

Editorial

The Consumption and Use of DVDs and their Add-Ons

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When DVD first arrived around 1997, consumers were not only familiar with demanded, domestic viewing but also with many forms of interactivity because of the increasing ubiquity of media such as the World Wide Web and digital games. DVDs however introduced the idea that 'traditional non-directional, or sequential, cinema was just one component of the moving-image experience, and that repeat watching was not only acceptable but was almost required' (Harper in Rombes, 2005: 97). While the videocassette transformed the size and accessibility of film experience by marketing it as a book-sized, readily available commodity, the DVD accelerated the ability to manipulate a film's narrative, with multiple options and commentaries.

Over the last few years there have been some interesting academic papers on DVD add-ons, including a special issue by the film journal *The Velvet Light Trap* in 2005, where contributors recognized the obvious point that film and media scholars are at last presented with new material for research and debate. Citing the expedient growth of the medium, Craig Hight in an article from the journal noted *The Economist's* statistics that in 2003, Americans spent \$22.5 billion on DVDs and videocassettes compared to \$9.2 billion at the box office (Hight, 2005: 4), global sales of the format has continued unabated ever since. However, Peter Dean's debate piece and Robert Brookey's feature article in this journal will contextualize such universal acclaim, while also questioning varying healthy predictions for the future. Both reviews will assess this dramatic success story using technical and economic comparators in an attempt to predict possible future scenarios for this fast changing technology.

Historically, much add-on material on DVD appeared to replicate the electronic press kits (EPKs) that are used to write reviews; by including extended trailers, together with infotainment documentaries of core cast and crew members, marketing the production, while extending obligatory praise for the film and their colleagues in the industry. But, as illustrated by several articles in this special issue, DVD add-ons have become much more expansive, even reflexive, with consumers/fans willing to pay much higher prices for deluxe versions of their favourite films. Films are now frequently shot specifically to include material for add-ons, with the foreknowledge that studios will probably earn an increasing percentage of their profits from a growing catalogue of DVDs.

Furthermore, these new production protocols are extended to audiences and general film reception, with consumers encouraged to become fans across varying niche markets. Several articles in this issue insinuate how the creation of fan cultures is becoming a global mainstream phenomenon somewhat paradoxically and marshalled by the industry to maximize consumption. DVDs certainly encourage such fan cultures alongside older terms like 'cinephiles' and 'technophiles' to promote a new digital logic of consumption. Drawing on a typology of new media pleasures (see Kerr et al., 2006), 'control' appears to be a defining characteristic of DVD usage and new media critics frequently theorize how this is negotiated in game/play environments. DVDs have become an appropriate technology for a new media-literate generation to apparently extend their home consumption control.

Brookey traces how and why the DVD format has been so successful and the changes it has brought, particularly noting the shift in home video consumption from a rental to a sell-through market. While focusing on the difficulty of predicting the successful future format, he examines the unique selling points of Blu-ray and HD-DVD, the two competing formats for the future of DVD. Predicting where the current format is in the technological evolutionary cycle remains problematic, while foretelling how consumers will decide which new format to choose, has major implications for the industry. But like all predictions, it is safer to hedge ones bets and maybe as Brookey astutely suggests, consumers will decide not to jump for either technology, for the moment at least.

Leaving aside predictions for the future of the technology, a majority of the articles in this issue concentrate on a wide range of uses and critical considerations presented by add-ons. For instance from an educational perspective, understanding how to effectively use add-ons remains an abiding preoccupation in several of the articles. While issues around copyright and the need to 'rip' DVDs, including add-ons, for teaching purposes continues to be a live issue for teachers everywhere, Edgar Huang paints a cautionary picture of how all stakeholders, especially teachers, need to be careful to protect themselves from possible legal censure. In particular the Digital Millennium Copyright Act has made ripping Macrovision or CSS-protected DVDs illegal, begging the question, how can academics safely show material to their students? This minefield of legal complexity demands a concerted effort across various jurisdictions to ensure academics are protected in their 'fair use' of DVDs for teaching and research purposes. But as Huang illustrates,

much more needs to be done to clarify what is acceptable regarding DVD manipulation and usage for all educational stakeholders.

The subsequent articles address a wide range of interdisciplinary interests and agendas, confirming the importance of DVDs for future research. Minako O'Hagan's contribution focuses on language support functionality and outlines the type of language options commonly provided on DVD film titles, while examining the changes introduced by DVDs in relation to translation requirements, together with new possibilities opening up for translation research.

Similar to the way Lev Manovich and other new media theorists draw their inspiration from early cinema to explain the dynamics of new media, Tom Brown applies Tom Gunning's well-known notion of 'cinema of attractions', identifying parallels with so-called primitive cinema in terms of exhibitionism, technology display and the prevalence of direct address, to explain how DVD add-ons create new ways of connecting with global texts like *The Lion King*. In his detailed case study, Brown explains how the DVD ancillary promotional material can be read as an intratext, which in many ways simulates the specific attractions of a Disney theme park.

Pavel Skopal follows a similar trajectory with his study of the *Lord of the Rings* franchise. Nobody disputes the economic importance of the home DVD market, which often exceeds box office receipts particularly with these multimedia franchise productions, but with the repurposing of various editions for different niche markets including television, they help alter the reception of film and require detailed examination. For instance as Skopal notes New Line Entertainment sold over 20 million copies of *The Fellowship of the Rings* in four versions (on the North American market), furthermore, Brookey earlier mentions how Amazon.com offers 16 different DVD products from the franchise, which is extraordinary by any measure of marketing success. Pat Brereton and Barbara O'Connor provide a contrasting focus with a study of audience research into how young people actually use the medium, which was carried out in Ireland recently. Arguing against the notion that new media is also a passive entertainment media, the authors test the claim that young people develop important skills using DVDs and are of the view that media literacy debates must be based on an understanding and legitimating of young peoples' use patterns and pleasures. While documenting Irish teenagers' attitudes towards the technology, this article goes on to outline areas where DVD add-ons can actively encourage direct film education. As Charlotte Brunson and many others affirm, contemporary media studies must converge with new media if it is to understand the complexity of the DVD format. These themed articles signal a range of possibilities for future convergence and research in this area of film studies. Hopefully, they also suggest how to break down arbitrary disciplinary divisions within the academy, which are necessary to inform discussion and debate around new media production and consumption. We hope this dialogue will continue and help refine many of our preconceptions around the cinema of the future as it is repackaged through DVD and later formats.

References

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