can register in minutes) and easy to use. It only takes 30 mins for documents to be retrieved once you've ordered them. Do consult the online catalogue before you decide to go there.

Note that you can use your **digital camera** to photograph most documents held in the National Archives (all you have to do is register as a camera user). I do encourage PhD students to make use of digital cameras, which are now very often allowed in archives and libraries as long as it is for your personal use. In my PhD years, I wasted a lot of time copying pages of documents that could neither be photocopied nor scanned! You can then keep the document in electronic form on your computer. You can also easily share the information with fellow researchers by emailing them the document. Note that a cheap digital camera will do the trick.

### **The British Library**

(Online catalogue: [www.bl.uk/catalogues/listings.html](http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/listings.html))

The British Library holds a copy of every publication ever published in Britain. It will therefore most certainly hold a copy of a publication you haven't been able to find anywhere else. Once you are registered, you can access most of the collections quickly and easily. Reading rooms are in St Pancras (general collection) and Colindale, Northwest London (newspapers and periodicals). But first, you must apply for a reader's pass from the Reader Admissions offices in St Pancras. PhD students have no problems obtaining it.

### **SOME METHODOLOGICAL TIPS:**

The following comments are based on things I found useful during my research, obstacles I encountered and mistakes I learned from! I do not pretend that they are applicable universally, but they did help me.

- **Initial survey of the archival material available:** before anything else, you need to assess the state, scope and accessibility of the archival papers you need to examine (either those of the organisation you are researching, or from relevant archives). This crucial exercise will allow you to plan (roughly) how much time you will need to go through these papers, and to determine at an early stage whether you will need to find the missing information elsewhere. The same process applies to secondary-source documents and to audiovisual material you might need (footage, television programmes, photographs, etc).

- **Chronologies/lists/tables/graphs:** before starting to 'theorise', make sure you know the chronology of the events, and the context in which the institution you are researching was created and developed. I did find it very useful to draw up various lists and tables of facts and figures, write straightforward chronologies and create graphs and charts, which allowed me to get a better, more global view of the issues at stake and helped me structure my argument. In my case, some of this data proved to be an end as well as a means since I actually 'recycled' several tables, graphs and charts in the appendices of my thesis.

- **Bibliography:** start building your bibliography early on, especially if you write an institutional history, as most documents you will be using are not necessarily straightforward books or articles but minutes of meetings, memos and a variety of other papers. And don't forget to take down the reference of all the documents you come across and photocopy or take notes from. This will save you a lot of time at the end of your PhD, when you finish the footnotes and bibliography!

- **Interviews** with people involved in an organisation's history are crucial to the general understanding of that history, in that they often provide key information on the general context in which decisions were made, and personal interpretations of these decisions. In that respect, they give you things that can't be found in reports, minutes of meetings or other official papers. Interviewees can also crucially provide contact details for other potential interviewees!

Interviews can rarely, however, be taken for granted, as personal views of past events are rarely objective, memory is often selective and dates and facts easily forgotten or distorted. Interviews are only valid and therefore useful if cross-examined with a range of other materials/evidence (including other interviews).

Always make sure you prepare your interview well, i.e. know your subject as well possible, prepare your questions in advance (why not send them - or at least themes for the discussion - to your interviewee ahead of the interview). It may sound stupid, but before you set off for your interview make sure your tape recorder is working and take a spare set of batteries with you (that can save a lot of embarrassment, believe me!). Choose a quiet spot for the interview, that will make your transcription work easier. Remember that cafes are often louder than we think (talking from experience again).

If you can't physically meet your interviewee, why not ask them to answer your questions by email? It will require from them a bigger effort than an oral interview, but if they accept it can be an interesting exercise, because they have more time to think about their answers than in a spontaneous discussion. You can always ask for clarifications in further email, if the initial replies raise new questions. I did it quite successfully with several key interviewees living in Australia.

Any more questions? Email me at [c.dupin@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:c.dupin@qmul.ac.uk)

[www.history.qmul.ac.uk/research/BFIproject.html](http://www.history.qmul.ac.uk/research/BFIproject.html)

# Publishing in Academic Journals and Conference Papers

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## Conference papers – proposals

- Topic – can be related to thesis but written for more general interest
- Proposal/abstract – this will not simply get you an invitation but also will get you an audience; so make it seem exciting
- Don't exceed word length for proposals
- *Normally*, don't offer more than one proposal
- Panel proposals are attractive, particularly for postgraduates who may not get invitations on the basis of their names

## Conference papers - presentation

- Assume twenty-minute presentation – *including clips*
- Around 10 pages – *not* 20 pages read very fast
- Think presentational style, not just research content. It's a performance of your ideas and arguments, not just a rote recitation.
- A good conference paper is not necessarily a good article - *and vice versa*. It should be written as a paper (with a bit of rhetoric), in the expectation that it will have to be revised *before* you send it to editors.

## Articles – submission

- Know the journal you're submitting to. Waste of time to send a *Screen* article to *Sight & Sound* - and vice versa
- Don't write letters asking if the editors would be interested in.... The response is likely to be 'Send it and we'll see'.
- Most journals are looking for articles between 5,000 and 7,500 words – 20-30 pages
- Abstract – good marketing tool (see conference proposal).

## Articles – presentation

- Check house style of journal.
- Use footnoting style of journal; double space throughout; indent paragraphs rather than double-double space, check spelling conventions, etc.
- Avoid lengthy footnotes which could be incorporated in the text
- Avoid too many footnotes

## Articles – process

- It is normal to be asked for rewrites. Make sure you are clear what you're being asked to re-write. (Some re-writes are worse than the original).
- Don't expect that you will always get detailed feedback on rejected articles. But there's no reason not to ask for it and for any suggestions about other journals
- It's not worth arguing with editors.

## Articles – general

- Submission on paper and disk
- Illustrations – only if accepted.

- Rights clearance. You will normally be asked to clear permissions, but it's a very grey area - even publishers have different understandings
- E-journals - increasingly important outlet, particularly for graduate students. Check if they're peer-reviewed and if they have an ISBN.

#### *Screen*

- Refereed journal; minimum of two readers for *appropriate* articles (that is, articles which are not meant for *Screen International*).
- Expectation of three-month turn-round on acceptance/rejection; minimum of nine-month to publication
- Normally, no more than one 'special issue' per annum. This avoids very long backlogs of 'general' articles.
- Published under license. Copyright remains with author though any re-publication should acknowledge original source.

#### *Screen*

- Report, debates, dossiers and reviews. Again, important outlet for graduate students.
- No fixed definition of a '*Screen* article'. You have to decide whether or not *Screen* will provide you with the audience you're aiming at.
- Interested in articles on film *and* television, on history, on independent and avant-garde cinema, on international cinema, on history, theory and criticism.
- Not very interested in analyses of single films *unless* they have wider theoretical, critical or historical implications

#### *Screen*

- For general information on the journal and guides to house styles and conventions, see:
- <http://www.screen.arts.gla.ac.uk/>
- OR
- <http://screen.oxfordjournals.org/>

#### Footnote – the book of the thesis

- Not all PhDs are publishable – sometimes better to be strategic and publish as articles
- Look for series and approach editors
- Be wary of textbooks too early in career. Publishers will ask for them, but not always the best career move.