

G325 Postmodern Media

10) How do postmodern media differ from other media?

Post modern media differs from other media in that it opposes the traditional movement of modernism. First appearing after World War 1 due to western frustration and disillusionment, Papa is an example of early post modern art which strived to be different in order to send a certain message. Postmodernism rejects the traditional idea of art replicating nature and reality theorised by Aristotel and states a huge emphasis on reality as a constructed fiction. Postmodern media places a high importance of the unconscious mind as a key feature in producing and reading media texts, while reflecting the modernist idea of an 'objective truism'. Instead, it believes in relativism and subjective ideas, irony and toys with the audience suspension of disbelief. It has influenced many aspects of culture including sociology, art, music and cinema.

Scream is a postmodern horror film produced in 1996 and directed by Wes Craven. A key postmodern feature which distinguishes it from other media is its reflexivity. Scream is a horror film about the horror genre, and it mocks and celebrates this. An example of this is the characters discussing the 'rules of horror films' e.g. "rule 1: never have sex". They also use self conscious parody humour when the female main character mocks horror films because "there's always a stupid girl running up the stairs when they should be running out of the front door". They create ironic humour by Sydney then running up the stairs away from the killer. Scream mocks its own genre, and itself acknowledging that the text is a constructed fiction which is a key element of postmodernism.

Although Scream uses humour about horrors it also sticks to many generic codes and conventions of horror films. This supports the postmodern theory that 'there is no more originality' and that everything is a mixture of bricolage and intertextuality. Scream uses bricolage to include many stereotypical aspects of horror films, which makes it a pastiche – or homage. These include the masked, dehumanised killer, teenage victims acting illicitly, a penetrative weapon, an isolated setting, mystery as of the identity of the killer and Laura Mulvey's Male Gaze theory – it forces the viewer to see female victims in a male point of view to heighten the predatory sense. It also incorporates the Final Girl Theory by Carol Clover, in Sydney's female character who appears androgynous, more innocent than her friends and survives to the end to seek revenge on the killer. In this concept this post modern film has similarities to others of the horror genre.

Intertextuality is a key concept of postmodern media which is not so much used in other media texts. Postmodernists believe that referring to other texts is essential when creating a text, and these references are often designed to be read by literates. There are many examples of this in Scream. Wes Craven, the director, appears in one background looking very similar to Freddy Kruger. This emphasises the lack of self-seriousness in post-modernism. The characters constantly refer to other horror films in dialogue. Examples of this are: "The Exorcist was on", "We used the same blood they used in Carrie" and "nobody cares why Hannibal Lector liked to eat people". This highlights how a modern society is constantly made up from other representations and media – Baudrillard's theory of the State of Simulacrum. Also, a character is killed by a TV screen showing the film 'Halloween'. This could be argued to mock the

modernist notion that viewers are influenced by horror films and could replicate it – postmodernists instead argue that every reading of a text is determined by each viewer. None is right or wrong.

This concept that ‘each member of an audience have different readings all which are correct and the intended meaning by the producer is no longer significant’ is Barthes ‘Death of the Author’ theory. Postmodernists do not construct texts for one meaning they place more impact on how a text looks than the meaning of it.

A key concept which differs postmodern media from others significantly is Lyotard’s argument of ‘the collapse of the grand narratives.’ He argues that traditional views held by the traditional movement are now disappearing. Thus, postmodern media often opposes ideas such as Christianity, Good vs Evil and progress.

A postmodern text which highlights this is the cartoon Family – which is a reflexive family sitcom with a dysfunctional twist. Family Guy is well known for being controversial and outrageous when covering sensitive subjects. An example of this is a shot of God trying to seduce a woman at a bar, showing the lack of care for what is traditionally believed.

Family Guy includes the typical postmodern feature of acknowledging that is a constructed fiction text, which most media texts do not do. An example of this is when Peter fears that “the network will cut Family Guy’s budget.” A self mocking humour is created which has proved very popular. Brian also acknowledges the irony and dysfunction that “I’m a talking dog for god’s sake!!!”. This shows the audience that it’s a careless, non serious comedy and makes humour out of everyone possible. A key feature of most texts which postmodernism opposes is linear narratives.

Fragmentation and chaos is a key element to postmodern media and Family Guy is a perfect example of this. The episodes contain random and ‘silly’ story lines which are interrupted by flash backs, flash forwards or completely irrelevant material many times in an episode. Examples are when Peter and Louis talk of changing Chris’ school and giant chicken appears to fight with Peter. A very long, irrelevant scene of about five minutes of violent fighting occurs, after which Peter simply returns to talk to Louis. Another example is the cartoon randomly being interrupted by a David Bowie music video, after which Peter comments “As if we let that happen”, then continues the storyline. This fragmentation, audience confusion and creation of a sense of chaos is a key element of postmodern art. It places much less importance on a main narrative than other medias and doesn’t place emphasis on ‘happy endings’ unlike traditional media.

Family Guy highlights the lack of morality and regard for an ‘objective truth’ which is an area where postmodernism opposes other medias. They play on, and mock stereotypes of race, culture and disability and gender carelessly. An example is where Brian the dog is turned human and he’s white, Peter remarks “You’re so lucky you came out white”. Another example is Peter wishing for a “Jewish money man” and interviewing for “a new black friend” when Cleveland moves. It has no care for right, wrong or truth simply the appearance of the finished text. Family Guy is ripe with intertextual references to pop culture – another element of postmodernism.

A key concept, one of the most significant that separates postmodernism from other media is Baudrillard’s theory of hyper reality. He theorises that modern society prefer simulated images of reality rather than reality itself – and that this is better. He believes that we are living in a state of simulacra – a reality made up of representations and other media. Examples of this are airbrushing and CGI. A perfect

example of this postmodern text is videogames. Videogames are postmodern in themselves because they never represent reality – it is always a constructed world. Grand Theft Auto uses this – a world in which the character can explore a huge range without having to complete the challenges (Sandbox effect). Modern audiences seem more and more enthusiastic for a simulated world which they can explore and be involved in. This may suggest that future media will develop the ideas of virtual realities and ‘made up’ worlds even further with developed technology.

Amorality is a controversial issue in postmodernism. Lack of regard for morals, emotions or political correctness is a key feature which is not often shown in other texts. Grand Theft Auto includes prostitution, sex, brutal killing, theft and crime and this has been criticised. However a modern audience made this very popular suggesting postmodernism is growing.

Postmodern media differs in many ways from other texts. It uses parody, pastiche, bricolage and intertextuality to refer to other texts. It has a lack of concern for historical correctness, objective truths, or morality which may imply very extreme forms of media for the future! Fragmentation, reflexivity and self mocking irony all distinguish postmodern media from other medias.

This is a clear level 4 response, meeting most of the criteria in all three areas (explanation, analysis and argument; examples and terminology) . The candidate uses a range of contemporary examples and relates these to a wealth of theoretical perspectives from gender parody to Lyotard’s death of the grand narrative. A range of postmodern traits are understood and discussed and throughout the response the question – of how these traits ‘mark out’ texts as postmodern - is answered.

1(a) Explain how far your understanding of the conventions of existing media influenced the way you created your own media products. Refer to a range of examples in your answer to show how this understanding developed over time.

Identifying codes and conventions of media texts is essential when creating a successful text of the same genre. In my AS coursework I created a school magazine cover and contents page and a music magazine cover, contents and double page. I then used these developed skills in identifying conventions of texts and creating my own work in my Advanced Portfolio to create a horror film poster, magazine cover and horror film trailer.

Textual analysis was essential for identifying convention for my foundation portfolio. I found a range of examples of existing school magazines cover and contents and compared and contrasted them. Conventions that I identified were a school environment in front cover photographs, many bright colours but a consistent house style, the use of a school logo and happy facial expressions on the student model. The contents pages were very simplistically formatted with basic text and contents lists and perhaps one or two smaller images. I used these conventions when creating my school magazine; I took a mid shot photograph which was required of a happy student in school uniform (typical and identifiable iconography). I then used Photoshop computer editing software to create the other parts of the contents and cover. I used a bold font in bright colour (red) for my masthead. I used my logo from Southfields which is blue, red and black as the main colours for my housestyle and I think this made it look more effective and professional rather than using many colours. I incorporated my school logo on the cover as it makes the 'school' genre recognisable and this was a generic convention that I identified. I also used small, basic font to create text of a 'date of issue', which I think was effective as it wouldn't draw attention from more important aspects of the cover. I also used this simple font to create simple text on top of my image which I used as cover lines and plugs, such as 'summer prom photos inside' which I believe would make a student reader want to read the magazine. The contents was created using simple headlines, black colour boxes containing page numbers and article information and three smaller, framed images of a library, school food, and girls at a prom. All of these aspects were conventional.

Although I stuck to the conventions in this piece I created did not look as professional and realistic as I had hoped. For example, I used a digital camera with 8 mega pixels which did not produce a good quality image compared to real life media products. I also think that the fonts were very simplistic and the layout was not creative. I still created a genuine conventional school magazine but perhaps my skills were limited at the start of my course.

Progressing into my Advanced Portfolio there was more work to be completed to a high degree of professionalism. One of my preliminary tasks was to create a magazine cover for a film magazine which was very similar to my AS coursework. I noticed that I was able to more thoroughly identify conventions and also apply them to my own text much quicker. I created a print cover in one hour whereas my AS coursework took much longer. This is because my skills with technology and my knowledge of the media has greatly improved.

I found examples of many film posters to complete textual analysis on and created a moodboard of conventions. I also asked a target audience for their preferences in this area which I think is essential in order to successfully attract your consumers. Conventions that I identified were bold, graphic fonts for both mastheads and straplines (such as a glowing effect) very glamorous photography with fashionable costume, hair, make up and body attitude, good quality photography, many smaller framed photographs and barcode and edition information. The language created focus on the on the film industry. Using these conventions I created my front cover. My photography was taken on SLR camera in order to make it look better quality, which was successful. I used a long shot of my main character looking glamorous and beautiful but scared. This fits the convention of the front cover using the theme of the main featured film. To follow this I created the masthead with a glowing font and superimposed it onto the character so that her head appeared to be placed on top of the text using cutting, cropping, copying tools and different layers. This made my cover seem professional I think. The glowing font was a deep shade of red to connote blood and danger and fit in with my horror genre. I used more impressive graphic fonts, such as 'cracked' fonts to stick to my horror genre theme. My barcode and date of edition were essential touches which I created through scanning in an existing magazine and copying it into my text. This is extremely conventional as all real media magazines include a barcode for the sales side of the industry. Overall, over my 2 year coursework I became more confident in identifying generic conventions of a product. My technology skills and knowledge of the media both developed and allowed me to create a more realistic and professional piece in my Advanced Portfolio.

This is a high level 3 response. There is a real sense of progression and a chosen theme – genre conventions is sustained in detail, along with a wide range of examples of creative techniques that led to conventional outcomes. The answer doesn't quite meet the criteria for level 4 because conventions are sometimes dealt with in a reductive way – eg a barcode, as opposed to being opened up to an analysis of their more symbolic qualities.

1(b) Analyse one of your coursework productions in relation to the concept of audience.

The concept of audience is fundamental to the making of a media text. A producer must take into account the age, social status and gender and interests of a target consumer in order to adjust the text to make it as appealing to them as possible. For my A2 coursework I created a horror called 'The sleepover'. Classification of age appropriateness is important in audience identification. Films are screened by an external board and given a minimum age of viewers. Most horror films are rated 18, due to extreme gore, violence, sex and disturbance – not to mention emotional trauma which is why I chose to rate my film as 18 as my film was a very conventional slasher film.

The Hypodermic Needle effect is the first audience theory. It originated in the 1920s when mass media first began to be popular. This suggests that a producer has an intended meaning which is definitely understood by the audience. In this theory the audience are completely passive. If this was applied to my text the audience would

view the killing scenes and sex scenes and instantly replicate the actions. This of course is unrealistic and this theory is often argued to be very simplistic and outdate, considering how much the media has developed this century.

The uses and gratifications audience theory suggests that an audience consume particular texts in order to receive something from them. Bulmer and Katz identified four uses and gratifications as diversion (entertainment and escape from reality), surveillance (information), personal identity (seeing yourself reflected in the text and learning new values and personal relationships (seeking emotional interaction and substituting media relationships for your own). In my coursework, a consumer may use diversion - the horror trailer is escapist – a route away from reality and they would be entertained by the mystery and fear of my film. Diversion would also include catharsis that my trailer would enable, which is using the media as an outlet of emotion – they would experience horror in the safety of cinema. They would also experience the ‘personal identity’ stage in seeing themselves in, or, admiring, the good characters – particularly the ‘final girl’ character and her charming boyfriend, depending on gender of audience member. They would also have the personal relationships because they could feel emotion of the fear and sadness of the victims whilst substituting their emotional relationship with the friendships in my trailer or the main characters’ romantic relationship with her boyfriend. My audience would not use the surveillance stage as horror films are not intended to be instructional.

The most modern and developed theory of audience is reception theory. This model based on Stuart Hall’s encoding model, suggests that a producer will encode a text and the audience will decode it. Their reading is affected by many contextual and personal factors such as age, social status, gender, current mood and personal experiences. I encoded my horror trailer as well as I could using beautiful, edgy, feminine characters which appeal to the female consumers. I used isolated settings which suggest to the audience that escape isn’t possible (deserted house, woods) thus highlighting the experience of fear and panic that one hopes for when watching a horror film. I used acoustic codes in the form of a deep male voice over and jumpy, low orchestral score to hope that my audience will feel tension and suspense. My killer was masked and always appeared silent and in the shadows, connoting evil and dehumanising him hopefully creating a response of fear from the audience.

My main target audience were males and females aged 18-30. I used attractive actors to appeal to the audience who would admire / desire them. The ‘cool’ stylish clothing adds to this. I used the male gaze theory by Laura Mulvey, showing a victim’s cleavage and the ‘final girl’ theory (hopefully creating a stronger feminist image to other women) to attract both genders. I used audience research in the form of questionnaires to find out my audiences preferences and dislikes in order to make my trailer meet their interests as fully as possible. I also asked for audience feedback on my first drafts which allowed me to make improvements based on the opinions of 20 18-30 year olds. They told me to exaggerate gore and violence more and use more threatening music which I then incorporated using iMovie so that my audience was tempted to watch my piece.

I aimed my piece at a low social status as my trailer was a version of British teenagers experiencing the American slasher experience. I used strong language, popular music for soundtrack and fashionable clothing to hopefully attract this group.

This is a level 3 / level 4 borderline response

Level 4 qualities –coherence, range of useful examples, ability to answer the question in sustained manner, relating of theory to practice. The understanding of Hall’s encoding / decoding model in relation to own work. The discussion of ‘effects’ early on is clear and relevant.

Level 3 qualities – the application of audience theories (insufficiently developed for level 4 – eg the ‘use of’ Mulvey, in the same paragraph as the use of questionnaires for feedback).