

Media Journal

ICS 2101

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Danna Walker's *The Longest Day*

I've been thinking about my media life in preparation for Friday's class, where we're expected to discuss Danna Walker's *The Longest Day*, an article that I had read before, though perhaps less critically than I should have. While her experiment is interesting, I now question its usefulness, and I haven't even bothered to mention how unlikely it is that most of her undergraduate students followed the directions of her assignment considering the lack of controls.

Let's assume for a moment that her students followed the directions of the assignment, and actually went a full 24 hours without electronic media. Is there something unique about iPods and cellphones beyond their ubiquitousness? Why are we so entranced by the idea of limiting access to these devices? What does it prove? I'm not shocked by how much difficulty some students had with this assignment because of the environment we're living in, but this is also the case with laundry machines and electric heating. It's much easier to be critical of our media "addictions" when we're sitting in a temperature controlled room on an ergonomic chair with easy access to a fully stocked refrigerator and all of the other comforts that we take for granted. The difficulty that students experience does not come from their addiction, but their isolation in an environment that embraces all of the technologies that they're trying to restrict. Change the environment, and you might have a different result.

DVDs, and the paradox of choice

John August comments on what he refers to as "DVDs, and the paradox of choice." Apparently there's been a 2% drop in DVD sales, and Fortune attributes this to paralysis over which new format to buy. August is concerned about picking the loser in the HDDVD/Blue Ray war. I'm in the same boat and will continue purchasing standard definition DVDs until there is a clear winner. In passing, August mentions Barry Schwartz's *The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less*, which I've had on my Amazon wishlist for a while now. One of Schwartz's arguments is that in our desire to not make the incorrect choice we avoid picking anything at all. This happened to me, not only with DVD formats, but with the latest video game

consoles, and much to my shame, video cameras. In the latter case, I have been paralyzed for far too long out of fear of buying the wrong camera.

Source: <http://johnaugust.com/>

Kevin Smith and Rehearsals

On his blog, Kevin Smith talks about rehearsals for his new movie *Zack and Miri Make a Porno*. He writes:

On 'Clerks', we rehearsed in Quick Stop, every night for three weeks straight. None of us had ever made a movie before, and we didn't have the cash to blow on multiple takes, so it felt like getting the performances and blocking (such as it was, considering Jeff and Brian were simply parked behind the counter most of the flick) as close to perfection made the most sense.

Since he was using film, I can certainly see the advantages of rehearsal, but I wonder if he would have done the same if he had access to affordable DV cameras. One of the reasons I'm so fond of DV is that it's not necessary to be so thrifty while filming. If you have to shoot multiple takes it costs you money, but not nearly as much as when you shoot with film.

An argument could be made that since he was working with non-actors the rehearsals helped to improve their performances. One of the pleasures of viewing *Clerks* is that in comparison to many of the other films produced the same year with a similar budget, the acting and writing are exceptional. I think Smith is underrated director, and he has expressed insecurity about his skills because he doesn't think of himself as being visual, but there's something to be said for just parking a camera and letting the script come alive with the help of your actors.

Later on Smith talks about getting pissed at his leads three weeks before shooting began on *Chasing Amy* because all of the actors were "on book," meaning that they hadn't memorized their lines and were still referring to the script. He laughs about it now because when he was working on *Catch & Release*, he memorized most of his dialog on the day of shooting, "like most actors." I find this last comment interesting, and a little surprising. I can't say I ever thought about how long it took an actor to memorize their lines or when they started, but I assumed they began before the actual shooting day. Of course

since there's a lot of inactivity for actors on film sets when they're not in a scene, I can understand filling time by learning lines, but I know of at least a few actors who have their lines memorized by the first day of shooting. Bruce Campbell for example is highly critical of actors who don't come prepared and he's known to learn the other actors' lines in addition to his own. I've heard similar stories about Jennifer Jason Leigh as well.

The limited experience I've had with acting involved improvisation, and the actors I observed while taking Theatre classes at Dalhousie University spent most of their time pretending to be trees and abstract concepts. I once tried memorizing the lines of a script for a movie I hadn't read as an experiment, and before getting bored with the process I managed to memorize around 25 pages of dialog. I found it to be a painstaking and imperfect process, so I have enormous respect for actors that get to the point where they don't even have to think about their lines.

Source: <http://silentbobspeaks.com/?p=368>

The Wii, The Wizard, and the Power Glove

While hanging out at Colonel Tuckers I noticed a few people playing the Wii. I quickly lost interest in the system. I can see how casual gamers would be charmed by it because it does seem more accessible than the other systems, not to mention less expensive, but I'm not sure I understand why video game veterans are so attracted to it. Nostalgia perhaps?

I find the controller gimmicky, as I noticed that the player doesn't have to actually adopt a correct posture to use it effectively. For example, to be successful at a Baseball game you can lazily swing one handed. Perhaps I'm expecting too much, but that seems as artificial as a standard controller. In a way, the Wii controller reminds me of the Power Glove, which was featured in *The Wizard*. I felt compelled to watch that scene again, and sure enough, YouTube came through: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zfjE2z_x5k8

After watching the video under Related Videos I saw a clip from *The Wizard* pointing out an early appearance by Toby Maguire, which then led me to the Super Mario Brothers 3 scene from the same

film. I can't remember if I saw the movie before I played the game, but I remembered getting chills when I watched this scene. Even now, I can feel an echo of the excitement I had as a child. That's successful product placement right there: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o42QTD4q_Rs

I'm not the only one interested in how the Power Glove compares to the Wii controller. One intrepid geek has done a detailed analysis of the two here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N1CTyYBJ1Pg>

In the spirit of more time suck, someone has actually taken the time to re-cut the *300* trailer audio with bits of *The Wizard*: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iL6tzOoHhLc>.

Directing Actors

I read an interview with Tommy Lee Jones at telegraph.co.uk. Commenting on his relationship with directors he says he doesn't compromise with directors, and that as soon as he figures out what they want he does it. The only time he has a problem with directors is when they don't know what they want. This is a familiar problem for actors, almost to the point that it has become a cliché, and yet I'm confident that many directors often don't know what they want, and the evidence for that can be found in DVD commentaries and documentaries. I suspect that many directors are good at faking it.

Source: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/arts/main.jhtml;jsessionid=2OYE3VPGNXU0FQFIQMGSFGGAVCBQWIV0?xml=/arts/2008/01/12/sm_tommyleejones112.xml&page=1

Grassroots Convergence Culture

I read the ICS 2101 reading for the week and decided to do a search on grassroots convergence culture to get a broader understanding of what Jenkins is talking about. I came across an interview in which he discusses the importance of video games. I find two of his statements particularly interesting:

Games, then, represent an interesting case study in globalization — games draw on local traditions but address a global market; they become shared reference points for young players around the world and in turn, they further inform the next generation of fantasies that will circulate in popular culture.

Game companies have been more open to user-generated content, more responsive to audience desires for opportunities to participate, than, say, the recording or film industries have been. In Convergence Culture, I contrast between prohibitionist responses (framed around intellectual property) and collaborationist responses (framed around user-generated-content) to the challenges that grassroots media pose to commercial culture.

Source: <http://hot.carleton.ca/hot-topics/articles/jenkins-interview/>

Regarding the second paragraph, Jenkins distinguishes between the video game industry and the film industry in terms of prohibitionist and collaborationist responses. I think he's right, in that game companies have been more open to user-generate content, but it should be said that outside of re-editing a film and creating mash-ups, there isn't much that you can do with a film in comparison to a video game, not simply because of the media's inherent restrictions, but also for financial reasons. With a video game, you can get access to the code, video, and graphics files if you know what you're doing, enabling you to completely restructure the game, but with a film what you see is usually what you get. I suppose filmmakers could provide access to alternative takes or deleted scenes, but even then you're considerably limited unless you shoot your own footage, and that requires far more resources than it does to mod a game.

Christy Dena

I came across Christy Dena's blog. She refers to herself as a cross-media specialist, and is currently working on her PhD. She also has a history with industry. From her About Me page, she writes that she has been "working as an industry strategist, mentor, [and] designer." I can't imagine that it's easy to juggle all of that while trying to complete a PhD, but she's somehow managing to do it. She has another website, Universe Creation 101, which is basically a podcast about what "clever, creative and brave practitioners, theorists, marketers and strategists are doing." I'm going to have to keep an eye on her websites because she seems to have an interest in how filmmakers are using the Internet to self-distribute their work.

Source: <http://www.christydena.com/> and <http://www.universecreation101.com>

Sony Vegas

The Sony Vegas manual is pretty limited, so I've been relying on online videos and trial and error to learn the program. I've been getting most of them off of YouTube. Interestingly, many of the tutorials have a machinima focus, though the skills translate regardless of what you're doing. Here's an example: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sozr9nzAEgU>

RSS feeds

Howard Rheingold released a vlog discussing RSS feeds. I decided to start subscribing to the many blogs I have bookmarked on del.icio.us. I've had an account with Google Reader for a while now, but I haven't taken advantage of it. Rheingold's tutorial got my interested, and now that I have 40-45 subscriptions I can see the advantage of using RSS. Google Reader also has some social networking features that I need to investigate when I get a chance.

Source: <http://vlog.rheingold.com/>

Mickey Mouse Monopoly

I watched Mickey Mouse Monopoly in ICS 2102 today. I ended up discussing the film with Arif after class. The documentary itself is unsurprisingly manipulative, selecting particular clips from Disney films that will garner the strongest reaction from the audience. Children are also used to show how impressionable they can be, and I'm wary of this because I don't know what the questions are that they're responding to. The lack of critical reflection on the part of adults is disturbing, but I'm not surprised by that either. Most people, regardless of their education level, I would venture to guess, are not critical of their media experiences. I found some of the arguments persuasive, particularly with respect to consumerism.

It's difficult for me to put myself in the position of a minority that is being inundated with popular images that stereotype and degrade my ethnic affiliation. I'm trying to think back to my childhood, and how I approached various kinds of media, and what prejudices or culturally situated impressions have remained with me due to my media exposure. Would my experiences have been different if I was a girl, or a minority? I'm not sure, and I'm concerned about starting with a conclusion, i.e., Disney has a

powerful socializing effect on young people, and then searching for evidence to support such a position. Still, that conclusion isn't unreasonable, is it?

Mumblecore and Quality of Life

While browsing Sujewa Ekanayake's blog <http://diyfilmmaker.blogspot.com/>, I came across a post about Mumblecore. He submitted an article about the movement to <http://www.indiefilmpedia.com> which, according to Ekanayake, is a "wiki project started by several indie filmmakers and indie film fans." The wiki is horribly disorganized, but his article is pretty good. Here's an excerpt:

Mumblecore generally refers to films by Andrew Bujalski, Joe Swanberg, Aaron Katz, Duplass brothers: Mark Duplass and Jay Duplass, and their film production collaborators, most of whom are also their friends (see this color coded chart at Cinephiliac: [1]). Mumblecore movies, as of 2007, are low budget, shot almost all on digital video or another video format (except for Bujalski's Funny Ha Ha and Mutual Appreciation, which were shot on motion picture film), are self-distributed or are distributed by small companies. Mumblecore movies feature young characters; twentysomethings and characters in their late teens, attempting to figure out their romantic relationships, work lives, and the general direction of, or the lack of direction, in their lives.

Amy Taubin has offered a scathing critique of Mumblecore in Film Comment: <http://www.filmlinc.com/fcm/nd07/mumblecore.htm>. She begins her article with "Adieu, mumblecore, the indie movement that never was more than a flurry of festival hype and blogosphere branding."

Her criticisms are the following:

1. Sound is almost always a neglected element.
2. The acting is poor.
3. The mumblecore crowd is homogeneous.
4. The films don't discuss anything important.

A couple of bloggers have armed themselves and are preparing to go to war with Taubin: <http://blog.spout.com/2007/11/07/m-words/>, <http://www.nerve.com/CS/blogs/screengrab/archive/>

[2007/11/09/die-mumblecore-die.aspx](http://www.thereeler.com/the_blog/2007/11/09/die-mumblecore-die.aspx), http://www.thereeler.com/the_blog/

[taubin_brings_the_grudge.php](http://edendale.typepad.com/weblog/2007/11/in-defense-of-s.html), <http://edendale.typepad.com/weblog/2007/11/in-defense-of-s.html>

I absolutely love RSS feeds. Being able to monitor all of these discussions is awesome. Anyway, Karina Longworth writes:

[I]f the hype is the problem, then don't penalize the filmmakers. Neither the festivals nor the bloggers mandated (or really, even encouraged) these filmmakers to work together, again and again, on projects as disparate as Katz' Quiet City, Swanberg's Young American Bodies, and Mary Bronstein's upcoming (last I heard, tentatively titled) Yeast.

Source: <http://blog.spout.com/2007/11/07/m-words/>

Anyone familiar with the history of the French New Wave will also remember the backlash. This is not to say that mumblecore is in the same league, but I'm not surprised by the—mostly empty—criticism. I get annoyed by hype as much as the next person, but these people deserve some applause for going out there and shooting stuff on the cheap without regard for commercial expectations.

While browsing <http://www.indiefilmmedia.com> I came across a link to Benjamin Morgan's *Quality of Life*: <http://www.qualityoflife-themovie.com/>. Morgan appears to be self-distributing his film, and he offers a DIY filmmaking book and DVD package with free shipping. I'm tempted to order, but he doesn't offer PayPal. I'm wary of submitting my credit card information, so I think I'll hold off. I have to be honest, his film doesn't interest me, and there is something off-putting about his website. It is slick and uncompromising with its goal to get you to buy his DVD. It's probably necessary from a marketing standpoint, but it feels at odds with his DIY handcrafted approach to making movies.

Neo-realism

In SOCI 3251 I watched Roberto Rossellini's *Germania Anno Zero* (1948) as an introduction to Italian Neo-realism. What struck me about the film is how little I was engaged by it. I felt completely detached as I watched people live and die in despair. I ended up discussing the film with Arif and Dr. Galbo after the class was finished. Dr. Galbo finds the film depressing, but I can't get that close to it. I wonder if Steven

Spielberg was influenced by the film when he made *Schindler's List*. Arif made an interesting point, suggesting that one of the reasons we're not able to get close to the characters emotionally is because of the randomness of the film.

I think my problem with the film is that it doesn't let you get close to any of the characters, so it ends up being a narrative experience rather than a dramatic one. The audience becomes an observer rather than a participant. If it was Rossellini's intention to not have us participate, that's an interesting choice, but one that I find discomfoting as an audience member.

Short Films

I've been watching the European short films featured at <http://www.daazo.com/> most of the day. I've been trying to get inspiration for my ICS 3006 project, but it's difficult to find short films that are two-minutes in length. Most short films seem to be in the five to ten minute range.

Buffy's Unaired Pilot

Buffy The Vampire Slayer - The Unaired Pilot, is currently on YouTube: <http://youtube.com/watch?v=NLrclnHyvh8>. I'm surprised that it hasn't been removed, especially since I recall Whedon saying that it would never see the light of day, but maybe he was just referring to an official release. I wonder how long it will be before fans start editing the original pilot and possibly doing mash-ups. If I wasn't so busy, I'd be tempted to do something myself.

Independent Video Games

I played some independent video games after reading "Explosion of Indie Games Kills 'Best of' Column": http://www.wired.com/gaming/gamingreviews/commentary/games/2008/01/gamesfrontiers_0114

The author suggests that video games have reached a maturation point that movies and music once hit. By implication, he suggests that the gaming industry is on the cusp of a revolution.

On a related note, to fix the lack of proper widescreen support in the PC game *Bioshock*, some fans have come up with a patch for the game. It's pretty easy to use, though I'm hoping that the official version will

be out soon. I'm surprised that the developers didn't crack down on the people that made the patch, especially since it is being openly discussed on the official forums.

DIY Filmmaking

Through my RSS feeds I have been monitoring the following websites: www.indymogul.com/, <http://www.selfreliantfilm.com/>, <http://blogs.indiewire.com/caveh/>, <http://wilddinerfilms.blogspot.com/>, and <http://datenumberone08.blogspot.com/>.

They're connected with the so-called do-it-yourself movement or DIY culture, which was mentioned in "Quentin Tarantino's Star Wars?: Digital Cinema, Media Convergence, and Participatory Culture" by Henry Jenkins.

While browsing these websites, I came across The Workbook Project: <http://workbookproject.com/>. I'm surprised that I haven't heard of it before. The guy behind it is Lance Weiler, who made *The Last Broadcast* in the late '90s. I still haven't seen his film, but he seems to be doing well for himself. The website is a bit busy looking, but after a while you get used to it.

Tom Cruise

While checking my RSS feeds I came across a leaked Tom Cruise Scientology video which is making its rounds on various video sites, no doubt being followed by cease and desist letters. I posted the video on Facebook, but I don't imagine it will last long.

Source: <http://www.cinematical.com/2008/01/15/the-tom-cruise-recruitment-video-scientology-tried-to-hide/>