Chapter 3

Researching Audiences: A Mixed-Method, Multi-Stage Approach

Introduction

This research project draws on methodological approaches developed in the intersecting fields of audience research and reception studies. Both of these traditions are more broadly located within the tradition of British cultural studies, the origin of which has a particular significance to the fundamental premise of this research project. For this reason, I begin this chapter with a brief overview of the history, purpose and kinds of work conducted in the field of cultural studies; in particular, I examine some of its contested areas, such as the differences between conflicting disciplines that have evolved for investigating audiences, and consider questions that have been raised over the validity of the 'ethnographic approach'. Alongside this, there is an overview of the parallel field of reception studies, outlining its techniques for investigating audiences and some of its key strengths and weaknesses. Although the two intersecting fields of reception and audience research have sometimes been positioned as conflicting disciplines (Staiger 1986: 21), this summary draws on the work of Austin (2002) and Barker et al (2001; 2007; 2008) to explore some of the ways in which the methodologies developed within these two traditions can complement and enhance each other in relation to this research project.

The second section of the chapter provides a brief outline of fan studies and summarises some of the ways in which it offers different methodological approaches to those used in the field of audience studies. The field of fan studies is particularly relevant to this project in that the study sets out to examine the cultures and practices of Asian Extreme fan communities; here the focus is on two particular issues. Firstly, the concept of 'interpretive communities' as a way of understanding strategies used by fan communities for interpreting and enjoying these films, as well as for displaying knowledge and negotiating hierarchical positions. Secondly, the growing output of research examining changes in the cultures and practices of the Web 2.0 generation of fans relates directly to the culture and practices of Asian Extreme fan communities in the UK. The reception study of Internet fan forums already undertaken [see Chapter 1, pp. 44-50] reveals some of the key ways in which this generation of fans shapes and influences the community as a whole;

in particular, fan-driven distribution labels and the status and influence of Internet-based fan critics are of considerable significance to the way that the community's values have developed. Finally, there is a discussion of the main methodological tools used to gather and analyse research data for the project, namely the online quali-quantitative questionnaire, and the individual in-depth interviews. Preceding this is a consideration of the forms of discourse analysis used to investigate and understand the empirical data generated through using these methodological tools; this includes a discussion of the underlying tensions arising from drawing on the theoretical approaches of Foucault and Bourdieu.

The British Cultural Studies Tradition

Although it is always difficult to pinpoint an absolute starting point for any academic tradition, field or school of thought, it is widely agreed that the development of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at Birmingham University in 1964 was the first institution dedicated to the academic study of popular culture in the UK (Moores 1993: 2; Storey 1994: 24; Schrøder et al 2003: 39). Key figures contributing to the establishment and early growth of this fledgling field were Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, Paddy Whannel and Richard Hoggart. Williams had already laid the foundation for developing a new approach to the study of British culture in his ground-breaking books *Culture and Society* (1958) and *The Long Revolution* (1961); these two books together paved the way for the move to establish popular cultural activities as legitimate objects of academic study. In various ways, and to different degrees, the group of academics associated with the CCCS were responding to traditional distinctions that had been made between 'high' and 'low' culture, and to related concerns surrounding the growth of different forms of mass media in the first half of the twentieth century. Within a British context these were principally espoused by the 'culture and civilization' tradition. This movement, inspired by the work of Matthew Arnold and further developed by F.R. Leavis in the early twentieth century, perceived popular culture, and in particular the 'Americanisation' of British culture, as a threatening and sinister force that had the potential to undermine the fabric of British society. In particular, Leavis ascribed harmful 'dark' powers to Hollywood films that were becoming increasingly popular with British cinema-goers at the time, arguing that

> they provide now the main form of recreation in the civilised world; and they involve surrender, under conditions of hypnotic receptivity, to the cheapest emotional

appeals, appeals the more insidious because they are associated with a compellingly vivid illusion of actual life (Leavis 1933:7).

One significant aspect of Williams' legacy which is of particular relevance to the fundamental premise of this research project is the way in which he challenged these assumptions being made by Leavis and others about the 'effects' of mass media on its audiences. These anxieties, originating in the 1920s and 1930s, questioned the role of the media in relation to politics and the democratic process. By the 1950s, however, these concerns had developed to encompass fears surrounding the extent to which messages and morals communicated via the mass media influenced the thoughts and actions of their recipients - in particular, those of young people. This approach to understanding media audiences has been broadly termed the 'effects tradition' because it invariably asks the question 'what do the media do to people?' As a response to these views and others like it, the CCCS researchers set out to explore cultural forms and activities in new ways. They combined interdisciplinary approaches, drawing on the fields of sociology and anthropology, and paid particular attention to the study of popular culture and various forms of mass media. Williams argued that the potential value of the analysis of any form of culture is linked to the evidence it can yield about a society as a whole; for this reason, he suggested, the more that research into various cultural activities is considered in terms of the social organisation within which they are embedded, the greater significance that research will have (1961: 63). After conducting his own small-scale observations amongst friends, family and acquaintances Williams concluded that 'I don't believe that the ordinary people in fact resemble the normal description of the masses, low and trivial in taste and habit. I put it another way: there are in fact no masses, but only ways of seeing people as masses' (Williams 1989: 11). One way in which this research project is inspired by Williams' seminal work on popular culture, then, is that it sets out to identify and interrogate the assumptions made about audiences of extreme cinema by a range of critics, academics, censors, cultural commentators and audience members themselves.

The 'effects' approach to understanding audiences continues to inform research carried out in the field of American mass communications studies today, and in its contemporary form it is often favoured by policy makers in the UK, US and elsewhere. The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) remains strongly informed by this tradition, and it

played a significant role in shaping 2009 guidelines (BBFC 2009a: 4) and research into responses to 'extreme cinema' (BBFC 2012) [see Introduction pp. 4-16]. Furthermore, it is a perspective that continues to manifest itself strongly in the 'mainstream' British press in relation to the Asian Extreme category of films. One of the most common assertions made about these films is that they encourage 'copycat' violence. Most notably, the *Daily Mail* has published a series of articles such as 'Campus gunman's death video was direct copy of award-winning Korean revenge film'[1] and ''Violent movies are to blame for knife crime wave,' blasts Sir Richard Attenborough'[2]. Both of these articles link the Virginia Tech Massacre in 2007 to Park Chan-wook's *Oldboy* via a number of broad, unsubstantiated claims. *Daily Mail* journalist Liz Thomas, for example, observes that

> there have been a string of murders and attacks in recent years by youngsters with an unhealthy obsession with gruesome films. The worst case was last year when U.S. student Cho Seung-Hui massacred 32 students and teachers at the Virginia Tech university before killing himself. Cho was said to have been repeatedly watching the Korean slasher film *Oldboy* (Thomas 2008).

Similar claims have been echoed by the BBFC; for example, when the decision was made to reject the low budget Japanese 'torture porn' film *Grotesque*, they argued that 'the chief pleasure on offer seems to be in the spectacle of sadism (including sexual sadism) for its own sake' (BBFC 2009d) and that 'to issue a certificate to *Grotesque*, even if statutorily confined to adults, would involve risk of harm within the terms of the Video Recordings Act, would be inconsistent with the Board's Guidelines, and would be unacceptable to the public' (BBFC 2009e).[3] For this reason, I outline below some of the flaws inherent in the highly influential 'effects' approach to understanding audiences; in this way I explain why its methodologies do not offer a workable option for this current investigation into British audiences of Asian Extreme cinema.

The 'effects' tradition takes a positivist approach to investigating audiences. Put simply, it mainly conducts laboratory-style experiments to measure audience reactions to advertisements, television programmes, popular music and other media.[4] David Gauntlett argues that the 'effects tradition' approach is inherently faulty because it assumes that the research participants will not alter their behaviour or attitudes as a response to being observed or questioned in these conditions (Gauntlett 1998: 120-8). However, as many other audience researchers point out, this criticism can also be levelled at techniques such as focus groups, interviews and other qualitative research implements favoured within the

cultural studies tradition.[5] Central to all 'effects' research projects is the notion that the viewers are in some way 'innocent', 'vulnerable' or 'corruptible' before their encounter with the media; this, then, is the direct antithesis of ethnographically-inspired media research that understands 'that individuals have been discursively constructed before their encounter with any concrete media text, and that they therefore 'precede' the media' (Schrøder 2009: 342-3). A further criticism of this 'snapshot' approach to understanding audiences is that it is entirely divorced from the everyday reality of the participants' experience, and fails to take into account any other social, cultural or physical influences on them; in fact, it assumes that these factors can be separated out from each other and measured individually (Winston 1986: 9-10; Gauntlett 1998).[6]

More pointed criticism of 'effects' research focuses on the legitimacy of asking the question 'what do the media do to people?'. Ruddock argues that the danger of phrasing a question in this way is that it suggests that the media can stand apart from other 'social institutions, trends and forces' (Ruddock 2001: 39) in the way it shapes and influences the lives of those who engage with it. Barker and Petley extend this argument further, proposing that the concept of 'media violence' is, in itself, fallacious because it is impossible to pinpoint specific instances of 'violence' in different kinds of media without 'asking where, when, and in what context these are used' (Barker and Petley 1997: 2). Petley also suggests that the arguments of the 'effects tradition' are often a mask for a prejudice against the activities of the working classes (Petley 1997: 170-83); he alleges that this disdain frequently manifests itself as the view that the working-classes are more likely to be adversely affected by media messages than the middle-classes. Whatever agenda is ascribed to researchers in the 'effects' tradition, it remains a highly problematic and widely contested approach to understanding media audiences; even the BBFC acknowledge, in their 2001 annual report, as well as more recently in the 2014 guidelines, that 'research on potentially harmful 'media effects' remains inconclusive' (BBFC 2002: 32). Jonathan Freedman examines the inconclusive nature of 'effects' research and takes this argument a step further; he contends that researchers in the 'effects' tradition of research overvalue positive research and grossly exaggerate the number of such studies, whilst choosing to ignore or lose the inconclusive cases (2002). This project does not, therefore, ask any of the questions common to the 'effects' tradition; instead, it probes the *impact* which the highly visible 'effects' discourse has had on a range of audiences. Furthermore, as an alternative to the 'effects' approach, it

seeks to build up a detailed and nuanced portrait of audiences for these films by examining their preferences, enjoyments, viewing habits and personal views on violence and extreme content.

Although Williams and his immediate contemporaries did not explicitly engage in audience research in the way it is recognised today, nevertheless their work facilitated a shift towards the academic examination of people engaging in various popular cultural activities; this offered an alternative to the traditional text-orientated literary approach to understanding media. More significantly, they refused to accept sweeping generalisations about audiences as mass consumers, and questioned those who did. The differences between these two approaches to investigating audiences continue, to greater or lesser degrees, to this day: whereas audience research following the mass communications model is motivated and guided by the search for a 'vulnerable audience' who encounter 'unsuitable materials', research in the cultural studies tradition takes as its starting point the view that all audiences are rooted in complicated but investigable ways in their history and society. This approach constitutes a second way in which Williams' ground-breaking work establishing the value of studying popular forms of culture provides the methodological starting point for this research project.

Audience and Reception Studies

A number of key early examples of audience research emerged out of the work of the CCCS; these established several of the broader objectives that are still pertinent to audience researchers today, as well as drawing attention to a number of problematic issues that have challenged researchers in the cultural studies tradition. Several of these early studies were heavily influenced by Stuart Hall's seminal essay 'Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse' (1980).[7] Hall rejected passive models of the audience and instead proposed that viewers are active 'decoders' of media texts and can respond to them with either 'dominant', 'negotiated' or 'oppositional' readings. His model of the audience is often referred to as 'active' in that it acknowledges the agency of the audience in developing their own response to a particular media form. An early example of audience research into popular culture that adopted Hall's model was David Morley's influential study of audience responses to the current affairs programme *Nationwide* (1980). Morley showed two editions of the programme to twenty-nine groups of people and recorded the discussions

that followed. Although at the time it was ground-breaking in its ethnographic approach to understanding audiences, *The 'Nationwide' Audience* (1980) has since been critiqued in many ways: for overlooking the immediate physical and domestic context in which the viewing of the programme would usually take place (Moores: 7); for the contrivance of bringing together a group of otherwise unrelated individuals to form a focus group (Schrøder 2009: 342); for facilitating a search for and 'celebration' of resistant responses; and for only providing a 'snapshot' of audience responses (Barker and Mathijs 2008: 9). Abercrombie and Longhurst have further argued the case that, in the intervening years since Morley's research took place, audience participation and involvement in the production of media texts has increased to the point that the power relations implicit in the encoding/decoding model no longer function in the way they did during the 1970s (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1988: 15-18). However, despite these many weaknesses, it remains an important landmark study in the move to replace textual determinism, in which the text was seen as the source of meaning, with an alternative model that acknowledges that it is the interaction between texts and audiences that serves to create meaning.

Other audience research projects that have followed in Morley's footsteps have investigated different issues, such as popular culture and gender (Radway 1984; Ang 1985; Hermes 1995). What many of these studies share is an attempt to understand the specific ways in which audiences enjoy media texts; Janet Staiger observes that one of the key characteristics of the cultural studies approach to audience research is its sustained consideration of the role of pleasure in audience responses (Staiger 2005: 92). Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* is valuable in that it provides one of the earliest studies of an 'interpretive community'. Her research into the reading habits and pleasures of a group of women in a small American town uses a combination of questionnaires and interviews, including those with the local bookseller 'Dot', who runs a newsletter containing book reviews and recommendations. Radway explores the ways in which the relationship between Dot and the reading group produces shared preferences within their community, for example in terms of what they expect from the novels by way of plot and character. This approach to understanding audiences reflects aspects of the tradition of 'reader reception theory' that already existed within literary studies. Originating in Germany as 'reception theory', this theoretical approach was further developed by the American literary academic Stanley Fish, who sought to understand how individuals respond to texts in patterned ways,

rather than in a purely idiosyncratic manner (Fish 1980).[8] The concept of 'interpretive communities' is of considerable relevance to this research project, and is discussed in further detail in the section on fan studies below.

In her study of viewers of the American soap *Dallas,* Ien Ang turns to Bourdieu's work on taste and social distinction in order to make sense of audience responses. Analysing forty-two letters sent to her by Dutch viewers, Ang engages in a qualitative interpretation of audiences' engagements and identifications with the programme and observes their shared recognition of a 'tragic structure of feeling' (Ang 1985: 79). Joke Hermes also engages in a survey of naturally occurring audiences. She conducts eighty interviews with men and women who read women's magazines. In her analysis of these interviews Hermes develops a useful framework which involves identifying 'repertoires' that readers draw on to make sense of their reading materials; these 'repertoires' are dependent on the cultural capital of an individual reader. In this way Hermes also draws on the series of debates initiated by Bourdieu (1979) that understand audience taste to be guided by distinctions particular to different social classes; Hermes' emphasis, however, is on gender as a defining characteristic. As well as providing a range of useful approaches for understanding audience responses to different media texts, what all of these studies share are 'ethnographically inspired' methods of investigating 'real' audiences rather than abstract spectators. Already established in other academic fields such as anthropology and sociology, this ethnographic approach seeks to understand a culture from its participants' point of view, following Bronislaw Malinowski's argument that 'culture can only be understood for what it is through the painstaking observation and documentation of everyday life' (Ruddock 2001: 128).

However, the ethnographic turn made by researchers in the cultural studies tradition has inevitably been contested. Criticisms of these early studies focus on the fact that their approach has rarely involved methods common to ethnographic research, such as extended periods of participant observation and unstructured interviews with members of the culture who are under investigation. Shaun Moores points out that in cultural studies audience research many media 'ethnographies' gather data through short semi-structured interview-style conversations, or other qualitative methods which result in only relatively brief encounters with audience members, rather than the extended periods of participant observation encouraged by Malinowski. Kirsten Drotner forms her critique into a proposal outlining what she sees as the requirements of 'real' ethnographic work: firstly, that people,

not the media, are the primary objects of research and are put first; secondly, that the ethnographer spends long periods of time with the participants; and thirdly, that 'ethnography is multi-locational, it engages its informants in a variety of settings (home, school, club, cinema and so on') (Drotner in Schrøder 2009: 341).

Whilst this proposal sounds very robust, and it is *possible* that long-term studies may yield important results for certain types of research, there is an implicit assumption being made here that this is inevitably the case; these assumptions about longitudinal studies preclude the possibility that short-term studies may also yield equally significant results. I argue, instead, that the length of a study cannot be used as a yardstick to ascertain its validity, as this fails to take into account other methodological factors; the way in which the research questions are designed and the 'talk' is analysed, for example, are more important methodological considerations when investigating the particular engagements that audiences have with one specific category of films. In her reflection on the relationship between audience research and discourse analysis, Brigitte Höijer highlights the importance of ensuring that the methodology employed corresponds with the ontology of the research project as a whole (2008). In other words, the driving questions behind the particular project should be aligned with its methodological approach. The kinds of questions I ask about Asian Extreme films – how are they categorised, used and understood by audiences – are not made more answerable by the kind of extended participant involvement that anthropological-style investigations demand.[9] Furthermore, for the purpose of this research project, the media are just as important as the audiences themselves. In this respect, my methodological approach more closely follows that of Austin (2002) and Barker et al. (2001; 2007; 2008); this is discussed in further detail below.

Despite the critiques offered above, Shaun Moores argues that ethnographic audience studies retain enough shared characteristics with anthropological research that they can nonetheless still be called 'ethnographies', arguing that 'there may be a similar concern, for instance, with questions of meaning and social context – and with charting the 'situational embeddedness' of cultural practices' (1993: 4). Ien Ang also argues that in so far as media audience researchers attempt to obtain a 'thorough insight into the 'lived experience' of media consumption' the term 'ethnographic' can be justified' (1996: 182). Additionally, Andy Ruddock notes that audience researchers draw on the idea that ethnography places the researcher and researched on a more equal footing than was

possible in earlier examples of mass communication research, arguing that 'much of the new audience research was on the side of the viewer, not only in terms of viewing the media from his or her position, but also of representing the larger political views and interests of those who were structurally excluded from the 'electronic public sphere''(Ruddock 2007: 129). Given that cultural studies researchers aim to examine the ways in which audiences make sense of media from particular social and historical positions, the ethnographic approach, which is adopted in this project, can be understood to be characterised by an assumption that context always informs interpretation – both the broader cultural, economic and political contexts and also the local, communal and individual contexts of consumption.

One dimension of these local, communal and individual contexts of consumption is that of specific settings, technologies and media platforms which play a key role in the cultures and practices of audiences for this category of films. Research into audiences of popular culture has included a number of studies that focus more specifically on how people make use of particular forms of media technologies in their everyday lives. This area of audience research has facilitated ethnographic studies of VCR consumption and domestic use (Gray 1992), studies of the use of computers in educational and domestic settings (Seiter 1993) and, more recently, research into the use of camcorders and mobile technology in everyday settings (Buckingham and Willett 2009). Ethnographic studies of daily media consumption are therefore considered as part of the secondary emphasis which this study places on the way in which technologies inform audiences' viewing strategies; these concerns are factored into four questions in the quali-quantitative questionnaire.[10]

A further key development in the move away from text-orientated forms of media analysis has been the emergence of reception studies. One of the earliest proponents of this approach to understanding the ways in which audiences make sense of media texts was Barbara Klinger. In the late 1980s Klinger identified and discussed a number of the problems emerging from text-centred strategies for analysing film (Klinger 1989). Her discussion of different forms of uninhibited behaviour amongst film audiences aimed to emphasize the social, collective nature of cinema-going. Klinger developed the argument that these audience responses should not be seen as abnormal; instead, they should be understood as reflections of audiences' moments of departure from engrossment in the film, through their use of and reference to a number of 'intertextual frames'. These could include marketing

materials, interviews, reviews and so on. Central to this emergent field of reception research, then, has been an acknowledgement of the significance of secondary or ancillary texts; these texts form a discursive framework which can shape and influences the various ways in which audiences respond to different forms of media. One of the main advantages to this approach, Klinger argues, is that in examining the complex way that the reception of a film changes over time a researcher is led to acknowledge the instability of audience interpretations. On the other hand, she contends that

> a danger of synchronic research is that researchers can find themselves attempting to settle a film's historical meaning; much like a standard interpretation would fix its textual meaning. Ideally, reception theory influenced by cultural and historical materialism analyses, rather, the discontinuities and differences characterizing the uses of a particular film within and beyond its initial appearance (Klinger 1997: 6)

Klinger (1997) has gone on to suggest that complete histories of films, integrating diachronic and synchronic approaches which take into account everything about them (their production histories, appendages, receptions, interconnections, and so on) should be attempted; she acknowledges, however, that this is a vast, perhaps impossible, endeavour for most researchers.

Reception studies that have, in different ways, adopted this approach include Klinger's *Melodrama and Meaning* (1994), a study of the reception of five melodramas directed by Douglas Sirk which reveals the way interpretations of these films have changed over time. The study draws on a range of film reviews which Klinger argues are 'types of social discourse which, like film advertisements, can aid the researcher in ascertaining the material conditions informing the relation between film and spectator at given moments' (Klinger 1994: 69). Klinger concludes from this research that 'historically, there does not appear to be 'the one, true text', but a text continually in the throes of transformation' (Klinger 1994: 161). Another early example of reception research is Cynthia Erb's *Tracking King Kong* (1993), a study of the racial subtexts found in promotional materials surrounding the release of *King Kong* (1933); Erb's study also demonstrates how one of the strengths of this research tradition is that it facilitates the investigation and uncovering of changing historical contexts of film reception.

It is important to acknowledge here, though, that the term 'reception studies' has more than one meaning. In the sense that it contrasts with 'audience studies', reception studies means the study of responses by means of naturally-produced materials; Klinger and

Erb both offer specific critiques of audience research because of the dangers of it 'producing what the researcher needs to hear'. However, Janet Staiger's conception of 'reception studies' is as a broader, portmanteau term that embraces the whole orientation to the ways in which meanings are produced out of interactions with a 'text'. Staiger explains this approach to understanding audiences as follows:

> Reception studies is not a hermeneutics or truth-finding of the meaning of the text. The enterprise it engages is historical and theoretical. It asks, *how* does a text mean? For whom? In what circumstances? With what changing values over time? Reception studies does not presume a meaning as an essence to be extracted by an insightful critic (Staiger 2005: 2).

Staiger argues that reception research, in its investigation of these discursive frameworks, can 'illuminate the cultural meanings of texts in specific times and social circumstances to specific viewers, and ... contribute to discussions about the spectatorial effects of films by moving beyond text-centred analysis' (Staiger 2000: 162).

The reception studies approach to understanding audiences has, however, also been criticised for the way in which it privileges particular forms of reception and ignores the problem of 'who can speak' (Poe 2001). Martin Barker has also pointed out some of the issues that arise when film reviews are favoured over other types of ancillary materials (2004). Barker critiques the way in which the work of Staiger and others tends to focus exclusively on film reviews found in broadsheets. He argues that this leads to a spotlight on 'serious' films that draws attention away from research into popular cinema which, he suggests, is the sphere most clearly immersed in the phenomenon of 'publicity gossip and other ancillary materials' (Barker 2004). This blind spot is addressed through a number of research projects undertaken by Barker and his collaborative colleagues that have combined aspects of reception studies with audience research. Similarly, Thomas Austin proposes a pluralist approach to studying films that attempts a 'triangulation between film texts, contexts and audiences' (2002:2) and draws on reception studies, empirical audience research and knowledge of production contexts. Though reception research is not the central component of this research project, it nevertheless plays a highly significant role in establishing the key debates circulating around this category of films, and informs the design of the research questions in a number of significant ways. For this reason these studies will be considered in some depth.

Barker et al have made extensive use of reception research in two particular projects: a study of the reception and controversy surrounding the British release of David Cronenberg's *Crash* (Barker, Arthurs and Harindranath 2001); and the international research project exploring the reception of the *Lord of the Rings* film trilogy, conducted by Martin Barker, Ernest Mathijs, Kate Egan and others (2008). These studies differ from the research carried out by Klinger and Erb in that they combine reception studies with audience research using questionnaires, interviews and focus groups. On a similar tangent, the work of academics such as Thomas Austin (2002) on the multiple publicity strategies surrounding films such as *Basic Instinct* (Paul Verhoeven, 1992) and *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1992) has drawn attention to the ways posters, trailers, teasers and the like can provide variable routes into and through a film. More recently, Jonathan Gray's work on paratexts (2010) has led to a parallel interest in this methodological approach developing within the field of fan studies.

Barker outlines a broad range of ancillary materials that are available to researchers attempting to investigate the prefigurative contexts of a film's reception, and proposes a three-stage mode of enquiry into the reception of any given film. The first stage of the enquiry is, he proposes, a study of the full range of ancillary materials surrounding the film, and the various ways in which they produce key discursive frameworks; the second stage requires a study of how different audiences make use of or are persuaded by these discursive frameworks; and the third stage of the enquiry is a study how the actual encounter with the film leads to fulfilment of various expectations on the part of the audience. Clearly such an endeavour would require considerable resources, and Barker points out that each stage may be undertaken separately as a valuable study in itself. The scale of a full three-stage enquiry is illustrated by both the *Crash* study and the international *Lord of the Rings* research project (Barker et al: 2008); the methodologies adopted in these studies are highly relevant to this thesis and are therefore considered in some detail in the following section.

Research on Film Audiences

In his summary of the work, purpose and scope of the CCCS , Shaun Moores notes that 'what is strikingly absent from these advances towards an anthropology of consumption is any qualitative empirical work in the public settings of cinema spectatorship' (Moores 1993:

33). In comparison with other forms of media, then, film is a relatively late arrival to the field of empirical audience research. In the context of this research project, the question of the physical space or environment in which audiences encounter each film is a complex one. Each of the films included in the online questionnaire has its own individual distribution and exhibition history. Some have never been formally released in the UK (the *Guinea Pig* series and *Grotesque*) but are easy to source online. Others have only had a DVD release (*Suicide Club*) or, in most of the cases, a limited theatrical release in either art house cinemas or at specialist festivals (*Dumplings*, *Audition*, *Ichi the Killer* and *Visitor Q*). However, three of the films (*Battle Royale, Oldboy* and *The Isle*) were the subject of noteworthy marketing campaigns, orchestrated by Tartan, and were screened at several multiplexes in the UK. For this reason it is important to consider the methodologies that have been used for analysing audiences who encounter films at the cinema, on DVD and online.

From the 1980s onwards a small cluster of research projects investigating film audiences began to emerge although, as Moores has observed, they were relatively few in number. Valerie Walkerdine's observational study of a family watching *Rocky II* on video provides one of the earliest examples of a small-scale, qualitative research project that investigates film audiences. However, as Walkerdine states, the purpose here was to undertake 'a psychoanalytical investigation into the dynamics of the domestic setting and the relationship of one specific family to television and video' (Walkerdine 1985: 167). Other approaches to understanding film audiences that developed out of the cultural studies tradition have used focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Annette Hill's study of audiences of films involving elements of screen violence (1997) investigates the kinds of pleasure that both male and female viewers experience when watching these films. Hill devises the useful concept 'portfolios of experience' to describe the various ways in which viewers use their own past experiences in combination with different forms of cultural knowledge as a method for interpreting the films they watch. Her qualitative study takes the form of six focus groups involving thirty-six participants in total. Hill's research findings present some pertinent and useful signposts for this current project; most notably, the sense in which her research participants were watching violent films as a way of 'testing boundaries' is particularly relevant to discussions about the 'extreme' which are captured in the empirical stage of this study, and are discussed further in Chapter 4. However, in terms of methodology, Hill's approach differs quite markedly from the one developed for the

purpose of this study. Although Hill piloted the use of questionnaires and interviews in the early stages of her project, she eventually discarded these research implements in favour of focus groups, as she felt that viewing violence was primarily a social activity, rather than an individual one (2002: 8). The advantages and disadvantages of questionnaires, focus groups and interviews as methodological tools are discussed in the following section, with reference to Hill's arguments. A second key difference between the methodological approach I develop here and the one adopted by Hill is the degree of attention paid to ancillary materials. Whilst Hill acknowledges that 'media hype' is a key reason why her participants chose to watch violent films (2002: 19), her study pays little attention to the actual materials generating this hype, or to the discourses that circulate within them. In contrast, the examination of these materials forms a key stage of this study in that it contributes significantly to the structure and design of the empirical research, as well to the process of analysing 'talk'.

At a similar time to Hill's research, the ESRC awarded Martin Barker funding for an 18-month study of the audiences of *Judge Dredd*; this was a larger and more ambitious attempt to investigate the way in which 'film audiences negotiate the meaning of a film' (Barker and Brooks 1997b: 2). The *Judge Dredd* project collected empirical data by conducting 48 interviews with 132 people, with an additional four interviews received on audio cassette. The study did not set out to be 'representative' in any way, but instead placed particular emphasis on the importance of recruiting 'naturally-occurring' audiences; that is, groups of friends or people who would naturally watch and discuss films together (rather than artificially constructed focus groups comprised of people that did not previously know each other). In a similar development to Hill's 'portfolios of experience' a specific approach to interpreting the data was developed in order to analyse the research findings; this centred on the concept of a 'viewing strategy', which is explained (in the context of a subsequent research project) as follows:

> The concept of a viewing strategy is designed to capture the ways in which the following elements of film viewing are interlinked: people's prior knowledge, and expectations, of a film; their ways of attending to circulating information, images and issues around the film, both from publicity regimes and from other competing (for instance, fan, or sensationalist, or censorious) accounts; their choice of manner of seeing the film (what cinema; with whom; with what kinds of preparation); their ways of attending to the film (accentuating parts, ignoring others, producing a

specific kind of narrative account, *et cetera*); their immediate responses (sensuous, emotional, cognitive, *et cetera*); and subsequent work on those responses to turn them into an account of meanings to self and the world. (Barker, Arthurs and Harindrath 2001: 158-9).

This approach invites the researcher to explore the connections between the way and the reasons why participants decide to watch the film, the orientation they adopt while encountering it, and the way they make sense of it afterwards. Although the *Judge Dredd* project did not combine these qualitative research techniques with aspects of reception research, it was significant in that it was one of the first major studies of film audiences.

A third key development in film audience research during this period was the 1998 Commonwealth Fund conference held at University College, London, which took as its primary focus the subject of 'Hollywood and Its Spectators'. This led to the publication of a series of four books that, to a certain extent, mark a turning point in the study of film audiences (Stokes and Maltby, 1999a; 1999b; 2001; 2004), although as an inter-disciplinary venture between the academic fields of American history and film studies, the series tended to have a particular focus. The papers published following the conference covered a range of issues relating to film audiences such as historical and archival research into early film audiences, explorations of Hollywood production strategies from the era of the studio system, and investigations into the reception of Hollywood films by audiences outside of the United States throughout the twentieth century. As already discussed above, reception studies, most often attributed to Barbara Klinger (1989; 1994) and Janet Staiger (1992; 2000), provided a final emergent approach to film audience research during this period. Over the last decade, then, there has been growing interest in analysing film audiences using a variety of methodologies.

From the late 1990s onwards Martin Barker and his colleagues have been instrumental in integrating together aspects of cultural studies research techniques (focus groups, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews) with approaches more common to reception research. The first of these projects began in 1997 when Barker, Arthurs and Harindranath embarked on an ESRC-funded study of the British reception of David Cronenberg's *Crash* (1996). Their research proposal for the project incorporated the study of a large collection of secondary texts; this was comprised of a review of over 400 newspaper articles that had been published about *Crash* in the UK, France and the US. The study

included materials such as production news, reviews, interviews with directors and actors, teasers, trailers, posters and other publicity materials, details surrounding debates, controversies and classificatory intervention. The collection of these ancillary materials was conceived as the first stage of a three-stage mode of enquiry, outlined above. Perhaps the most ambitious attempt to conduct this type of preliminary research was undertaken with the *Lord of the Rings* project, an international audience research project that assessed the responses of audiences from twelve countries around the world (Barker and Mathijs: 2008). In the UK alone over 2,500 ancillary items were collected and analysed in the first stage of the enquiry.

In a third project conducted in 2006/07, Barker and a group of colleagues based at Aberystwyth University embarked on a project into audience responses to films containing scenes of sexual violence (Barker et al: 2007). This project, which was commissioned and funded by the BBFC, focused on responses to five films that the Board had found to be problematic during the classification process; as a direct precursor to this present research project the 2007 study is of particular significance. As with the *Crash* and *Lord of the Rings* projects, the BBFC project was conducted in three separate stages. The first of these involved a survey of 243 websites, which had been identified as key sites containing online debates around the films. Barker et al offer three reasons to justify the significance of this aspect of the research. Firstly, that these discursive frameworks may affect decisions made by the audience before encountering the text, such as who to watch it with or when to watch it. Secondly, Barker et al argue that 'talk' about films is 'socially and culturally patterned' and often operates through networks; the analysis of these ancillary materials therefore functions to guide the researcher's interpretation of the audiences' talk. Thirdly, Barker et al suggest that 'there is good reason to think that prefigurative materials will have different degrees of salience for different groups and individuals'. This, again, can only be assessed if the researcher has a good knowledge of these prefigurative materials. Following the completion of the *Crash* project, Barker set out several propositions outlining what this type of audience research project should concern itself with during each stage of the enquiry. The first of these is a consideration of the volume of ancillary materials in order to accurately gauge their impact. He proposes that it is important to observe how these discursive frameworks develop over time, to consider who owns them, to observe the use of particular 'figures of the audience' operating within them, and to deduce what sort of claims

they are making.[11] Barker also points out the need to consider how aspects of film analysis and practice inform these discourses, and whether these are acknowledged or contested. Finally, he adds, it is helpful to consider the processes that shape the marketing materials.

The second stage of all three projects (on *Crash*, *Lord of the Rings* and the five films including sexual violence) involved the distribution of questionnaires (either online or in person following a screening) followed either by semi-structured interviews and/or focus groups. In this respect these audience research projects encompassed quantitative, qualitative and quali-quantitative approaches to gathering empirical data. Each of these projects, then, generated different volumes and types of research data that to a certain extent reflected whether the study was of audiences of a big-budget Hollywood film or a small, independent or foreign-language film with a controversial reputation. This data then provided the material for a study of how different audiences encounter, make use of, or are persuaded by the discursive frameworks they come across surrounding each particular film.

All three of these projects also included a third stage of enquiry, a study of how the audiences' encounter with the film either fulfilled or confounded their expectations. In this way, these projects understand audience encounters with films not as 'snapshot' experiences that begin and end with the opening and closing credits of the film, but as on-going processes that often begin long before the film goes into production, and continue after it finishes with reviews, discussions, arguments and so on. In effect, Barker proposes the need for an 'over-arching conceptual and methodological framework which can link the analysis of ancillary materials with a renewed emphasis on how actual, live viewers use them as part of their film-watching' (Barker 2004). One of the advantages of adopting this three-stage mode of enquiry when researching audience responses to a particular film is that it is possible for a researcher, or a team of researchers, to follow a full cycle of interaction between a film and its audiences, from the release of the preliminary marketing materials and snippets of information through to the afterlife it develops following the release. Later reflections following the *Lord of the Rings* project led Barker to revise his three-stage model of audience enquiry and consider a fourth phase, that of the aftermath. In an essay exploring the impact and influence of one character from the film trilogy, Gollum, he proposes a possible extension of any audience research project to include a fourth stage:

The fourth – *symbolisation* – is a conditional extra. It amounts to the *cultural tentacles* that reach to other parts of the cultural or political arena. In principle, this could begin at any point. But given press dependence on topics generated by other formations, it is more likely to begin once a film has reached a determinate level of public attention. It is these that particularly interest me – because they constitute a concrete and empirically verifiable case of the 'influence of film' (Barker 2011: 14).

However, Barker's study of the traces and influences the character of Gollum has had on cultural activity since the release of the film also highlights the many difficulties facing a reception researcher; the scale of material available just as the result of a Google search, for example, makes the study of ancillary materials a daunting task.[12] Clearly this form of enquiry requires the setting of parameters, particularly when undertaken by a sole researcher. A further complication arises when examining a group of films released and re-released over a period of time; the interactions between different audiences and various aspects of the discursive frameworks surrounding each of the ten films involved in this project take place at many different points throughout an eleven year period. This means that ancillary materials may be encountered by participants before or after their encounter(s) with the film; the extent to which they either shape and prefigure their expectations or moderate and influence their later responses cannot therefore be readily gauged. The three-stage method of enquiry is, therefore, most effective when it is following a contemporary release rather than as part of an historical study of a film's audience.

Thomas Austin's investigation into the circulation of three Hollywood films (1992) also offers a highly useful methodological framework that bears some important similarities and differences to those developed by Barker et al. Like Barker, Austin draws together audience and reception studies techniques, alongside a consideration of broader discursive contexts; Austin's approach also specifically considers

how patterns of reception are anticipated by the industry and feed back (via market research) into financing, production, and marketing decisions; and how practices of consumption are informed, but never simply determined, by such strategies (Austin 2002: 2).

In this respect, Austin places a slightly stronger emphasis on the role played by economic and industrial factors in the circulation of Hollywood films. Austin also makes a point of asserting the value of the 'internal properties' of texts which, he argues, determine some of the uses to which they are put (2002: 2).The research conducted by Barker et al, by way of contrast, does not emphasize the internal properties of the text at the outset of the study,

but instead allows these to emerge (or not, as the case may be) from the research findings. Fundamentally, though, there is a subtle difference between Austin and Barker's overall research focus: whereas Barker et al adopt reception studies techniques as a means to develop a more thorough and sophisticated form of audience research, Austin draws empirical audience research together with reception studies methods and industrial discourses and practices to order to investigate popular film culture *more broadly*. This difference in focus stems from the purpose of Austin's study, which is to facilitate 'an investigation into the significance of popular film, into how and why it matters in contemporary society' (2002: 2). In contrast, the studies conducted by Barker et al are, first and foremost, audience research projects; these may or may not focus on popular films, and will matter culturally in different ways, depending on the remit of each particular study. This research project, then, follows the methodological approach developed by Barker et al. more closely in that it is, primarily, an audience research project. I also contend that, in certain cases like that of *Grotesque,* it is not possible to separate participants' 'talk' about the internal properties of the text from their discursively situated comments about the 'torture porn' category and its reception; in this respect, whilst acknowledging the importance of internal textual characteristics, I argue these should be understood in conjunction with, and not separate from, the broader discursive frameworks in which they are situated.

However, despite these minor differences, the approaches developed by both Austin and Barker et al offer a methodology well-suited to a researcher in the cultural studies tradition who wishes to develop as thorough as possible an understanding of audiences for these films. In particular, some of the considerations of the four-stage enquiry have proven very useful for the purposes of this study. For example, the volume of ancillary materials surrounding titles such as *Oldboy* and *Battle Royale* far outweighed those surrounding other titles; this correlated with more questionnaire responses about these titles including comments about their expectations for these films, and the extent to which they were or were not realised. The first stage of the enquiry also uncovered the series of debates surrounding the marketing of these films by Tartan that had been explored by film academics and Internet fan reviewers; this discourse influenced many research participants and informed one of the key patterns of response in the questionnaires. If a cultural studies researcher attempts to conduct research into responses to a media text without any

consideration of subsidiary and ancillary materials, they clearly run the risk of misinterpreting the participants' responses; the extent to which a full, four-stage enquiry can be conducted, however, is clearly linked to the resources of any given research project. The degree to which this project attempted to consider these materials will be outlined below.

To summarise, the evolving field of cultural studies provides this project with key components of its methodology in two ways. Firstly, it begins its investigation into audience responses to Asian Extreme films by recognising that participants in the research project are historically and culturally rooted in complex ways that need to be taken into account as far as is possible. As this project examines only a relatively recent historical period (the last ten years), this means that current debates circulating around concepts such as extreme cinema, censorship and online communities and social networks will be considered as some of the relevant broader contexts for understanding audience responses, alongside any specific debates about this group of films.[13] Secondly, unlike research conducted in the 'effects tradition', the project avoids seeking particular responses from participants, or determining the results of the research by asking questions that aim to prove or disprove a particular theoretical approach. Instead, it makes a concerted attempt to understand the specific ways in which audiences enjoy and make meaning from this group of films and the kind of pleasures associated with them. To this end, the research incorporates ethnographically-inspired techniques with the purpose of producing wide-ranging and diverse responses from the participants, and in order to avoid generating a 'snapshot' set of results.

Fan Studies

Much of the research and theoretical discussion taking place in the field of fan studies explores the position of the fan researcher, or 'aca-fan', in relation to research on their own particular object or objects of fandom; as an audience researcher who is not personally invested in the fandom[14] of Asian Extreme films, these discussions are not directly relevant to the methodology of this project. However, fan scholarship nevertheless opens up a number of important debates that have contributed to the methodological considerations of this research project. The first of these is the series of discussions relating to the concept of 'interpretive communities'; for the purpose of this chapter I have combined these

discussions of 'interpretative communities' within the field of fan studies with those taking place within the wider tradition of audience research. The second key area of research examines changes in the cultures and practices of the Web 2.0 generation of fans. This area of research relates directly to the culture and practices of the Asian Extreme fan community in the UK, in terms of the development of fan-driven distribution labels and the status and influence of Internet-based fan critics.

Recent overviews of fan studies have grouped scholarly work within this field into three distinct waves, or generations (Gray et al. 2007: 1-16). Whilst there is clearly some overlap and continuity between these three waves, they nevertheless offer a helpful framework with which to discuss particular approaches the field can offer to this research project. The first generation of fan scholars emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Key figures contributing to the establishment and early growth of fan studies were Henry Jenkins, John Tulloch, Constance Penley and Camille Bacon-Smith. Early fan scholarship drew on the writing of Michel de Certeau (1984) as a means to interpret fan practices as strategies employed by disempowered social groups to engage in collective action against the media elites. In *Textual Poachers* Henry Jenkins portrays fans as a 'popular resistance' who voice the concerns that are generally ignored by the dominant bourgeois culture (Jenkins 1992: 25). Jenkins differentiates fans from 'ordinary viewers' by the way they transform their viewing preferences 'into some type of cultural activity, by sharing feelings and thoughts about the program content with friends, by joining a community of other fans who share common interests' (Jenkins 1988: 88). He argues that fans seek to challenge the idea that there is one author-endorsed or informed meaning of a text; this, in turn, results in fans pitting themselves against producers and directors as 'textual poachers' (1992). From the outset, then, there have been key theoretical approaches explored in fan studies that clearly differentiate it from the broader category of audience research (although there are overlaps, as well). One significant characteristic of fan studies is the emphasis on, and celebration of, the concept of community. Fan researchers are often more fully immersed within this community and its culture than other audience researchers, sometimes for considerable periods of time. Furthermore, they may have strong emotional attachment to their objects of study, and might have already invested a considerable amount of time and resources into various fan activities and practices associated with the particular community.

This approach to ethnographically-inspired research brings with it distinct advantages and disadvantages.

A key strategy Jenkins develops for interpreting fan activities is the concept of 'interpretive communities'. He observes that the long-term members of fan communities act to initiate and guide new members with various pieces of information, explanations of characters and plots and other forms of expertise. This expertise can include not simply information about primary texts (films, television episodes and so on) but also details about ancillary materials, or paratexts, such as interviews with stars or production personnel. This wealth of expertise, in turn, leads to particular readings or interpretations being negotiated and adopted within fan communities. Jenkins draws attention to the way that discussion and shared commentaries amongst community members produces 'mutual self-disclosure' and increases intimacy between fans (Jenkins: 80). This correlates with 'commentary', the first of four kinds of talk identified by Denise Bielby and C. Lee Harrington in their analysis of fan interactions; the others they recognize are 'speculation', 'request' and 'diffusion' (1995: 85). Of these, they suggest that 'speculation' and 'diffusion' can involve the display and exchange of expertise, while 'request' can act as part of an initiation process into the community. Janet Staiger adds to these a fifth category, 'the use of catch-phrases or insider information that would identify the depth of knowledge that a "true" fan would know, creating a system of marking who does and does not belong to the fan community or establishing degrees of fan knowledge' (Staiger 2005: 108). Like Bielby and Harrington, Staiger tends to interpret group interactions within fan communities as being more complex and varied than Jenkins does. Writing at the same time as Jenkins, John Fiske's understanding of fan culture also notes that fan communities often create their own internal hierarchies that mirror the larger social infrastructure from which they feel excluded, and in this respect his perception of fan culture is less celebratory than that offered by Jenkins (Fiske 1992).

Since the publication of *Textual Poachers* there have been many critiques made of the first wave of fan scholars' work on 'interpretative communities', not least by Jenkins himself.[15] Eileen R. Meehan offers a critique that borrows the terms 'emic' (the perspective of an insider) and 'etic' (the perspective of an outsider) from anthropological studies in her discussion of fan ethnography. Meehan examines the claim that 'emic ethnographers report that fans fear censure from non-fans ('mundanes') and discrimination by mainstream

institutions' (Meehan 2000: 73). Her argument, that only genuine fans can win the trust of the community and the privilege of studying their practices, was also put forward by Jenkins (1992). However, Meehan goes on to question the 'emic' approach, suggesting that fan ethnographers are limited by their insider status and the pressure it carries to portray the community in a positive and flattering light. She argues that they are also more likely to represent debates or disagreements within the community from a biased perspective. The view of Meehan and others has led to a widespread critique of fan ethnographers which suggests that they are merely apologists for fans, or are too celebratory in their approach.

Outside of fan studies, Kim Schrøder also critiques the 'ethnographic turn' in audience research and suggests that the concept of the 'interpretive community' is one of the 'most used and abused in reception research over the last ten years' (Schrøder 2009: 337). He argues that the concept of the 'community' is in urgent need of clarification if it is to continue to be of any constructive use in contemporary audience research. Schrøder points out that whereas Radway employed the term to refer to a singular interpretative community with shared reading strategies, it is now being used to describe people belonging to multiple interpretative communities, or 'sub-communities' within larger communities, and that this raises a complex set of problems for an audience researcher. Schrøder argues that in order to make sense of the multiple memberships people may hold with various interpretative communities 'it is necessary to adopt a semiotic and discursive approach' (Schrøder: 339). This approach understands interpretative communities to operate not simply by using situational and social networks to produce shared interpretative strategies, but also by drawing on 'discursive formations, or codes' that are triggered by media use and are the cumulative product of a person's social and cultural experience.

Schrøder also critiques Ien Ang's argument that the reception studies approach to audiences is too narrow in its scope and fails to acknowledge 'wider sociocultural conditions' audiences are situated in (Ang 1990: 244). He counters Ang's assertion with the argument that although it is difficult to produce complete accounts of audience readings and practices, it is nevertheless still worthwhile attempting to 'produce *in*completely articulated accounts of audience readings and practices which may, in spite of their (no doubt) multiple shortcomings, provide illuminating insights into the polysemic and polymorphic relationships between media and people in the world we live in' (Schrøder 2009: 341). The way in which he argues this can be achieved, however, is not through the

use of group observation; in fact Schrøder highlights the failure of research studies by Morley (1980) and others that bring together a group of otherwise unrelated individuals simply for the purpose of research. Instead, Schrøder suggests that individual interviews in the participants' home can uncover the ways in which they belong to interpretative communities without having to actually observe these communities in practice:

> In other words, a research design that privileges the individual reader does not automatically prevent us from exploring the multiple sociocultural discourses that partake in the construction of that individual's readings and uses of television (or other media). This is ultimately an empirical question, we might say, depending on the actual terms we establish with the individual informants and on the questions we ask them (Schrøder: 342)

Schrøder goes on to highlight the need to differentiate between social communities such as the family or neighbourhood that are constituted independently of any media use, and those that are constituted through some form of media use; only the latter, he argues, are authentic 'interpretative communities'. The former, Schrøder contends, should be known as 'cultural positionings' rather than 'interpretive communities'.

Many of the critiques made of the first generation of fan scholars are addressed by the second wave of academic work on fan practices and cultures, which highlights the replication of social and cultural hierarchies within fan subcultures [see Introduction, pp. 11-15]; this generation of scholars frequently draw on Bourdieu to explore taste hierarchies amongst fan communities as a continuation or reflection of wider social inequalities (Thornton 1995; Hills 2002; Williamson 2005). Although some previous audience research studies (such Ien Ang's *Watching Dallas* and Joke Hermes' *Reading Women's Magazines*) made use of Bourdieu's work on taste-making practices, it is the second wave of fan studies that develops this approach most fully. However, while this generation of fan scholars acknowledges the usefulness of Bourdieu's *Distinction* as a starting-point for theorising taste hierarchies within fan communities, they also critique its limitations [see Introduction, p. 20]. Hills also problematizes Bourdieu's work for the deterministic nature of its 'professional rationality' which he argues facilitates a limited dominant/subordinate model for interpreting class difference and cultural taste (Hills 2002: 64).

Gray et al identify a third wave of fan studies that has emerged as fan cultures have started to occupy a more prominent and influential cultural position. The development and rapid expansion of many fan communities as they migrated from the marginal spaces of

conventions and fanzines to the highly visible and accessible meeting places offered by the Internet has, to a certain extent, transformed their cultural status. Whereas the first and second generation of fan scholars studied fans as members of specialist communities, with their own internal hierarchies and taste distinctions, Gray et al suggest that 'as being a fan has become an ever more common mode of cultural consumption, these approaches based on a model of fans as tightly organized participants in fan- and subcultures did not match the self-description and experience of many audience members who describe themselves as fans' (Gray et al 2007: 7). Instead, they argue that as fans have established themselves as an integral aspect of contemporary cultural life there has been a shift in emphasis amongst fan scholars that suggests 'fandom is no longer an object of study in and of itself. Instead, through investigation of fandom as part of the fabric of our everyday lives, third wave work aims to capture fundamental insights into modern life' (Gray et al 2009: 9). Whilst this third generation of fan scholarship explores many different avenues of research, it can also be broadly characterised as a move away from studying one specific fan community and towards the study of multiple fandoms and the ways in which they intersect with one another.

However, in identifying a shift in the way fans are perceived, Gray et al overlook a different shift that has occurred over the last decade – the changing meaning of the word 'fan'. Whilst the argument that the figure of the fan has become more socially acceptable is convincing, it needs to be contextualised by an awareness of the changing usage of the word. For example, until quite recently the 'like' option on many Facebook pages was 'become a fan'; the implication here – and elsewhere – is that, in certain contexts, the phrase 'I'm a fan of' has become interchangeable with 'I like' and does not necessarily indicate the level of intensity, passion or expertise about a fan object that it once did. This, in turn, has implications for those who *are* intensely engaged in a particular fandom and do not wish to be associated with others who claim to be fans, but whose interests might appear to be more superficial. Ruth Deller argues that there's

> got to be care about how the term 'fan' is used and the fact it means
> different things to different people…. I follow lots of famous people on Twitter who I
> find interesting but would not say I was a 'fan' of their work necessarily. And I think
> everyone is the same - we have different levels to which we 'like' something and
> whether or not we'd use that word 'fan' to describe the liking. My students
> sometimes feel a bit divided over the term as well - being a fan still implies a level of

liking something that goes 'beyond' somehow - but what is 'beyond'? Buying the box set? Discussing something on a forum? (Deller 2013: 304).

Deller identifies the elastic nature the term 'fan' has taken on in recent years; discussions about the 'mainstreaming' of fandom therefore need to be balanced with an on-going evaluation of the value and use being made of the term 'fan' in any given context. Deller's comments are particularly pertinent to the empirical stage of this study and the disavowal of fandom that it engendered [see Chapter 4].

The opportunity to study fan communities on specific websites, message boards and forums which has emerged over the last twenty years has opened up a further area of discussion surrounding academic approaches to the study of fan cultures. Schrøder et al. suggest that for the media ethnographer, 'the Internet offers a unique opportunity to overcome the so-called Observer's Paradox ... according to which we cannot observe in a sustained manner how people behave when they are not being observed, without observing them, and with the consequence of potentially altering their behaviour' (2003: 371). This approach to observation-based research privileges a hypothetically 'invisible' role on the part of the researcher, and implies that no interaction between the researcher and the research participants is actually necessary. However, Virginia Nightingale contests this approach and argues to the contrary that, for observation-based research to be productive and effective, it relies entirely upon this relationship between researcher and research participants. Although she does not specifically discuss the type of research outlined by Schrøder et al. above, Nightingale's arguments are highly relevant to the study of internet communities and fan interactions. She proposes that the success of this form of audience research depends on a degree of self-reflexivity on the part of the researcher:

> In observation-based research, 'exchange' between the researcher and the research subjects is the medium that assists the transformation of ideas and thoughts into the words and activities recorded. Exchange also acts as a corrective to the assumptions inherent in the researcher (his or her predisposition to counter-transference) that might otherwise be projected onto the research subjects (Nightingale 2008: 105-06)

In the same way that researchers who raise the 'observer's paradox' claim that the presence of the researcher affects the outcome of the research process, here Nightingale is making the point that the researcher will *always* affect this process, simply through being the person instigating and directing the research project from the outset; furthermore, she implies that the researcher's exchange with the researched is also an incredibly productive

element of the process that requires careful attention. For these reasons, Nightingale argues, it is the degree of openness and transparency in the relationship between the researcher and the participants, and the greater the level of self-reflexivity on the part of the researcher, that ensures that the research is carried out to the highest possible standard.

Nightingale goes on to discuss different forms of observation-based research. Acknowledging some of the disadvantages of early forms of participant observation, she explores approaches that involve sharing power with the participants, various forms of collaboration, and the differences between embedded and immersed research practices. Nightingale suggests that power-sharing practices can include, for example, encouraging the participants to become involved with the design stage of the research or involving them in other stages of co-producing research activities. Collaborative forms of observation can include allowing the participants to document their practices themselves – for example in the case of fan studies it might involve participants producing fan artwork for the research project. Whilst embedded research involves the researcher becoming in some way aligned with the research subjects, while not actually belonging to the group, immersed research, exemplified by fan-academics such as Jenkins, takes place when the researchers are actually members of the community they are documenting. Nightingale summarises that

> the immersed researcher is (1) often a member of the group, (2) authorised (either tacitly or explicitly) by the group to undertake the research, and (3) pursues a research task that serves interests the group has identified as important. The knowledge immersed research produces serves a dual purpose: it represents the group to itself and it allows the group to position itself, to pursue action outside the group to achieve group goals. In fan research a group member claims the specialist task of researcher for the group, while in activist research the group controls the research which is defined by the group's needs and history rather than by the interests of the academic community (Nightingale 2008: 128).

These approaches to observation-based research offer a range of possible ways of conducting observational research. They also offer another perspective on the critiques made of Jenkins' celebratory generation of fan studies; Nightingale's view is that the quality of the research depends on the extent to which the researcher acknowledges and interrogates their role, rather than the extent to which they are immersed within the community. Key to Nightingale's argument, then, is the assertion that whichever technique is adopted, it should be active rather than passive; this research activity then needs to be

fully acknowledged and scrutinised by the researcher, as it will clearly have an impact on their perspective and view towards the participants, and likewise, on the participants' relationship with the researcher.

In conclusion, the methodological approach to audience research developed through the field of fan studies informs this research project in several ways. Firstly, whilst I do not consider myself to be a fan of Asian Extreme films, I made a concerted attempt to develop an open and productive relationship with these communities over a period of eighteen months; this perhaps can be best described as a period of being temporarily embedded within several fan communities. This approach was partly born out of necessity; as a series of niche communities, the number of British fans that could participate in the research project was relatively small, and therefore to encourage their involvement a certain degree of interaction with them was necessary. In the case of several of the forums, the discussion threads were not visible without applying for membership, so interaction was required. This provided me with the two options of creating either anonymous or real identities for myself on these forums. Creating an anonymous identity carries with it certain ethical complications, as highlighted by Nightingale, which I felt uncomfortable with. This left me with the alternative of being as open and straightforward as possible about my identity and the purpose of my research, and demonstrating a respectful attitude towards the communities I became embedded within.

Each of these communities responded differently to my presence – their attitudes ranged from being extremely enthusiastic and grateful that I was taking an interest in their activities, to outright hostility and rejection. For example, while members of some communities started to follow me on Twitter, add me as a friend on Facebook or publicise my research on their websites and blogs, other communities banned me from their message boards as soon as they saw the online questionnaire. In some cases this led to a more complex relationship between myself and the research participants who spanned across a number of social networking sites and forums. As I became aware of some of the personal details of the lives of fans who had become my Facebook friends, they too became aware of my personal life, my interaction with family and friends outside of academia and, perhaps more significantly, the moments of frustration that I experienced with the research process. In this way, the boundaries between myself, as a researcher, and some of the participants involved in the project evolved in unexpected ways across a period of eighteen months. In

my case, Nightingale's model of the embedded researcher was facilitated by social interaction on multiple websites, and within markedly different social networks and discursive frameworks. This ethnographically-inspired approach to observing fan practices and groups on the Internet revealed quite clearly, then, that there is no singular fan community associated with this group of films, but several overlapping social networks that each have their own particular hierarchies, practices and strategies for discussing and attributing value to Asian Extreme films. Nightingale suggests that participant observation is 'a terrain characterised by insecurity, uncertainty, self-doubt and mistrust by both parties' (Nightingale 2008: 130). In my case, although I experienced some of this hostility first-hand (in my rejection by certain forums) in other ways I managed to navigate the terrain more successfully and cultivate a relationship of mutual trust; this was fostered by a sense of personal intimacy acquired through friendships developed on 'mainstream' social networking sites.

Discourse Analysis

An important element of any audience research project that involves the collection of qualitative data from interviews and questionnaires is the method used for analysing talk. Put simply, discourse analysis is a set of procedures employed for analysing the social organisation of talk. Through the study of how people talk or write, most discourse analysts believe they can uncover the social assumptions, shared cultural values and communities of response which participants in the talk are involved in. Over the last thirty years discourse analysis has, as an academic field, witnessed rapid expansion; as a result it could now perhaps be best described as an umbrella term that refers to a wide range of theoretical and methodological procedures and approaches for analysing talk.[16] Some audience researchers place these various approaches within two main categories: conversation analysis and discourse analysis (Schrøder et al: 167). They identify the key difference between the two to be that 'while conversation analysis is mainly focused on the dynamic exchange of utterances, on the interview as *interaction*, discourse analysis is more focused on how people give accounts of the social world through language, on the interview as representation' (Schrøder et al: 167). This implies that while conversation analysis tends to focus on the 'micro' features of communication, discourse analysis is more concerned with the identification of 'macro' structures; however, a closer examination of the field reveals

that many approaches to discourse analysis tend to combine elements of both. Another key marker differentiating approaches to discourse analysis is that those which have evolved out of the academic field of psychology tend to adopt techniques that emphasize a far more individualised approach to understanding forms of social interaction. Discourse analysis also raises a number of methodological issues for an audience researcher. Firstly, there is the question of the role the researcher plays in generating the talk, which otherwise might not have occurred in exactly the same way. How can this be taken into account when analysing the talk? Secondly, there is the issue of knowing whether or not a discourse has been correctly identified; under what system, if any, can this be qualified? Thirdly, there is the question of deciding whether all talk deserves equal attention and analysis, and if not, why not? These questions reveal many of the methodological complications inherent to the process of discourse analysis; in this respect and several others, discourse analysis is a highly contested and much debated sphere of academic activity.

This overview identifies a number of different forms of discourse analysis which are employed, in different ways, to analyse the qualitative research materials gathered in this project; these include Foucauldian discourse analysis, discursive psychology and conversation analysis. These different approaches vary in several ways, most notably in terms of how they conceive of the participant in relation to broader social structures, how they interpret the overall role of language in society, and the extent to which they focus on the minutiae of personal interactions. Early forms of discourse analysis arose out of the field of linguistics, which was dominated in the first half of the twentieth century by the writings of Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure argued that language is formed out of an arbitrary system of differences; structuralist approaches to discourse analysis that are strongly influenced by his writing aim to reveal or uncover such systems embedded within language and other cultural forms. One offshoot that has developed out of structuralist approaches to understanding discourse is critical discourse analysis. Pioneered by theorists such as Gunther Kress and Bob Hodge, this field of discourse analysis is aware of the limitations of structuralism; however, it does not abandon semiotics wholesale. Instead, it has developed a form of social semiotics that emphasizes the 'social action, context and use' of signs (Hodge and Kress 1988: 5). This tradition of work has introduced a range of more nuanced concepts such as 'modality claims' into discourse analysis. For Hodge and Kress, analysing modality claims involves considering the significance attached to various aspects of

conversation and communication through the use of intonation, gesture and so on, or through the use of 'modal auxiliaries' such as 'may' or 'might' (Hodge and Kress: 121). These are analysed to identify the ways in which different kinds of claims (assertions, opinions, hypotheses and speculations) are made and, in turn, how committed the participants are to these types of claim. Having identified and analysed modality claims, Hodge and Kress then use them as a means to detect broader ideological and political structures referenced within different forms of communication. In this way critical discourse analysis combines the micro analysis of personal expression and grammatical structure with the macro approach of identifying wider cultural repertoires drawn on in different forms of communication.

Whereas semiotic approaches to discourse analysis tend to identify general cultural structures and resources and their possible connotations, Foucauldian discourse analysis takes as its starting point the notion that discourses are systems which constitute their subjects through institutions and practices. This approach focuses on the availability of conflicting discursive resources within a culture; in recognising these conflicting discourses it rejects any one totalising account or system of interpretation. From a Foucauldian perspective, discourses function to both enable and constrain what can be said, when and by whom. It examines the ways in which discourses are bound up in institutional practices which organise and structure social life, and therefore offer subject positions that, once taken up, have implications for subjectivity and experience. Foucauldian discourse analysis tends to ask questions about the relationship between discourses and the way people feel about their material conditions.

Whereas post-structuralist and Foucauldian approaches to discourse analysis emphasize, to different degrees, the role of broader cultural and social forces and power structures at work in discourses, discursive psychology is more concerned with interpersonal communication. In this field of research, discourse analysts focus on the ways in which participants make particular choices during their interaction with others. This approach to discourse analysis emphasizes how people use talk to construct their identity or memory. Discursive psychologists often explore how participants orient themselves to, and manage their stake in, any particular discussion; it is concerned with '*how* particular versions of reality are manufactured, negotiated and deployed in conversation' (Willig 2008: 8). Discursive psychology therefore understands discourses and identities as being performative, fluid and variable. The key question that guides discursive psychological

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analysis is often 'What are participants doing with their talk?' (Willig 2008: 164). The researcher examines the talk to look for 'action orientations', for example, they may explore what a group of female participants are trying to achieve by using a mode of speaking in which they refer to themselves as a 'girls' rather than 'women'. In summary, discursive psychology attempts to understand discourses as acts performed within a particular context; it makes no claim to interpret these discourses as indications of wider social assumptions, shared cultural values and communities of response which participants are involved in. For a discursive psychologist, these spheres of interpretation are not considered to be accessible through language.

Compared with some of these approaches to discourse analysis, conversation analysis (CA) can be seen to be dealing with the micro-processes of social interaction. It developed out of a research project conducted by Harvey Sacks that examined telephone calls made to a suicide prevention centre. It examines language as social action and analyses transcripts of conversations, for example analysing the organisation of turn-taking in a conversation; the central concerns of this approach are the discovery of patterned ways of talking and interacting that form a discourse. Several CA theorists identify an overlap between conversation analysis and other approaches to discourse analysis, in that they often replicate its methodological procedures (Wooffitt 2005: 129). Wooffitt suggests, for example, that 'it is clear that CA is a major resource for discursive psychology' and cites the arguments of Jonathan Potter, who 'identifies Sacks' work, and the form of analysis he began, as one of the most significant influences in the emergence of post-cognitive psychology' (Wooffitt 2005: 140). In particular, Wooffitt suggests that CA bears a resemblance to the methodological approach of discursive psychology in that it focuses on the ways in which the participants actively construct and orientate themselves to the social interaction.

Within the broad field of discourse analysis, however, theorists are divided as to whether or not conversation analysis and Foucauldian discourse analysis can be reconciled with one other. In particular, there have been tensions identified between the methodologies developed within the two approaches. On the one hand, CA focuses on the organisation of talk and demonstrates an aversion towards extra-textual theorising; in other words, CA adopts the position that 'structure' should not be viewed as an external constraint on an individual, but rather as a social feature that participants actively orient

themselves to. On the other hand, Foucauldian approaches prioritise extra-linguistic, contextual factors, such as culture and political context, as the central means of understanding research participants' behaviour and talk. From this perspective, it is CA's apparent inability to tackle issues surrounding the production of power and social inequalities that is most frequently critiqued. A secondary dispute over methodological differences also exists with respect to claims of ideological neutrality. Conversation analyst Emanuel Schegloff argues that sociological approaches to Foucauldian discourse analysis are in danger of imposing an interpretation on participants' talk and social interaction which reflects their own political orientations. In response, Michael Billig has argued that conversation analysis

> conveys a participatory view of the world, in which equal rights of speakership are often assumed. The assumptions of these rhetorical conventions are revealed if they are applied to talk in which direct power is exercised. In this respect, CA is not, as Schegloff suggests, ideologically neutral, but habitually deploys a rhetoric that conveys a contestable view of social order (Billig 1999: 544).

This methodological tit-for-tat, over which approach can make the most authentic claim to ideological neutrality, illustrates clearly that for many theorists in this field, CA and Foucauldian approaches to discourse analysis remain very far from being reconciled.

However, Margaret Wetherell develops a slightly different argument, suggesting that although the relationship between post-structuralist Foucauldian approaches and CA need to be reconfigured, the most effective methodological approach to discourse analysis understands one in terms of the other. Focussing on differing conceptions of the subject, Wetherell notes that whilst the agency of the subject is paramount in CA, Foucauldian-inspired approaches over-emphasise discourses as systems which constitute their subjects. Drawing on the work of Laclau and Mouffe, however, Wetherall proposes instead that social agents are both passive and active. On the one hand, they 'seem to provide the energy required for meaning-making and articulation. On the other hand, as Mouffe argues, the individual subject becomes de-centered, not the author of his/her own discursive activity and not the origin point of discourse' (Wetherall 1998: 12). This understanding of the subject as unstable and plural in nature has implications for the claims made by Billig and Schegloff with respect to ideological neutrality. As Wetherall argues, 'the concept of false consciousness assumes that social agents have real or true identities (as members of the proletariat, for example) and real or true interests which go with those social identities

which they may misperceive, simply not recognise, or which can be obscured and invisible' (Wetherall 1998: 13). She proposes that these identities, however, are fluid and do not exist in a fixed manner that would facilitate their being either perceived or misperceived in dependence on adopting a particular methodological ideology. In critiquing what appear to be opposing conceptions of the subject position, Wetherell concludes by advocating a more eclectic methodological approach that draws on analytic concepts from across these apparently conflicting fields.

The different forms of discourse analysis that are available to a researcher clearly allow for the study of different degrees and levels of social interaction. As Höijer argues, there are benefits and disadvantages to each approach, and some are more suitable for analysing particular types of talk than others. The key questions being posed by this research project centre around the ways in which people enjoy watching and understand Asian Extreme films. While the research explores individual responses to this group of films, it frames these responses in the context of how audiences relate to wider communities, institutions and social practices. Some of these approaches to discourse analysis provide this project with starting points for analysing talk rather than complete methods in themselves; for example, several of the analytical frameworks favoured by social semioticians, such as those for considering the concepts of modality, are integrated into the overall approach for analysing talk. Like Hodge and Kress, I am also interested in the ways in which small changes of tone and gesture relate to what is being said about broader cultural discourses. However, the analytical frameworks used by social semioticians do not acknowledge the influence of larger social and cultural institutions in shaping and producing discourses as fully as I do throughout this project, and in that respect our methodologies differ. Therefore, while some aspects of the semiotic and psychologically-rooted approaches to discourse analysis provide useful tools and starting points for thinking about patterns of social interaction, this project leans instead towards a Foucauldian understanding of discourse analysis. In particular, it considers the extent to which audiences draw on, use or are influenced by the discursive frameworks that arise out of competing institutions, cultures and practices surrounding these films: namely, the BBFC as a regulatory body, institutions involved in distributing (or not distributing) Asian Extreme films in the UK, British film reviewing practices and online fan communities and their cultures.

However, alongside this use of Foucauldian discourse analysis, there is also a sustained use made of Bourdieu's sociological approach to understanding taste-making practices. Drawing on the theoretical perspectives of both Foucault and Bourdieu arguably produces certain methodological tensions for any research project. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau critiques the two scholars' approaches to theorising social relations and notions of agency. His critique of Foucault centres on the argument that his conception of discourse, and the procedures through which it operates, overlook the potential role played by minor practices and procedures; de Certeau argues that 'these techniques, which are also operational, but initially deprived of what gives the others their force, are the "tactics" which I have suggested might furnish a formal index of the ordinary practices of consumption' (de Certeau 1984: 49). Similarly, Bourdieu's work is critiqued for its lack of complexity and inability to account for all of the variables of social action; in this respect, de Certeau argues, his adherence to the particular sociological model he has developed makes his work dogmatic. In his critique of the two scholars, then, de Certeau identifies what they have in common; their theoretical approaches to understanding the mechanisms of power overstate the denial of agency, and overlook the potential for resistance.

Other scholars engage in similar comparisons between the two theorists, though draw different conclusions. In response to what he perceives to be the misapplication and overuse of both theorists by undergraduate students, Staf Callewaert offers a detailed and insightful presentation of Bourdieu's critique of Foucault (2006). Emphasising from the outset the intrinsic differences between the academic fields of philosophy and sociology, Callewaert highlights the problematic use of Foucauldian approaches to power and discourse by British and American academics. Part of this, Callewaert suggests, is because Foucault never wrote about power 'as a social reality in action'; rather, he discussed the way in which power 'is thought of, conceptualised and expressed, placed on stage' (Callewaert 2006: 91). The problem, Callewaert contends, lies in taking Foucault's work on discourse and applying it to the real social world; this, he argues, leads to the misuse of Foucauldian theory to support notions of radical relativism and social constructivism.

Where similarities can be drawn between Foucault and Bourdieu, Callewaert suggests, is in their conception of human social action. Bourdieu positions the social agent

as being directed by objective relations, in that 'it is not the agent's own conception of the situation that is guiding action … but the agent's embodied practical sense with its root in accumulated history' (Callewaert 2006: 94). Similarly, he argues, Foucault understands the social agent to be aware of their engagement in discourses, but to be unaware of the outcome of these discursive practices. Callewaert summarises that

> both point to the same issue, both frame their solution in similar terms. But their point is sharply different. Bourdieu is comprehending both agent and structure, both discourse and action … and therefore he is not, like Foucault, exposed to the danger of promoting the devastating trend in the social sciences today, where the everlasting need to tone down science, positivism and behaviourism lead to the absurd idea that social practice is nothing but free construction of meaning (Callewaert 2006: 96).

Foucault and Bourdieu therefore share a similar view, in that they both conceive free will to be a misconception, even though a social agent may *feel* themselves to be free to make their own choices in life. Therefore, with respect to understanding and interpreting social action, it is not entirely contradictory to draw on the theoretical perspectives of both Bourdieu and Foucault; however, it should be stressed that, within this research project, neither of these perspectives is appropriated in an absolute way. The methodological approach taken here draws on Bourdieu in certain very specific respects, particularly in its understanding the way in which *some* of the research participants articulate their interests as bids for cultural or subcultural distinction. The concept of subcultural capital is also critiqued through the findings of the thesis [see Conclusions, p. 229]. The thesis draws on Foucault in its broader understanding of discourse and power; that is, as Callewaert suggests, as a means of *conceptualising* discourses surrounding censorship. In particular, it re-considers Kuhn's appropriation of Foucault, and conceptualises an alternative model of the censorship process as one of 'boundary construction-imagined controversy-prohibition' (see chapter 1, p. 44).

Methodological Tools

The principal methodological tools that I developed to gather the empirical data for the project were an online quali-quantitative questionnaire and two types of semi-structured interviews. Additionally, a range of ancillary resources including newspaper, magazine and Internet reviews, marketing materials, interviews, classificatory documents, and debates

and discussions on Internet forums and message boards were all examined in order to establish the discursive frameworks in which these films were received, enjoyed and contested by different audiences. In this regard the study employed a mixed-method approach that operated in a number of key stages: each stage of the research informed the design and scope of the stage that followed it; this facilitated a multi-stage method in which the later (empirical) phases of the research were directed by the preceding ones.

The study began with an investigation into classificatory documents and debates surrounding each of the films. Initially this stage of the research functioned to establish which films to include in the online questionnaire; studying debates in fan forums identified films that were considered to be markers of extreme cinema in this category. Most frequently, the *Guinea Pig* series and *Visitor Q* were used in this context to indicate the most 'extreme' films within the category.[17] This stage of the research also identified *Ichi the Killer*, *The Isle* and *Grotesque* as films that had either been cut or rejected by the BBFC, making all three highly relevant case studies for exploring the boundaries of extreme cinema. The next stage of the research process involved a survey of fans' favourite Asian Extreme film lists on the Internet. This established *Battle Royale, Oldboy, Audition* and *Suicide Club* as important films to include in the project in that they were very popular and their inclusion would help to ensure a higher level of participation with the online questionnaire. *Suicide Club* was a potentially interesting case at this point of the research, as it had not been formally released in the UK. Finally, having researched a range of academic and popular definitions of Asian Extreme cinema, it emerged that Fruit Chan was frequently listed as a director associated with this category of films; for this reason *Dumplings* was added to the list of ten films included in the questionnaire.[18]

Following on from this initial overview of some of the ancillary materials, I collected together a further range of film reviews, interviews, Internet articles and forum threads to investigate uses of the term 'extreme'.[19] This stage of the research alerted me to some key aspects of the discursive frameworks surrounding the films, such as debates about the different roles of Internet communities in promoting the films, arguments put forward about Tartan as a distributor drawing on notions of orientalism, connections and discussions made in different contexts between and about extreme cinema and pornography, issues surrounding film censorship in the UK, and a range of claims circulating about various figures of the audience in relation to this group of films. It also highlighted an interesting

discrepancy in differences between the value and significance attached to each film title by different groups and sectors of the film review industry, which informed my decision to interview two professional fans who review Asian Extreme films for online publications. Finally, an additional collection of twelve reviews and articles were gathered around the DVD release of *Suicide Club* in September 2011. These materials were supplemented by academic analyses of marketing materials produced by Tartan (Dew 2007; Martin 2009).

Questionnaires are most commonly used as tools in quantitative audience research; they are often conceived to provide the data and evidence with which to make broad assertions and draw out generalisations about their participants. Although the questionnaire designed for this project is quali-quantitative, and has not been developed as a tool for making broad generalisations about audiences of Asian Extreme films, the process of conducting the questionnaire bears many similarities with the procedures for conducting the operations of a large-scale quantitative questionnaire. Schrøder et al. (2003: 180) propose that quantitative researchers need to pay particular attention to three tasks: operationalization (defining the research questions and developing instruments for gathering and measuring data); generalization (setting the sample size and frame); and inferential analysis (using methods such as cross-tabulation to analyse the results of the survey). In several ways the first steps taken to design and develop the questionnaire were influenced by the 2006/07 research project investigating audience responses to films containing sexual violence (Barker et al, 2008). This project recognised 'the necessity for the BBFC to consider how films may shape audiences' feelings and attitudes beyond the cinema' (Barker et al. 2007: 5). For this reason the online questionnaire designed for this purpose included questions which allowed the research team to examine the ways in which audiences remembered aspects of each of the five films. After the empirical data was gathered and analysed, a five-part classification was devised to categorise the ways in which moments from a film become memorable and meaningful to audiences. For similar reasons, the questionnaire also included questions to encourage participants to recall sections of favourite films (see Appendix 2, Question 1). Other questions aimed to establish the viewing strategies, patterns of enjoyment and ways in which audiences understood the term 'extreme'.

During the first stage of the research project it became clear, through an analysis of activity in online forums, that the Asian Extreme category is a highly contested one. The

online forums which most frequently discussed these films were either devoted to Asian films and media in general, or were more broadly focused on the horror genre; it became apparent quite early on, therefore, that it would be useful to differentiate between these two very different communities on the questionnaire, as a means to evaluate the different pleasures they derived from the films. Although only one forum, Snowblood Apple, described itself as a forum devoted to the discussion of Asian Extreme films, it was decided that one orientation option should be for fans of the category; this was because one the original remits for the research project established in discussions with the BBFC was to study fans of Asian Extreme films. Having identified these three main audience orientations towards the category, I then deliberated over whether or not to create categories to represent the less prominent online film communities (in relation to the category), such as forums dedicated to cult cinema, independent cinema and world cinema. After studying some of forums devoted to these interests (which referenced Asian Extreme films), it became apparent that the category was, for many members of these communities, part of a much broader and discerning interest in film culture. For this reason, I decided that rather than create a number of minor categories for each of these orientations, I would instead create a fourth category that encapsulated this broader range of film interests. Finally, I added an additional category for occasional viewers, to represent the interests of those who might have only seen one or two of the films listed on the questionnaire. As a result, the decision was finally made to offer participants five options on the questionnaire that allowed them to orientate themselves towards the films in a range of ways that reflected these findings (see Appendix 2, Question (d)).

The wording used to define the five orientation categories was developed by studying the descriptions and discussions found used by users of the online forums which were studied. This revealed that forums dedicated to Asian cinema most often used terms such as 'love' and 'passion' to describe their relationship with Asian films, and were reluctant to describe themselves as fan communities. Online horror forums, on the other hand, more frequently described themselves as having an 'interest' in extreme horror. Whilst the choice of wording was difficult to get right, it was essential to mirror these communal expressions of interest as closely as possible, in order to effectively capture the very different key orientations towards Asian Extreme films; in this respect, the wording chosen was deliberate and ethnographically inspired. It could be argued, however, that in

using these descriptive terms (fan/passionate/interest) in conjunction with specific interests (Asian Extreme/Asian Cinema/Extreme Horror), I made it impossible to distinguish precisely what the respondents were affirming: whether it was a particular filmic interest, or their relationship to it. However, had the term 'fan' been used in all three orientation descriptions, this may have led (based on my initial research findings) to a disproportionate number of respondents selecting the fourth orientation-type; the ability to distinguish between (what I projected, at the design stage, to be) the four key orientation types might, as a result, have been blurred or lost entirely. Therefore, whilst the design of this question was difficult to get absolutely right, it was nevertheless developed very carefully, with the clear rationale of establishing, and differentiating between, the distinctive interests of audiences for this category of films.

The orientation categories used on the online questionnaire also formed one of the principal structures for categorising the research participants and identifying some significant patterns of response. Developing categories for interpreting relatively large quantities of data is always tricky and can lead to unhelpful generalisations. It was also true, in this study, that many of the research participants did not *want* to be categorised; their responses indicated that this was linked to the negative stereotyping of audiences for extreme horror films they had encountered prior to taking part in the research. Having established, through the reception study, the extent to which negative stereotyping of Asian Extreme audiences had taken place in both the mainstream and specialist press, it was therefore important that the orientation options offered to the participants were positive affirmations; these then formed the five categories for analysing the findings. Other audience researchers have developed systems to categorise research respondents in dependence on their findings. Barker et al. use the categories 'embracers', 'refusers' and 'ambivalents' to analyse patterns of response to films containing sexual violence (2007: 2); whilst this might be useful when investigating a specific issue (sexual violence on screen), I didn't feel this type of categorisation would be helpful in interpreting the complex responses to the Asian Extreme category. In fan studies, Jonathan Gray has been instrumental in developing the categories 'anti-fan' and 'non-fan' to analyse different types of audience response (2003); whilst useful for contrasting other audience perspectives alongside those of fans, these categories are very broad and could be interpreted by some research participants as being unnecessarily negative and fan-centric. Having considered

some of the different options for categorising the research participants and interpreting their responses, I therefore decided to use the ones they had self-selected on the questionnaire.

The design of the questionnaire provides opportunities to cross-tabulate quantitative and qualitative responses; this allows for qualitative data to be usefully framed by quantitative information, and for interesting findings generated by quantitative data to be clarified and explored using the qualitative information. In this way, it is possible for a questionnaire to generate findings with a level of complexity and depth usually associated with focus groups and interviews, but with a much broader range of respondents. In this regard, a quali-quantitative questionnaire is not subject to the same pitfalls as those identified by Annette Hill in her pilot study for investigating viewer responses to violent films. Hill's conclusion, based on the view the questionnaires can only be used for gathering quantitative data, was that it would be of little use in a small-scale study (Hill 1997: 8); however, as research undertaken by and Cherry (1999) Barker et al has illustrated, quali-quantitative questionnaires can generate complex and in-depth data if designed carefully.

A key issue in designing any form of social survey or questionnaire is sampling. One way to approach this issues is to try to engage in 'probability sampling' which aims to be representative in its scope; however, this is dependent on many other factors such as detailed knowledge of the distribution of a population, and so on, and therefore requires additional expertise and the funding to support it. The other approach is to take 'nonprobability samples' which are constructed with a purpose, to find something out. When constructing the questionnaire for the *Lord of the Rings project*, Barker and Mathijs argued 'the best way to reach quickly the huge target population needed for our research, cheaply and manageably, was to use Internet sampling' (Barker and Mathijs 2008: 222). However, this method still brings issues with it in that there are significantly fewer older Internet users, and therefore the sample is biased towards a younger segment of the population. A further hindrance with Internet sampling is that, as with any indirectly administered research format, 'the defect of self-completed interviews is their low response rate: respondents have little motivation to do the work' (Schrøder et al 2003: 246). The choice of Internet sampling also affects the style of the questionnaire and the amount of 'briefing' that the participants require. In this case, I provided two options: a short introduction that outlined the overall purpose of the project (see Appendix 3) and a longer

explanation that provided background information about the project supervisors, the research tradition and so on (see Appendix 4). Schrøder et al point out that the level of disclosure about a project may be a factor that creates a bias in the results, and reference the British Psychological Society's observation that participant responses are often moderated when they know the general purpose of the research project (Schrøder et al.: 247). However, the ethical considerations of my research project meant that it was important to avoid deliberately deceiving participants by withholding information. Therefore, the briefing provided for participants was written with the purpose of being as straightforward and accurate as was possible, and also guaranteed anonymity for those who participated.

In total there were 709 questionnaire responses, of which 660 were submitted online and 49 were paper responses (received primarily at the *Cine-Excess* conference in May 2011, from audience members at a screening of *Audition* in Glasgow in late October 2011, and from people attending the *Abertoir* festival in Aberystwyth in November 2011). The questionnaire went online in February 2011. Initially a link to the questionnaire was posted on five Internet forums dedicated to the fandom of Asian Extreme films, Asian horror films, Asian films, cult films or, simply, horror films. These forums were chosen because the category of Asian Extreme films is a complicated one for reasons already discussed, and does not equate with one particular genre of film. For this reason every effort was made to recruit participants who were fans of Asian cinema and cult cinema as much as those who gravitated towards extreme cinema and the horror genre. Over the course of the following twelve months that the questionnaire remained online, this expanded to include a wider spectrum of sixteen specialist forums, such as one dedicated to horror literature and another that shared horror knitting patterns; it was also posted on message boards attached to mainstream websites such as imdb.com and amazon.co.uk. Furthermore, a small number of Internet magazines and websites also published links to the questionnaire and it was shared 117 times on Facebook and re-tweeted 22 times on Twitter. Seven Internet magazines and websites ran brief news articles about the questionnaire, although it is possible that there were others.[20] Finally, several film and media departments at UK universities encouraged their students to take part in the research project in the autumn of 2011. Although it cannot be claimed that the sample is representative of viewers of this

category of films (there is an obvious bias towards recruitment via the Internet, for example), a sustained effort was made to attract participants with a range of film interests.

The questionnaire responses were then cross-tabulated in order to identify patterns of responses. Of the seventeen questions included in the questionnaire, nine provided tick-box options and eight provided space for the respondents to write longer answers qualifying their responses to previous answers. The first stage of this process therefore involved thirty-five separate cross-tabulations to establish patterns of responses between the tick box questions. This stage of the analysis established several key patterns of response, such as a strong aversion amongst all participants towards self-identifying as a fan, a tendency for female respondents to self-identify as having an interest in extreme horror, and a tendency for male respondents to self-identify as being passionate about Asian cinema in general. This, in turn, led to a closer investigation of gendered responses to the qualitative questions, and to an in-depth search of key words, and combinations of key words, such as fan, fandom, extreme, censorship and so on.

Initially, I had considered holding focus groups as part of the second stage of the research process. However, this possibility did not develop beyond a tentative proposal for two key reasons. Firstly, as the films had been released in the UK a number of years prior to the project, there was no opportunity to organise focus groups following screenings of the films. This also meant that any focus groups that would be conducted would involve bringing together a disparate group of individuals rather than members of a naturally-occurring audience. Secondly, it became clear through the questionnaire responses that this category of films touched on a number of sensitive issues for some of the respondents and provoked emotions such as embarrassment and shame; these types of responses were important to the project, but might have been difficult to explore in the context of a focus group. As Meyer (2008) points out, the individual interview is also particularly suitable for exploring issues of a sensitive nature, about which people may be too shy to respond in a group context. Schrøder et al. also note that the individual interview 'eliminates the possibility of group pressure' and thus results in a 'higher possibility … for holding informants individually accountable for specific discursive positions on an issue' (2003: 154). A semi-structured one-to-one interview offers similar levels of flexibility and informality as a focus group; the interview can generate naturalistic talk and provide opportunities to clarify points with the participant. As with focus groups, the interview remains a non-natural

encounter set up for the purposes of research, and can therefore also be susceptible to 'moderator demand' (where the participant modifies their responses in relation to what they think the interviewer wants to hear). There are, however, some key differences between focus group interviews and individual depth interviews. Firstly, while 'moderator demand' is still an issue, the individual interview does not risk the conformity of response that is possible in a focus group. Schrøder et al. also argue that the individual interview is the best way to access 'the whole array of cultural discourses that the individual inhabits – for the simple reason that it does not try to build any of them into the interview situation' (1994: 342). Even when interviewed alone, participants may draw on recalled conversations with others, conceptions of imagined communities, and other factors that display their connection within the wider media culture. For this reason, Schrøder argues that it is a highly productive research implement which can be adapted to uncover reading strategies developed within interpretive communities regardless of the fact that the participant is interviewed on their own (Schrøder 2009: 341).

The interview subjects were recruited during the early stages of publicising the online questionnaire. A request for participants was made on Internet forums that carried links to the questionnaire and respondents were then chosen for two reasons. Firstly, eight of the interviewees were selected with the purpose of capturing a cross-section of different audience types. This meant ensuring that there were participants who represented all of the orientation categories (with the exception of the occasional viewers, of whom none came forward to be interviewed), that there was a reasonable balance between male and female interviewees, and that there was a broad spread of age ranges that reflected the questionnaire population of responses. Initially it was difficult recruiting female participants, and the request for volunteers had to be re-posted on a knitting website to address this deficit. This stage of the recruitment process resulted in five male and three female subjects aged between nineteen and fifty-two being interviewed for the project; the sample comprises two representatives from each of the remaining four orientation categories used in the online questionnaire.

The second rationale for selecting interviewees related to their professional involvement in the distribution and reception of Asian Extreme films in the UK. The four participants who were interviewed for this reason identified themselves as having expertise in this area during the early stages of the research project. Two of these interviewees were

film reviewers writing for specialist online film magazines, and two were involved in the distribution of Asian films in the UK. All four of these interviewees were male and aged between twenty-five and fifty-five. The question schedule for the first group of participants was designed to explore particular issues that arose out of responses to the questionnaire, such as questions of genre, marketing, and access to the films (see Appendix 2). A set of additional questions was then produced for the second group of interviewees; these were designed to facilitate a closer exploration of the cross-cultural networks surrounding the distribution of Asian Extreme films in a British context (see Appendix 2, Question 7). The four interviewees with a professional relationship to the category also provided answers to the first schedule of questions. The interviews were then analysed using elements of discourse analysis which have already been discussed.

Conclusions

This chapter has located the project within the broad fields of cultural studies and audience research. Unlike research conducted in the 'effects tradition', I avoid predetermining the results of the research by asking questions that aim to prove or disprove a particular theoretical approach. Instead, my methodological approach makes a concerted attempt to understand the specific ways in which audiences enjoy and respond to this group of films and the kind of pleasures associated with these responses; this understanding then functions to guide the design and multi-stage process of the empirical study. Recognising that the research participants' responses are culturally and discursively framed in complex ways that need to be acknowledged as far as is possible is therefore key to this mixed-method, multi-stage approach. Additionally, the research methodology is influenced by ethnographically-inspired approaches to understanding audiences; these are developed with the purpose of making explicit the relationship between myself as researcher and the research participants as a means to produce a more complex and nuanced understanding of the complex ways in which discourses circulate between audiences, institutions and academic researchers. This is achieved through the use of particular concepts, such as 'interpretive communities' and 'viewing strategies'. The 'ethnographically inspired' methodological tools frequently used in cultural studies work, such as semi-structured interviews, are appropriate research implements for this project in that they offer opportunities for gaining detailed insights into audiences' understanding and enjoyment of

this group of films. The quali-quantitative questionnaire provides an invaluable tool for establishing patterns of responses amongst participants and frameworks for analysing the qualitative data. Finally, the different approaches drawn from within the diverse field of discourse analysis establish my overarching aim of identifying patterns across and within discourses, and situating these within broader institutional and cultural contexts.

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[1] Daily Mail (2007) 'Campus Gunman's death video direct copy of award winning Korean revenge film'. Found at: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-449460/Campus-gunmans-death-video-direct-copy-award-winning-Korean-revenge-film.html#ixzz1yEGH3iXI [accessed 26th February 2011].

[2] Thomas, Liz (2008) 'Violent movies are to blame for knife crime wave blasts Sir Richard Attenborough' in the *Daily Mail*. Found at: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-1038361/Violent-movies-blame-knife-crime-wave-blasts-Sir-Richard-Attenborough.html#ixzz1yEHoHhpC [accessed 19th May 2012].

[3] The press release 'BBFC rejects sexually violent Japanese horror DVD' originally issued by the BBFC in 2009 is worded differently to the version currently archived on the BBFC's website; both versions are referenced here.

[4] Some research in the effects tradition uses other methods for gathering data, such as questionnaires and interviews (see Schrøder et al 2003, chapter 15; Barker and Petley 1997: 1-23).

[5] In their discussion of the 'Observer's Paradox', Schrøder et al (2003: 16-17) suggest that all audience researchers of audiences face this dilemma in some form, and that it is a problem which cannot be resolved. They argue that being aware of the strengths and weaknesses of each method is therefore an essential prerequisite for credible audience research.

[6] Schrøder et al (2003: 320-321), Ruddock (2001, Chapter 2) and others point out that there have been many significant developments made in this field which have attempted to take on board criticisms of their methodology put forward by cultural studies academics and others.

[7] Although this essay was published in 1980, it was first presented to the academic community in 1973.

[8] Hans Robert Jauss coined the term 'reception theory' in 1967, see Drotner (2000: 169) for a longer explanation.

[9] Additionally, there are time restraints involved in a three year doctoral programme of research (that also has to include research training, conducting literature reviews, analysing materials and writing up findings); it would therefore not be possible to extend the length of the time dedicated to the empirical stage of the research in this particular instance.

[10] These ask respondents to explain the importance of watching uncut films, how they get hold of the films and what thy preferred way of watching them is [see Appendix 2, Questions 7-10].

[11] For a discussion of 'figures of the audience' see Chapter 1, pp. 39-40.

[12] Although many possible avenues and approaches are touched on, Barker focuses in particular on the use of the online press database *Nexis* as a valuable tool for engaging in clearly defined searches of news sources in a wide range of countries. He notes that, if it is accepted as an index rather than a means to gauge levels of readership or contexts of consumption, then *Nexis* is a useful way to gather and sort information from a particular point in recent history.

[13] For example, the debate on several film forums about the extent to which Tartan's marketing tactics are 'orientalist' in nature.

[14] In this context, I am referring to fandom as a community of people who are passionate about a particular form of media, who frequently engage with/create secondary texts in relation to it, practice repeat viewing in relation to it, and so on. Whilst I greatly enjoy these films, I would not consider this to constitute a passion.

[15] Jenkins argues that the first generation of fan scholarship was, by necessity, celebratory in character in order to counter negative stereotypes and social stigmas that were associated with the figure of the fan at that time. He acknowledges that 'when I was writing *Poachers* I was so frustrated by how badly fans had been written about. As a fan I felt implicated in that writing and I wanted to challenge it; there are passages in the book that are just out-and-out defences of fandom' (Jenkins 2001: 11).

[16] For a more detailed overview of these developments see Barker (2008) pp.150-154

[17] Forum contributors often make comments such as 'it's not as bad as Visitor Q' or 'the Guinea Pig films are the only films I would really describe as extreme' [comments taken from the *Snowblood Apple* forum].

[18] *Dumplings* is also one of the films in Tartan's 'Three Extremes' trilogy released on DVD in the UK.

[19] This collection of newspaper articles was comprised of 57 articles about *Audition*; 40 articles on *Battle Royale*; 27 articles on *Dumplings*; 29 articles on *Grotesque*; 14 articles on the *Guinea Pig* films; 13 articles on *Ichi the Killer*; 73 articles on *Oldboy*; 27 articles on *The Isle*; 12 articles on *Suicide Club*; and 3 articles on *Visitor Q*. In addition to these 295 newspaper articles I collected 86 Internet reviews, interviews and website articles and read forum threads relating to all of the films on 41 separate sites.

[20] The online websites and magazines were Electric Sheep, Brutal as Hell, Melon Farmers, Hangul Celluloid, Cult Reels, Cinema-Extreme and Sexgoremutants.

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