

Pleasure and Pedagogy

The Consumption of DVD Add-Ons Among Irish Teenagers

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Abstract / This article addresses the issue of young people and media use in the digital age, more specifically the interconnection between new media pleasures and pedagogy as they relate to the consumption of DVD add-ons. Arguing against the view of new media as having predominantly detrimental effects on young people, the authors claim that new media can enable young people to develop media literacy skills and are of the view that media literacy strategies must be based on an understanding and legitimating of young peoples' use patterns and pleasures. The discussion is based on a pilot research project on the use patterns and pleasures of use with a sample of Irish teenagers. They found that DVDs were used predominantly in the home context, and that while there was variability in use between the groups, that, overall, they developed critical literacy skills and competences which were interwoven into their social life and projects of identity construction. The authors suggest that these findings could be used to develop DVDs and their add-on features as a learning resource in the more formal educational setting and they go on to outline the potential teaching benefits of their use across a range of pedagogical areas.

Key Words / literacy / audience / pleasure / cultural competences / teaching

Introduction

As western society has become increasingly media saturated and is characterized by an ever-changing media landscape, issues arise about the pleasures for and pedagogical influences of new media in young people's lives. Much of the popular, and indeed academic, discussion of young people's use of mass media has been characterized by moral panics around their perceived detrimental effects. Until relatively recently, research on young people and television, for example, has frequently adapted this strategy. New media have been dogged by the same kind of negative perception. Parents and educators alike have bemoaned the amount of time young people spend on game consoles and the ever expanding web capabilities, particularly chat rooms, as opposed to using the internet to find information. Often these activities are contrasted with other more traditional games and pursuits, which are regarded as physically and mentally healthier ways of spending leisure time. In relation to media education, the traditional response in Ireland and elsewhere has been 'protectionist' or 'innoculationist' (O'Neill, 2000), whereby it is considered necessary to immunize children against the pernicious effects of the mass media with similar kinds of arguments rehearsed in relation to new media (Lister et al., 2003).

However, an alternative approach has been to argue for the importance of new media in enabling young people to develop media literacy skills and hopefully acquiring a critical approach to media. The relatively more progressive paradigm that has emerged (Buckingham, 1998, 2003) encourages students to think critically about the media and to develop a sense of themselves as empowered players in the contemporary 'mediascape'.¹ This media education strategy derives largely from the work of scholars who perceive understanding of and access to the media as crucial to democracy and participatory citizenship, as well as those who point to the wider educational benefits of critical and creative engagement with popular media (such as Dyson, 1997; Newkirk, 2002; and Buckingham et al., 2004).² Arguments are rehearsed about the qualitative difference between old and new media in terms of their effects and how older mass media constructed/reinforced a passive user compared with newer interactive media like the BBC's Creative Archives project, which, it is claimed, can promote a more active, engaged and critical consumer.

Much of this debate on the positive/negative effects of new media has taken place within the confines of textual and political economy/production framework. The debates have also been characterized by a relative absence of empirical audience research, although we acknowledge some pioneering work by Sonia Livingstone among others. While many studies have been very insightful in setting up analytical and theoretical frameworks, there is an urgent need now for more empirical research on new media consumption. This need has been acknowledged by media scholars, who have seen that the clear distinctions, which formerly existed between text and audience have become increasingly blurred. Audience researchers such as Martin Barker, in particular, argue that there is now an urgency to engage with the audience and media consumption generally as a central component of film scholarship.

Nevertheless, any discussion of new media use, pleasures and literacies needs to take place within the context of access to new media technologies. Ireland can be regarded as on a par with most other European countries in this respect. With the qualification that broadband access

remains patchy throughout the country, nevertheless in the past five years access to the internet and purchase of mobile telephones has dramatically increased in Ireland. For example we have one of the highest rates of penetration in the world of Sony PlayStations (Kerr, 2006). Mobile phones have reached saturation point. In another pilot study of their use by young Irish teenagers, replicating the sample study of DVD use, we found strong confirmation of this.³ The arrival of Sky digital TV has also become a reality in many Irish households. While access to new media technologies is increasing rapidly, there is a lack of knowledge as to what people are doing with these new technologies, what pleasures they are getting from their use, what skills and competencies they are acquiring, and what impact these new media are having on traditional literacy. Investigation of the viewing experience is at an embryonic stage and there is a paucity of reception studies of new media in Ireland, as elsewhere. However, some studies indicate that there are broad similarities between Ireland and other European countries in relation to young people's consumption. Kerr's (2006) study of video games, Hynes's (2005) study of ICTs in Dublin working-class homes, the Knowledge Based Project Report (BEACON, 2005) and European comparative studies of consumption of new broadband-enabled technologies all confirm this.

Research under the title 'New Media – New Pleasures?' (Kerr et al., 2006), carried out at Dublin City University, included an examination of DVD usage in the home and investigated the constituent pleasures of DVDs as part of a bigger project, which also examined experiences of computer gaming and digital television. The authors of the study acknowledge the need for consumption studies to help understand the pleasures of new media texts through an examination of user experiences. They argued for the need to 'take account of the specificities of new media artefacts while also considering the nature of the new media experience for particular users in particular contexts' (Kerr et al., 2006: 64).

This article builds on and extends the main issue addressed in the earlier project, that is to establish the extent to which Irish teenagers are acquiring new media literacies in the home and to explore the continuities and differences between traditional and new media in terms of pleasures and literacies. Much of the discussion in this article is based on findings from a more recent pilot study of DVD consumption among Irish secondary school children. In this research, we set out to explore a number of key areas around the extent and nature of their use of DVD extras within an overall media use context.⁴ The research findings were based on questionnaire data (sample of 38, with 24 male and 14 female) and focus group data from a sample of 24 in the 15 to 17 age bracket. The research was conducted in three secondary schools, one in North Dublin, one in a commuter town (population 18,000) and one in a small midland town (population 1200). Real names are not used, to ensure anonymity. The questionnaires were distributed to students and completed in a classroom setting. This information was used to establish patterns and context of use. A smaller sample of each class then participated in a focusgroup discussion eliciting more in-depth information on the nature and quality of their use of DVDs. We felt that the use of focus groups would be effective in gauging broad opinions and pleasures and affirming or rebutting the primary assumptions and hypotheses of our research project. Two of the focus groups were mixed gender and one was an allmale group. At the outset it must be stressed that this is a pilot study based on a small sample and, as such, is limited in terms of the definitiveness and representativeness of its findings. What we offer is a tentative, but hopefully instructive, piece that sets up what we consider to be an interesting analytic framework and raises questions which will inform larger and more in-depth studies of DVD consumption.

There is always the danger of simply valorizing this new DVD format, primarily designed from an economic perspective to exploit the loyal and sometimes obsessive fan base with the carrot of 'new' features.⁵ Taken as a whole, the increasingly large amount of supplementary material surrounding the feature film places the original text itself within a substantially new context, where it could be regarded as no longer the sole or even the main attraction. The 'meta-text' of the DVDs consists of a series of differentiated texts that allow the user to construct their own unique combination in the process of viewing any or all of them. While many critics mention how DVDs allow the user to view the material non-linearly, VHS also provided this possibility. However, it is now much easier and has become a defined 'new logic' and one of the main attractions of the DVD format. These new technological attributes, particularly 'non-linearity' and 'interactivity', remain of course critically contentious and have become a central focus in discussions around the internet, alongside a new range of digital formats.

Cultural Competences and Media Literacies/Pleasures

DVD use was very popular among the student sample, with only two of the 38 claiming never to watch DVDs. Unsurprisingly, the music soundtrack was one of the most popular of the extras among all three groups. While a few might still argue that the DVD format/platform lacks the analogue 'rawness' or 'liveness',⁶ most would dismiss this assertion and speak of the overall diegetic potency of the technology/medium. This attribute is particularly applied to the purity of the

digital sound, which greatly increases the viewing (audio) experience. This enhanced experience did not go unnoticed by our sample, as revealed in this quotation:

On some you need the DVD format, to get the proper music, like. And then you have the music DVDs which are deadly compared to watching it on video. (St Fabian's)⁷

The new format is most commonly associated and marketed on the increased quality of the viewing experience. We found most of our sample users totally bought into DVD as the current consumption standard, citing their ease of handling, size and so on with some high-using boys even looking forward to new developments beyond DVD. One wonders, however, if intrinsic audience pleasure is affected by such technical comparisons.

While we found that DVD use was popular among all students in the sample, we were struck by the different levels of cultural and technological competence among the pupils of the Dublin school compared with those from the smallest and most provincial school. Focus-group data indicated that the male students from St Fabian's were 'high achievers' (they were doing honours physics for their leaving certificate⁸) and computer gaming was one of their favourite hobbies. They were competent in multi-tasking with media and could be described as having what Sonia Livingstone refers to as 'multimodal literacies' or what Buckingham refers to as high level 'multiple literacies' – literacies which require an expansion of traditional notions of literacy (Buckingham, 2002; Livingstone, 2002). Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) also make the distinction between different levels of engagement with forms of popular culture on a continuum from 'petty producers' as the most engaged to 'consumers' as the least engaged.

While the students of St Fabian's were not 'petty producers' in the sense used by Abercrombie and Longhurst, they were the nearest to it. The group stood out for their ability to use and connect with a wide range of media, often at the same time. They firmly endorsed the questionnaire statements that information from DVD add-ons was both beneficial and enjoyable. While effectively demonstrating their multi-tasking skills and developing multiple literacies, they consumed vast quantities of media, while at all times having music playing in the background. This observation raises all the old moral panics about concentration and study, signalled by Neil Postman's idea of losing a 'literate culture' (Postman, 1985). While ostensibly studying, the students claimed they were able to text on their up-to-date mobiles, watch DVDs, and surf the internet. At the same time, they apparently have the ability to filter out 'noise' – including irrelevant chat and text messages. Furthermore, disrupting the notion of a 'common culture' constructed by TV schedules, many of the new generation of consumers appear to no longer be 'slaves' to mass cultural time management. Apparently they are becoming more 'active' consumers creating niche audiences and watching TV series on DVD only when they want to.⁹ But of course, one wonders if they are still consuming indiscriminately without appreciating contextual interconnections. In any case, we found levels of competence were uneven and limited, even in the most technologically competent group. For example, none of our current sample knew what hidden messages like 'Easter Eggs' were. Neither were they worried about contradictory nuances of meaning and decoding of texts; rather they easily accepted a peer-controlled common cultural norm for what was the accepted benchmark of taste within focus group discussions.

Students from the two non-Dublin schools, St Fin's and St Fulham's, appeared much more 'passive' in their use of DVDs overall. The majority of St Fulham's students – the commuter-town school – indicated that they would not even look at the special features or would just watch them once but 'never again'. Surprisingly they also purchased cheaper bootlegged copies, which would not have been high quality and may not have included some of the bonus features and not suitable for a 'collection'. Students from these two schools were less likely to read books or to play computer games as a hobby compared to students from St Fabian's.

While the differences in new media competences between the schools were marked, it is difficult to account for these variations. It would not be useful to claim a crude 'urban/rural divide' overlaid onto a 'digital divide'. Yet, we cannot discount some evidence of unequal access to new media technologies. But in addition to this, there may have been a number of additional factors at play, including gender, educational competences and aspirations, and varying levels of social and cultural capital.

Our findings indicate that the predominant location for viewing DVDs was in the home and that they appeared to be used less in the formal educational context. Indeed, much of the discussion centred on home viewing. In this context, we were interested in establishing if there were perceived differences between viewing on a computer and on a conventional TV (with the rapid increase in HDTV and wide-screen TV purchases). Consequently, it would be interesting to compare the effect on the dynamics of the usability and viewing experience of both technologies. What would be the percentage viewings of DVD on a computer screen by mainstream audiences compared with more conventional use of DVD players (or game consoles like PlayStation or Xbox) hooked up to more established leisure-based TV sets? Our findings suggest a continued

dominance of viewing film and add-ons in the sitting room – regarded as the most comfortable viewing location – while watching a big TV screen. While some watched add-ons on computer, all our respondents felt this was not conducive to achieving optimum viewing pleasure. For example, one male student made the comment: '[Y]ou want to watch it on the big screen. That's where it's meant to be seen. You want a couch there [in the living room]'. Despite the proliferation of both television and computer screens around the modern day home, this kind of comment appears to corroborate John Fiske and John Hartley's early media studies assertion that the act of communal TV viewing as a family has a close affinity with the ancient Bardic function of the hired poet or storyteller who told stories around a camp fire, affirming the notion of the TV as the 'hearth of the home' (Fiske and Hartley, 1978).

Some of the apparently intrinsic unique selling points of DVDs, which had informed our questioning, seemed to work but others did not. For instance, technical/interactive comparisons are frequently being made between DVD and VCR formats. Being able to jump through sequences or chapters in a film remains a primary difference between the two forms of filmic viewing, which could be rated across the 'active/inactive' viewing axis. Like in video games, mobile phones, or digital TV, DVD also demands a menu-driving skill on the part of the user that in turn allows some choice in their use. With regards to a breakdown of films into 'chapters' on DVD, it is interesting to gauge how these decisions are made from an aesthetic perspective.¹⁰ Anna Everett speaks of how:

Digital media technologies are distinguished from their analogue counterparts through a sort of phenomenological 'click fetish' and concomitant 'lure of sensory plenitude' effect, presumably with any one of several clicking apparatuses. Newer apparatuses of click pleasure, such as the computer mouse, video game joystick, wireless cell phone with internet connectivity, personal digital assistant, personal video recorder combined with more familiar click apparatuses, including the TV remotecontrol device and even the telephone, produce a consumer-driven on-demand media services environment few could have predicted even five years ago. (Everett, 2004: 94)

Incidentally, we also wanted to determine how users described their activity. The term 'flicking' was frequently used in our 'New Media – New Pleasures' focus groups to explain how they played with add-on features of DVD and new media generally. But the term was not used by our younger student groups, who appeared much more functional and instrumental in their use and displayed little sign of fetishizing the technology. While not apparently affected by special effects driven films, nevertheless, being up to date remains so important for these students, since not having the latest communication technologies provokes strong reactions, as affirmed by a revealing (and partially jocose) comment by one student that '[P]eople without broadband are lepers'.

None of the people to whom we spoke ostensibly bought DVDs specifically for the add-ons. Their motivation for purchasing was because they had already enjoyed the film at the cinema and wanted the experience replicated or archived in their own homes, or the film had been highly recommended by friends and peers. Furthermore, we found a majority of sample audiences watched films from start to finish – even those films they knew very well. In fact a majority of DVD purchases were previously viewed films from the big screen. As one St Fabian's student commented: 'You wouldn't buy a movie you hadn't seen. It could be crap.'

We found that the DVD extras were often used where the film narrative was perceived as complex or unintelligible. The director's commentary was deemed particularly useful in this regard, with certain scenes and situations explained by the director which gave them a clearer understanding of the meaning of the film.¹¹ For instance, one St Fabian's student asserted: 'Sometimes they actually explain what's going on. Like I was watching a movie called *Internal Affairs* [dir. Mike Figgis, 1990] and you couldn't understand it at all.' Another St Fabian's student made a similar comment: 'Some movies just get really deep and you have to watch them again, like *The Matrix* [dir. Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999].'

Initially, we had presumed that consumers' rationale for purchasing special effects (SFX)-driven films and viewing DVD versions was to gain the much valorized and collectable add-ons.¹² However, we found with this sample age group that this was not the case. They did not perceive the add-ons to be an essential part of the viewing experience. Of course, we do not infer from this any corresponding diminution of cultural competencies. Reasons for such lack of interest might include simply the lack of time to explore within an already media-saturated environment, alongside a perception that add-ons were possibly a 'waste of time'. Indeed, there was a certain antipathy to the idea of 'collecting', as expressed by two St Fabian's students:

No, you don't collect them. You just buy them and you just have them.

You just buy DVDs of films if you like them, and it just happens to turn into a collection. You don't go, 'I don't have a DVD collection so I better start building one now'. If you see a good DVD come out, you go, 'oh, I wanna buy that'. And then another one comes out and you buy that.

Our sample study displayed a range of cultural competences and pleasures alongside collecting protocols, which appear to be driven by strong peer pressure. This coalesced in a clear teen comedy favourite for many boys, namely *Jack-Ass*, *The Movie* (2002 dir. Jeff Tremaine) and its sequel. Their tentative collections certainly did not fit into the category of 'highbrow classics', where the motivation to purchase centres around a desire to build up archive collections of favourite movies, in the same way as one collects CDs of favourite albums.¹³ While the students did not consciously see themselves as collectors, having DVDs was nonetheless very important to them and seemed to be instrumental in terms of constructing and performing teenage identities. As the fan culture literature indicates (e.g. Jenkins, 1992; Hills, 2002) media are used to position oneself within certain taste and fan cultures, and relationships with others are negotiated partially on that basis. This project of identity construction was illustrated in a number of ways. One was in terms of sharing DVDs with friends and peers. As one student said: 'It's good to share, because you can show people who you like and see the things they like.' A second way of performing identity was through displaying cultural competences acquired through an extensive knowledge of the film text with repeat viewings. *Star Wars* (1977, dir. George Lucas) in particular, in spite of its age and outdated special effects, continues to be a favourite for students and appropriated in a range of social situations to validate group identity. It was interesting to see how cultural competences were crosscut by gender in this context. While repeat viewing of *Star Wars* was regarded as a marker of cultural competence by the St Fabian's group, similar repeat viewing of *Friends* was regarded as somewhat ridiculous, as indicated in the following:

Friends, I like Friends, but my sister, she has the one-box-set of Friends. Everyday that she's not in school, she'll spend an hour watching the same episodes. And over and over again [inviting laughter from fellow male students!].

In addition to the kinds of construction and performance of gender within the focus groups, questionnaire data also indicated that there was a gendering of film and television taste cultures. For instance, the males' three favourite genres of television were comedy, sport and science fiction. The females also liked comedy but reported more viewing of television soap opera and romance genres.

Interviews with directors, actors or cinematographers can of course provide important background information on the film. Our sample respondents signalled this as one of their favourite categories of add-on material. One could infer that there was a gender bias, with more girls favouring interviews with stars. This probably emulates more conventional fan magazine, soap and reality television consumption. While critics often dismiss such add-ons as simply space fillers on the DVD (Parker and Parker, 2004), correlating to 'tabloid style' gossip or outright hagiography, nonetheless they provide valuable back-up and contextual information, which augment the pleasurable consumption of the metatext as revealed by the comment: '[Re. *Internal Affairs*] Seriously, you try to watch it and it'll confuse the crap out of you. With the director's commentary, you can actually understand what's happening and the story.' However, the view that the director's commentary was useful did not go uncontested as other students felt that, 'you just want to watch the film. You don't care about the director's commentary' or, 'it's really boring', which suggests contrasting ways of engaging with texts and gaining pleasure(s).

The audio commentary can help affirm auteurial intentions while alluding to the difficulties and pleasures of the production process. Film scholars at least would like to believe that students and even more general consumers of creative art desire the illusion of getting inside the mind of the producers of mediated texts. We hypothesized that this layering of extra-textual knowledge on the add-ons remains a key pleasure for the user – echoing Barthes' notion of *jouissance*, particularly at later stages in third-level student film analysis, where cine-tastes have become more established and defined. Furthermore, various alternative endings appear common in thrillers for example and can promote narrative debates on the making of the film affecting the final version. Our sample students particularly cited their love of deleted scenes, which raised the spectre of incompleteness and the fractured coherency within the text. Deleted scenes are especially useful if the rationale is provided for their exclusion from the final edit, helping students to appreciate the reasons for narrative continuities. We found many students particularly enjoyed explorations of the making of stunts in the add-ons. 'Well they show all the stunts and how they were done, and the bits that were cut out, and they're just fun to watch.' But the pleasure in viewing the stunts was dependent on how well they were done in some cases:

But it also depends on the film as well. With a Jackie Chan film, he does all his own stunts. He actually does them himself. He jumps from one building to another with nothing to save him. But with The Matrix you see them on the wires and you think: that's not exactly cool.

There is, however a danger of revealing too much for some people's taste. For instance, the wonder of comedy entertainment can be destroyed by showing the failures and trivialities that

might lie behind it. Yet one of the most popular comedies already mentioned among our sample group, *Jackass: The Movie*, has over five hours of bonus material including deleted outtakes. The DVD affirms its intrinsic pleasures with the blurb: 'If you've only seen the movie in the cinema, you've only gone half ass', which of course corresponds to an explicit marketing strategy that encourages planned obsolescence and the corresponding demand to re-purchase the DVD version for its apparent 'surplus value'.

While recognizing the dangers of simply endorsing a 'pro-social agenda' with regards to teaching media literacies – which Martin Barker and Kate Brooks (1989) suggest is equally driven by suspect theorizing¹⁴ – this article seeks to frame these students' comments within a media literacy framework and attempt to test some of our pedagogical assumptions for using add-ons to teach film.

Teaching New Media Pleasures

While this current audience study focused on media consumption in the home, we would also like to make some suggestions for teaching new media including film using DVD add-ons. These suggestions are augmented by the 'New Media – New Pleasures' research project, which focused particularly on third-level students and adults. At the outset, we would categorize a broad taxonomy of the potential teaching benefits of DVD¹⁵ and their accompanying add-ons across a number of broad areas, including: adaptation and the study of comparative grammars; film style and generic language; political economy and corporate knowledge; audience reception study; additional benefits for language acquisition and useful documentary material for the study of a range of media debates.

(1) Adaptation and the study of comparative grammars. With so much add-on evidence from original sources, such as excerpts from the original novel and the replication of storyboards and director's comments, students are able to compare and contrast the two media in a much more direct and immediate way than before. Film grammar of course draws extensively from other art formats, particularly literature, and both can learn from each other. Many film students want to learn the skills of narrative construction and scriptwriting, DVD add-ons certainly can aid this. Some of the young respondents in this sample project tended to agree that add-ons would assist in developing their skill-sets and enable them to possibly produce media in the future, while helping them to interrogate their pleasures generally.

(2) Film style and generic conventions alongside a reinvigorated auteur theory are certainly augmented by add-ons, as inferred by many of the student comments. Incidentally, Criterion – who distributes a wide range of classic art-house films – employs eminent academics to contribute to the DVD add-ons and proselytize for and explain the artistic qualities of these seminal films for the discerning audience. This possibly also re-affirms a canonical highbrow evaluation of such texts, while at the same time highlighting a rare direct relationship between film education and the industry.¹⁶

(3) Political economy and corporate knowledge. For example add-ons that focus on how a film got made alongside a range of economic barometers of 'success' help develop these critical skills for students. There is a growing body of business-related research outlining the phenomenal success of the technology to widen the scope of film consumption and its possible future. For example, some add-ons provide evidence of the placement of the film text within the production companies' stable of films, which is a very useful business study, while exposing how specific films fit into predetermined genres or not as the case may be. For example Paul Grainge traces how the DVD release of *North by Northwest* (1959, dir. Alfred Hitchcock) was re-packaged in 2001 with the contemporary logo of Warner Bros (the MGM back catalogue being owned by Turner Entertainment, a subsidiary of Time Warner). 'By replacing and refreshing old studio signatures, media corporations have been able to claim proprietary rights over Hollywood's past, a form of brand annexation tied to the appropriation and circulation of competing logos' (Grainge, 2004: 352).

(4) Furthermore, audience reception study is greatly assisted by add-ons, using niche market publicity trailers alongside a range of reviews, from which students can explore the contextual relationship between the film and its historical antecedents. This remains particularly important for an appreciation of historical and classic film texts as well as framing audience appeal for new generations of film study.

(5) We always find a *language* option with every DVD, yet not surprisingly none of our sample study used it. Presumably, as for a majority audience, this is considered too unpleasurable and difficult. Is the inclusion of various language choices simply negating the need to have separate products sold to different markets, yet maybe also encouraging more translations and 'localizing' work for language graduates? Translations specialists tell us that time scales for producing competent translations of Hollywood films are getting shorter, primarily to overcome the dangers of piracy, which in turn produces increasing possibilities of errors. One wonders if such a menu of easily accessible translations could be used to encourage the development of language

skills with viewers testing out their competencies.¹⁷ At least, European colleagues tell us that DVDs have made it easier to access original texts for people in a wide range of language groupings.

(6) Also broad media and film debates around race, class, gender and censorship for instance are facilitated by extra material provided on a growing number of DVDs. Race issues in particular are well served by excellent documentaries on *Birth of a Nation* (1915, dir. D.W. Griffith) for example. Similarly, the investigation of gender issues has greater scope for development with focused readings and other raw material added to a wide range of the current output. We found however, little evidence of the creative or educational use of DVD add-ons by teachers to help flesh out a range of issues and debates. This, we feel, would be of great benefit. By providing up-to-date categorization of such add-ons, they would serve as an important resource for educationalists at all levels to connect with their students in critically analysing issues around intercultural debates and other important topics raised by add-ons.

Concluding Remarks

Our research findings and discussion here has focused on the interconnections between new media pleasures and pedagogy in terms of DVD consumption. We have examined some of the main pleasures of DVD use for a sample of secondary school students and have highlighted some of the ways in which these pleasures might be effectively harnessed for educational objectives. We are strongly committed to the view that effective media literacy strategies must be based on an understanding and legitimization of young peoples' use patterns and pleasures. In summary, DVDs strengthen the overall appeal of the medium for audiences and can also have significant educational applications.¹⁸ With a growing interest in new media research, the add-ons accompanying DVDs augment the study of new media generally and most specifically help to explore how new generations of Irish and world audiences 'think digitally'.¹⁹ At a broader educational level, we are interested in developing strategies for assessing some of these further questions and broaden our pilot study. Our aim is to develop a more comprehensive and empirically based sampling project to more fully appreciate audience pleasures alongside informal cultural competencies. From this, we hope to suggest future strategies for teaching new media alongside developing appropriate educational policies for Ireland and elsewhere.

Notes

1 An underpinning research question in much of the literature is to what extent use of such new media expands upon, or merely remediates existing literacies. There are of course many different definitions of 'media literacy' and it is clear that it is never static, evolving over time as people become more experienced and media themselves evolve. Adapting a conventional educationalist stance, we take media literacy to include both the technical skills required to access a particular media like DVD as well as an ability to analyse the media codes and conventions, and evaluate the underlying values and meanings. Furthermore, it should also aim to include the ability and skill to actively create media content. Our younger sample appeared to have effective literacy for use of the technology, but was unable to appreciate how such transferable skills might improve their computer literacy for example.

2 As Sefton-Green and Buckingham affirm in an essay 'Digital Visions: Children's Creative Uses of Multimedia Technologies':

From our perspective as media educators, it requires us to consider the relationship between young people's 'informal' cultural competencies (as consumers and users of digital multimedia technology in the context of leisure) and the ways in which these competencies might be used and developed in formal schooling, particularly through the 'creative' uses of technology in arts subjects. Thus there is a need to investigate the ways in which young people might draw on their 'informal' cultural competencies in their work at school, and how their experiences of the formal curriculum might then impact back on their leisure uses of the technology. (Sefton-Green and Buckingham, 1996)

3 We are also interested in teasing out their extreme (even excessive) use of mobile texting – often maintaining hundreds of texts on their phones as an affirmation of their networking friendships. Nevertheless, in the focus groups many felt texting per se constituted a different language skill and did not interfere with, much less affect, their conventional writing and expression skills. It would be interesting to also test students' growing aural communication skills, as a consequence of extensive use of mobile phones.

4 The pilot study was financed by Dublin City University and co-ordinated by Post-Doctorate researcher Anthony Cawley, who together with Pat Brereton and Deirdre Hynes carried out the focus group discussions. Cawley and Hynes will present the findings of the mobile phone element in a separate report.

5 Yet in very rare cases this fan base can be actively included in DVD decisions. Furthermore the DVD can offer a pseudo-editing programme that allows the user to put short scenes together using alternative takes, like in *Men in Black* (1997).

6 Stephen Prince (2004) suggests the format lacks the analogue 'rawness' or 'liveness' of older platforms – like in debates between vinyl and CD music – and most importantly lacks 'grain' which gives the celluloid image its specific 'luminosity and vividness'.

7 As already mentioned, the names of the three schools have been changed to ensure anonymity. However, to signal the socio-economic differences between the schools, we would suggest that while the Dublin school's catchment area could be described as a lower middle-class suburb with high employment and high disposable income, the commuter town school (less than an hour and a half by public transport from Dublin) equally has good employment prospects, either in situ or by commuting to the capital with good disposable income. Meanwhile, the small midlands town is sustained by farming and other manual work, with less disposable income and some evidence of students leaving early for the capital to gain professional employment and comparatively smaller numbers go on to university.

8 In the Irish educational system, students study approximately seven subjects – compared with three A-levels within the British system – whose results are aggregated to produce a points score which is used to assess entry levels to third-level education.

9 Rob Cover for example has done some interesting analysis on how DVDs are appropriated for television series especially *24* and cites Robert Latham's *Consuming Youth: Vampires, Cyborgs and the Culture of Consumption* (University of Chicago Press, 2002) – suggesting that members of the 'digital generation' are seen as 'breaking free from a one-way, centralized media form' and provides evidence of 'an emerging ethos of interactivity among young people who have been raised with computer technology' (Cover, 2005: 143).

10 Incidentally in a detailed reading of the DVD version of David Lynch's *The Straight Story* the breaks can be seen to closely echo the poetic moments in the chapter divisions (Brereton, 2005: pp.124–30).

11 Barker and Brooks (1998) had some surprising counter-intuitive findings from their *Judge Dredd* study; when questioning young people what 'media education' did for them, they affirmed that 'critical viewing' is what you do when you were bored. 'If a film is good, one of the kinds you enjoy, you just bathe in it, in the ways you've learnt how. But if the film is boring, or slow, or not what you expected, then you go into the media studies mode of watching' (1998: 308). One wonders, with the increase in viewing films on DVDs and the growth of so-called 'smart films', if such notions of critical viewing are changing.

12 In a current undergraduate paper in our School of Communications, a student interviewing 60 of her third-level student peers discovered that few admitted to buying DVDs specifically for their add-ons, but several admitted to splashing out on box sets costing up to 60 euros for their favourite *Matrix* or *Kill Bill* collections.

13 Age of course appears to be a primary factor, alongside increased disposable income. From observations over the years we find that third-level media students frequently build extensive collections of DVDs corresponding to their specialist cultural competencies with new media generally.

14 'Once again, the agenda is a moral one: how much good can we do through the media?' Barker and Brooks continue that the shared assumption is that 'research into audiences is research into influences' (1989: 85) with 'users' hardly being studied (1989: 88). We would certainly endorse however the strategy of trying to 'pay close attention to how people talk about their own uses of the media, how they define their own pleasures, what meanings they see in a "text" and what significance they attach to their encounters with it' (1989: 104).

15 Meanwhile we take on board recent criticism, which suggests that many extra-textual features on the DVDs may surprisingly serve to close down meaning. (See Brookey and Westerfelhaus, 2002.)

16 For example Laura Mulvey has done a 'dense commentary' for the Criterion edition of *Peeping Tom* (dir. Michael Powell, 1999), and David Bordwell for Eisenstein's classic *Ivan the Terrible 1 and 2*, alongside Yuri Tsivian's 'elliptical but engaging commentary' on Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1999). (See Parker and Parker, 2004.)

17 In another Teaching and Learning funded DCU project, Japanese manga and anime fans tell us that they are certainly encouraged to try and pick up the original version because of their hatred of poor dubbing.

18 As also explored in Lehman-Wilzig and Cohen-Avigdor (2004).

19 Echoing the broader disciplinary base for the Society of Cinema and Media Studies, alongside other film research centres, we would endorse the realignment of 'old' and 'new' media research to help ensure that film studies remains relevant for contemporary students and contemporary (digital) film literacy.

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