

## **Ephemeral Media Workshop:**

### **Investigator's Report**

#### **Activities of the workshop and the themes explored**

The ephemeral media workshop applied the broad concerns of the Beyond Text programme (namely, how we communicate across time and place using performance, sound, images and objects) to a particular feature of our accelerated media world - the proliferation of the brief or 'ephemeral' texts that exist beyond and between the films, television programmes, and radio broadcasts more commonly isolated for analysis.

The general purpose of the workshop was to invite reflection on some of the changes taking place in the contemporary media environment, specifically, although not exclusively, as it relates to the rise of digital and Internet technology in the last two decades. Within critical accounts, the rise of new media technologies in the 1990s and 2000s have been linked to fundamental changes in the media environment, shaping newly emerging circuits of production and consumption and propagating a cultural landscape where media seem available everywhere and all the time. The workshop used 'ephemeral media' as a rubric to designate and explore some of the key strategies, forms and practices that are helping producers and publics alike to negotiate today's pervasive media terrain. Specifically, the term was used as a critical lens to examine the brief or otherwise transitory audiovisual forms that populate contemporary screen culture and which participate in a competitive 'attention economy.'

The workshop was organized around two separate 2-day seminars at the University of Nottingham on 23<sup>rd</sup>/24<sup>th</sup> June and 21<sup>st</sup>/22<sup>nd</sup> July 2009. These

explored two distinctive, yet interrelated, areas of contemporary screen life - the exponential growth of *user-generated* and *promotional* content. Across themed events, the workshop examined how the emerging digital media environment has created new opportunities for users to produce ephemeral texts with their own global trajectories (examining online video found on sites such as YouTube). It also examined the ephemeral media produced by cultural industries as they attempt to construct distinct identities in the marketplace (examining logos, promos, idents and trailers). Together, the workshop considered the technologies involved in the production and delivery of ephemeral media, the creative processes that take place in and between professional and grassroots media communities, and the making and unmaking of cultural expressions geared towards consumers and viewing communities 'on the move.'

The first workshop of the series ('Internet Attractions: online video and user-generated ephemera') examined the status, significance and circulation of user-generated ephemera, focusing on the place and function of online video in media life. Across panel and plenary sessions, and within open-group discussion, the workshop explored themes of:

- *Production and genre* – the technologies and genres involved in making online video and the relation between amateur and professional media production
- *Performance and address* – styles of online acting, dance, musical performance and projections of gesture and voice within online video and other user-generated ephemera (e.g. webcams, camera phones)
- *Sensory communication* – the use of sound and image in particular web-based forms and genres
- *media environments* - the relation of user-generated ephemera to continuities/changes in the media landscape and the historical precursors to online video
- *Audiences* – online communities and the dynamics of cultural borrowing and authorship involved in online remakes, mashups, and machinima

- *Distribution and business models* - emerging business models relating to ephemeral media production and consumption
- *critical methodologies* – the means and possibilities of studying and archiving user-generated ephemera

The second workshop of the series ('The Promotional Surround: logos, promos, idents, trailers') focused on the ephemeral media produced by the film and television industries; the workshop looked at promotional texts that exist beyond and between the 'primary' output of studios and networks. Across panel and plenary sessions, and within open-group discussion, the workshop explored themes of:

- *production* – the creative practices, technologies, and key companies involved in the making of logos, promos, idents, and trailers
- *design* – graphic histories and approaches to promotional media
- *performance and address*– projections of corporate identity and personality in channel idents, interstitials and other self-reflexive promotional material
- *sensory communication* – the use of sound and image in particular promotional forms and genres
- *media environments* - the relation of promotional ephemera to continuities/changes in the marketing and media landscape, and to shifting boundaries between promotion and content
- *Memory and media literacy* - The relationship of logos and interstitials to cultural memory and nostalgia
- *critical methodologies* – the means and possibilities of studying texts that fall outside the analytic focus of film and broadcast archives

In critical and thematic terms, the two events used brevity and evanescence as a point of departure for media analysis. The workshop sought to historicize and theorize 'ephemeral media' and assess the relation of key forms to the organization and experience of (contemporary) screen life. Activities were focused around two residential events which enabled sustained discussion among a diverse group of academic and industry practitioners.

## People and organisations involved

Both workshop events were designed to bridge perspectives across disciplines and between academic and media professionals. Through direct invitations and an open call for papers, the workshops brought together a mix of established and early career academics, doctoral students, and media professionals.

The first workshop event ('Internet Attractions') was attended by 28 people, 19 of whom gave papers. Of these, 24 were academic (5 professors, 6 senior lecturers, 7 lecturers, 5 doctoral students) and 4 were media professionals (two creative designers, mentioned below, one digital media consultant and a representative from EDINA, a national data centre based in Edinburgh). The academic participants came from disciplinary backgrounds in film studies, television studies, media studies, education, design technology, and business studies, and from a variety of higher education institutions (including the Universities of London, Nottingham, Bath Spa, De Montfort, Swansea, Greenwich, West of England, Cardiff, and Glasgow in the UK, and Indiana in the US). There were four plenary speakers at the event. This included two internationally renowned academics within film and new media studies (Professor Barbara Klinger (Indiana) and Professor Jon Dovey (UWE)) and two leading web practitioners (Hugh Hancock and Rik Lander). In the latter case, Hancock has been instrumental in the development of the influential online genre known as 'machinima.' He is creative director of Strange Company and has produced over 16 Machinima films, including the hit feature-length film *BloodSpell*. Rik Lander is Creative Director of U-Soap Media and has been a key figure in the development of interactive web narratives such as *Wannebes* and *Viral Spiral*.

The second workshop event ('The Promotional Surround') was attended by 30 people, 23 of whom gave papers. Of these, 25 were academic (7 professors, 8 senior lecturers, 6 lecturers, 4 doctoral students) and 5 were media practitioners or archivists (two creative industry professionals, mentioned below, and three members from the British Film Institute National Archive). The academic participants came from disciplinary backgrounds in film studies, television studies, and graphic design, and from a variety of higher education institutions (including the Universities of Aberystwyth, Nottingham, Stirling, Royal Holloway, Wolverhampton, Portsmouth, and Lincoln in the UK, and MIT, UCLA and Northwestern in the US). There were four plenary speakers at the event. This included two internationally renowned academics within film and television studies (Professor John Caldwell (UCLA) and Professor William Uricchio (MIT)) and two influential creative industry professionals (Charlie Mawer and Victoria Jaye). In the latter case, Mawer is executive creative director of Red Bee Media, a leading brand design company responsible for the channel idents and media branding of companies such as BBC 1, BBC 3, UKTV, Dave, and RTE. Victoria Jaye is Head of Multiplatform Commissioning, Fiction and Entertainment at BBC Vision where she is responsible for overseeing the commissioning of Comedy, Drama and Entertainment content and products across interactive/on demand TV, the web and mobile.

As the two seminars were fashioned around discrete topics, the participants were different at each workshop event. However, interactions were encouraged before the event through a dedicated website ([www.ephemeralmedia.co.uk](http://www.ephemeralmedia.co.uk)) that posted details of all papers as well as visual clips of the various ephemeral media under discussion. This produced collaboration before the workshop took place and between participants across the events (see next section). The organizing staff and students based at Nottingham attended both events, and helped make connections between the two themed areas. In terms of the workshop itself, the events took the form of a seminar, including themed panel sessions and four plenary talks. Almost all participants gave a paper and there were no competing sessions. This meant the group could develop themes in collaborative discussion across the two days, enabling threads and debates to unfold.

The feedback for both events was uniformly positive. To sample a few indicative responses, evaluation sheets and e-mails sent to the PI commented that the Promotional Surround workshop was 'outstanding in intellectual terms' (John Ellis), 'a brilliant show, rich discussion, good presentations, nice set up all round' (Martin Barker), 'a wonderful workshop and inspiring to spend time with such an engaging group of people' (Victoria Jaye), 'an excellent event with a really high level of papers and debates' (Catherine Johnson). Many commented that the best thing about the workshop was the 'productive array of perspectives' (William Uricchio) and 'the mix of US and UK academic and TV industry people' (Peter Meech). Evaluation sheets commented that the best thing about the Internet Attractions workshop was 'the diversity of the work being presented that opened up new corridors' (Barbara Klinger), and 'the high quality of papers based in grounded and specific investigations' (Jon Dovey).

A balance was sought between the time given for specific panels/papers and the time given for general discussion. This was, for the most part, effective although I would be inclined to build in slightly more time for general discussion and summary sessions next time. It is gratifying that participants at both events routinely commented on the workshop being 'brilliantly organized,' 'well scheduled' and 'expertly run.'

### **Advances and outcomes**

The workshop made advances in a number of areas, both in understanding user-generated and promotional content and in connections made to themes of the ephemeral. It became clear that, in conceptual terms, the ephemeral carries with it two significant meanings, or connotations, that can be applied to the study of media and media historiography: it signifies the relationship of screen forms to regimes of time (shortness, speed, immediacy) and regimes of

transmission (circulation, storage, value). In broad terms, the workshop helped advance understanding of the particular, and shifting, dynamics of immediacy, impermanence and textual exchange within screen culture. On the one hand, with the burgeoning number of delivery channels, contemporary audiovisual culture has seen a proliferation of short-form media geared towards mobile audiences whose attentions are more dispersed. On the other hand, with the rise of 24/7 global platforms and cultural archives like YouTube and Google, media content (or clips drawn from it) can now live on, receive unsuspected attention and be shared indefinitely by viewing communities. In this dual movement towards speed and storage, immediacy and archiving, the workshop helped think about how the ephemeral has become a site for our social engagement with media.

In bringing a diverse range of academic and media professionals together, the workshop stimulated debate and advanced discussion in the following key areas:

- *Changing business models for media industries and web practitioners in the age of the Internet.* The Internet provides a platform where texts that might have previously been considered transitory and fleeting become more permanent and more accessible by vastly increasing the opportunities for their production and distribution, potentially making ephemeral media less scarce. The workshop considered to what extent the Internet has changed practices, especially in the TV and new media industries, and made the ephemeral more or less important to media institutions (for example, in such as the rise of media planning, and the utilization of user-generated content).
- *Design practices and viewing frameworks within media culture.* The workshop was one of the first events of its kind to give critical primacy to logos, idents and interstitials as a subject for study. These were discussed as an overlooked factor in the evolution of media literacy, viewing styles, and memory (especially within television culture). The workshop considered the audiovisual strategies used to create such media, and the affective feelings and memory traces they generate. In a different vein,

the workshop considered the design and development of key online genres, in particular web drama and machinima. These were also linked to questions of media literacy and viewing styles.

- *Relations between primary and secondary texts, or between the 'substantial/iconic' and the 'peripheral/ephemeral.'* The workshop considered the relation between hierarchies of texts, exploring how the latter can inform, surround or re-mediate the former within production and reception contexts.
- *The ephemeral as a point of departure for media archiving and analysis.* The workshop helped illuminate and refine perspectives on the place of short, informal or ephemeral texts within curatorial policy at the BFI, within educational data service provision at EDINA, as well as in media criticism more generally.

Together, the workshop advanced discussion about transitory screen culture as it relates to questions of *attention*; it developed thinking about practices and strategies used to capture, hold and manage attention in a fast-paced media environment, and considered what attention has or should be given to particular (overlooked) media forms in a critical and curatorial sense.

These discussion areas relate centrally to the Beyond Text theme of 'making and unmaking'; the workshop examined the processes and practices involved in the production and (to a slightly lesser extent) consumption of promotional and user-generated media. The workshop developed perspectives on the making and unmaking of screen forms defined by their brevity and evanescence. It analysed the creativity involved in producing short-form media, and the contingencies of transmission and reception that shape and frame the temporal life of screen media. The workshop also engaged with the programme's theme of 'performance, improvisation and embodied knowledge,' as ephemeral media are often designed as sensory attractions with the specific aim of arresting audiences through communicative display. From the dynamic projection of

television idents to the self-reflexive performance of online videos, promotional and user-generated content are characterized by forms of media performance that rely on the assemblage of sound and image. In both respects, the workshop advanced the Beyond Text programme's concern with *communication in digital culture*, focusing on performances, sounds, and images that relate, in fundamental ways, to the rapid delivery and ubiquitous availability of media in contemporary screen life.

The workshop resulted in a number of immediate outcomes. These include the following:

- *Website and online materials* – the workshop was, and continues to be, supported by a specific website that links to the main Beyond Text home page (<http://www.ephemeralmedia.co.uk>). This site includes practical information but also a 'workshop' and 'forum' section including paper abstracts, visual clips, and relevant links. To enable general dissemination of the plenary lectures, video recordings have been made available on the University of Nottingham's YouTube channel (<http://www.youtube.com/user/NottmUniversity>) with links provided on the Beyond Text and ephemeral media sites. Sound recordings of the plenary talks have also been uploaded. This material has been publicized to subject communities such as the Media Communication and Cultural Studies Association (MeCCSA). A blog relating to the first workshop was posted by one participant (a digital consultant) on a professional forum called 'Creative and Digital Dialogues.' (<http://digitalconsultant.wordpress.com/2009/06/26/ephemeral-media-workshop-23-24-june/>)
- *Networking opportunities* – one of the most significant outcomes of the workshop was the networking opportunities provided within and between academic and industry participants. The workshop enabled academics and graduate students to meet/dialogue with influential practitioners, and for

these practitioners to meet each other and to learn from, and gain insight into, current academic debate. This has resulted in a number of fruitful exchanges that have emerged as a direct result of formal and informal discussion at the workshop. For example, several participants from across the two workshops have put forward panels to the Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS) conference based on themes discussed at the ephemeral media workshop (see next section). As a result of meeting Susi O'Neill, Evans has been invited to observe the production of a new web drama called 'The Mill' with the aim of integrating this research into an article or book chapter. In terms of industry/academic links, Charlie Mawer, Victoria Jaye, Hugh Hancock and Rik Lander have been open to follow-on conversations with participants, Mawer and Jaye agreeing to be interviewed by Grainge and Evans, respectively.

- *Publications and other dissemination* – Before the workshop, several participants (from both events) produced a themed discussion on the online 'In Media Res' scholarly forum. This is a website dedicated to experimenting with collaborative, multi-modal forms of online scholarship where academics curate a 30-second to 3-minute video clip accompanied by a 300-350-word response. Five participants (Elizabeth Evans, James Bennett, JP Kelly, Max Dawson, Avi Santos) curated a week on the subject of 'online content in an era of multiplatform branding (Feb 16-20 2009). This subject joined the Internet and promotional themes of the ephemeral media workshop. <http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/imr/theme-week/2009/08/online-content-era-multiplatform-convergence>.

In addition, Paul Grainge as PI delivered invited guest lectures on ephemeral media to staff and graduate students at the Universities of Glasgow (Oct 2008), Southampton (Nov 2008), Kent (Feb 2009) and Nottingham Trent (May 2009). He also delivered a paper prepared for the 'promotional surround' workshop at the 2009 MeCCSA annual conference. The subsequent article ('Elvis sings for the BBC: Broadcasting branding

and digital media design') has been accepted in *Media, Culture & Society*, forthcoming in issue 32 (1) 2010.

### **Future topics, collaborations and plans for further development**

As a result of the workshop, a number of topics and collaborative opportunities have been identified and pursued. As mentioned above, two conference panels have been submitted to the international SCMS conference due to be held in Los Angeles in 2010. Elizabeth Evans, Max Dawson and Jon Dovey have put forward a panel that explores the technological, textual and disciplinary limits of television, developing workshop themes of going 'beyond' the broadcast text. This panel examines questions such as: Where do programmes end and adverts begin? What new kinds of relationships are formed between producers and audiences? How can television studies evolve as a discipline? A further panel has been submitted by Roberta Pearson and Catherine Johnson, exploring promotional paratexts and the ancillary ephemera that surround and extend film and television.

A significant topic for further investigation, as indicated by these conference panels, concerns the boundaries of film and television in a pervasive media world. A related topic concerns the impact of the Internet on our understanding of ephemeral media. In specific terms, scope exists for a comparative study that looks (in the context of television) at pre- and post-Internet periods, examining changing industrial/textual definitions of ephemeral media as well as people's social engagement with ephemeral forms. This project would ask to what extent the Internet impacts on our on our understanding of ephemeral media and their social and industrial function.

A number of research collaborations and projects have been proposed as a result of the workshop. Some members of the workshop (Evans) have expressed interest in pursuing a research network on 'the limits of television.' Others (Grainge, Johnson) are interested in developing, and deepening, the theme of ephemerality in the context of television/Internet culture. These remain under discussion. In terms of current research projects, the ephemeral media workshop has indirectly informed two interdisciplinary bids based at the University of Nottingham. First, its exploration of contemporary screen culture has fed into a successful cross-disciplinary feasibility account bid to the EPSRC ('towards pervasive media' – EP/HO24867/1). This project will look to connect specific research themes dealing with the rapid delivery and ubiquitous availability of media. Grainge and Pearson will act as co-investigators on this project, carrying forward themes of ephemerality in relation to the study of the 'pervasive media' terrain. Second, the workshop's focus on digital delivery has informed, in part, a successful bid to the British Film Institute (members of which participated in the workshop) to establish a Centre for Moving Image Research. As a result of the workshop, Victoria Jaye (BBC Vision) gave her support as a prospective collaborator in this BFI/HE venture. In October 2009, the University of Nottingham was selected as the BFI's main HE partner (with the Open University) to develop research, teaching and digital impact initiatives around the BFI archive. This provides future scope for developing the workshop themes.

In furthering the workshop, the principal plan of action is for Grainge, as PI, to develop an edited book collection that will bring together essays from the two seminar events. This collection will use the ephemeral as a critical lens for examining key developments in contemporary screen culture. Victoria Jaye (BBC) and Charlie Mawer (Red Bee Media) have both agreed to be interviewed for this collection, and all the plenary speakers have agreed to contribute. The working title of the book is *Ephemeral Media: transitory screen culture from television to YouTube*.

Dr Paul Grainge, Principal Investigator (word count 3,489)

