



THE BFI MEDIA CONFERENCE

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TV Drama: Stories and Audiences

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Stories and Audiences

Television Drama



Genre codes and conventions



Audience pleasures and responses

TELEVISION DRAMA

- Television drama is one of the longest running and most popular of television genres, mainly because it cuts across a range of different hybrid and sub-genres including soaps, costume dramas and hospital dramas. The defining features of the genre are:

- CHARACTERS
- SETTING
- NARRATIVE.



TELEVISION DRAMA

- Television dramas are the fictional recreation of real life stories. The best television dramas engage the audience because we believe in the characters and the worlds they create, even if those worlds and characters are seemingly unbelievable, for example, *Dr Who*.





SUB-GENRES

- ◉ Costume drama
- ◉ Science fiction/fantasy
- ◉ Hospital
- ◉ Teen
- ◉ Soap opera
- ◉ Action/adventure
- ◉ comedy



Narrative in television drama

- Narrative within media texts is a specialist term and refers to the sequence of events that is re-mediated into a story.
- The way in which the narrative is constructed encourages different responses from different audiences.
- According to the genre an audience will have expectations of the narrative.
- Audiences recognise the genre conventions and make assumptions.

Narrative techniques in audio visual texts

The way in which narratives are constructed are often complex and challenging. Audiences have to work hard to make sense of the story.

- ◉ Manipulation of time and space
- ◉ Split screen narratives
- ◉ Three strand narratives
- ◉ Flexi-narratives

Narrative in Television Drama

How is the narrative 'shown' to the audience?

- ◉ Technical codes
- ◉ Audio codes – dialogue, non diegetic music, sound effects, voice over
- ◉ character
- ◉ Editing

Narrative conventions in audio visual texts

- ◎ **Flashbacks** – these manipulate audience feelings. Consider how an audience may view the narrative differently if they did not have access to a back story e.g. Brodie's war experiences in *Homeland*.
- ◎ **Point of view shots** – similarly manipulate the audience perceptions and emotions and create empathetic responses.

Narrative conventions in audio visual texts

Audiences are positioned within the narrative to enhance audience pleasure:

- Apparently impossible positions
- Privileged spectator position
- Enigma codes
- Action codes
- Dialogue/ voice over

Codes and conventions



This is more complex because of the range of sub-genres:

Characters:

- Use of stereotypical characters to transmit messages quickly.
- Characters related to specific genres – expectations of behaviour.
- Recognisable but also exceptional

Codes and conventions



Technical codes

- Specific to sub-genre : Realistic lighting and editing of social dramas e.g. *Skins*
- Editing techniques
- Shots and angles

Audio codes:

- Voice over – 1st person narrative from pov of character can manipulate the audience.
- Music – highlights narrative tension, mood etc
- Sound effects
- dialogue

Codes and conventions



Setting and iconography:

- Recognisable settings related to the genre
- Iconography specific to the genre

Narrative formula –

- Casualty (three strand), Homeland (flexi-narrative).
- Restricted narrative
- Format linked to production values – one-off, short series have high production values e.g. *Downton Abbey*

Audience

- Expectations of narrative and genre conventions
- Changing viewing habits effecting engagement e.g. Boxed sets, catch up etc.
- Literal responses, blogs, forums etc
- Theoretical:
 - Uses and gratifications. What pleasures do audiences get from television drama?
 - Hall – preferred, negotiated, oppositional
 - Factors effecting response.



DR WHO AND
THE BBC
1963-2012



Too Scary?

'The series has become increasingly reliant on the internal fears of children. The crack in the bedroom wall that is really a tear in space and time and the Weeping Angels that send you into the past when you blink. Clever writing, but not great for getting the kids to sleep.' The Guardian 2011

Characters:

- ✓ Appeal of Dr Who 'I'm not a hero. I really am just a mad man with a box'
- ✓ Strong gender representations
- ✓ Engagement
- ✓ Innovation

TEXT

Narrative:

- ✓ Complex story arc for more sophisticated audience
- ✓ Manipulation of time and space
- ✓ Exciting and predictable plot situations
- ✓ Settings reflecting hybrid genre
 - ✓ Enigma codes
 - ✓ Action codes
- ✓ Links to loyal audience and new generation

Technical and audio codes

- ✓ High production values
 - ✓ Special effects
- ✓ Audience involvement
 - ✓ Theme tune

AUDIENCE

Target audience is broad:

- ✓ Older viewers
Whovians
- ✓ Young children new to the programme
 - ✓ families
- ✓ Those who have expectations of quality from BBC

Pleasures and expectations:

Some audiences will take pleasure out of being scared and being able to predict outcomes.
Plays on fear of the unknown

Interactivity:

- ✓ The website includes quizzes and games
- ✓ Dr Who free party packs to celebrate the series 6 DVD launch

Uses and gratification:

Escapism – every week we are taken to new worlds
Social interaction – everyone is talking about it!

The audience is loyal and passionate:

'Most kids care more about the Doctor than God, and he shouldn't die just for the sake of a clever plot.'

ORGANISATIONS

280,000 DVDs and Blu-rays of the new series were sold in 2010 along with 220,000 tickets to a Dr Who Live show.

New writer Stephen Moffat has also written *Sherlock* for the BBC

Scheduling:
Dr Who is part of the BBC's aim to reintroduce early Saturday evening family viewing and 'event television'. Other programmes include *Strictly* and *Merlin*

MARKETING

- Trailers
- Website
- Games
- Live events
- comic

New series 2010 stats:

- Opener was watched by 10.1 million viewers live or within 7 days.
- 1.4 million watched repeats the following week
- 2.24m requests to watch on iPlayer April – end of 2010 making it the most popular video-on-demand programme

Public Service Broadcasting:
Part of the BBC's remit is to produce programmes with high production values for a broad audience

SPIN OFFS:
Torchwood
The Sarah Jane Adventures
Dr Who Confidential