

**8 ESSAYS – THE KNOWLEDGE
EXCHANGE PROGRAMME:
A COLLABORATION BETWEEN
BBC R&D AND THE ARTS &
HUMANITIES RESEARCH COUNCIL**

BBC R&D



Arts & Humanities
Research Council

EIGHT'S CREATORS

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TIM WRIGHT is a cross-platform media producer and a director of XPT Ltd (www.kidnappedtrail.com). His credits include two BAFTA-winning interactive projects: 'Mind Gym' and 'Online Caroline' and the collaborative web fiction and Sony Award-nominated BBC Radio 4 play 'In Search of Oldton.' On page 3, he looks at the KEP research into digital memory.



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STEPHEN HEPPELL (www.heppell.net) is a professor of New Media Environments at Bournemouth University and one of the leading authorities on ICT and learning. On Page 6, he uses the KEP studies as the springboard for a passionate plea for the BBC to risk playing a leading role in upgrading our current ideas of media literacy.



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BILL THOMPSON (www.andfinally.com) is one of the UK's new media pioneers. A Visiting Fellow at City University, he covers digital culture for various media outlets, including BBC News Online, Focus Magazine and BBC World Service's 'Digital Planet.' On Page 8, he looks at the KEP research and digital inclusion.



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PAT KANE is a musician, writer, consultant and activist. He is author of 'The Play Ethic' (www.theplayethic.com), and one half of Hue And Cry (www.hueandcry.co.uk). On Page 14, he looks at the KEP research studies that focus on play and digital culture and ponders a playful future for the BBC.



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KATHRYN CORRICK (www.kathryncorrick.co.uk) is a digital media consultant and creative, whose clients include The New Statesman magazine, McCann Erickson, Handbag.com, New Media Age and the London Development Agency. On Page 17, she looks at the KEP studies' treatment of interactivity and participation.



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BRONAC FERRAN is a freelance writer/producer/academic. She currently directs theidealaboratory at Imperial College for the Royal College of Art's Industrial Design Engineering Department. On Page 20, she writes about innovation in the knowledge economy and the research partnerships created by the KEP studies.



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JIM MCCLELLAN (getmydrift.typepad.com/jim) is a journalist turned hackademic, specialising in new media. He's written for the Face, i-D, The Guardian, The Observer and the BBC and is currently Principal Lecturer in Journalism at the University of Westminster. He's 8's editor.



8

NEWSPAPER CLUB (www.newspaperclub.co.uk) is a new tool that helps people and communities make their own newspapers. It's an offshoot of RIG, a multi-disciplinary organization working in post-digital design whose clients include Six To Start, This Water and Penguin. Newspaper Club's Ben Terrett and Alex Parrott are 8's designers.



EDITOR'S LETTER

Welcome to 8, a one-off newspaper from the Knowledge Exchange Programme, a collaboration between the BBC and the Arts and Humanities Research Council or, to be more specific, between UK academics and BBC staff. So why's it called 8? The simple answer is that the Knowledge Exchange Programme (KEP) produced eight research studies in total, covering everything from how the BBC works with user generated content and how older users use digital services to the development of a 3D online world designed for children.

Of course, the other reason is that 8 is a rather more intriguing title than others we could have gone with. You know the sort of thing – Enabling Knowledge Partnerships in the 21st Century – Key Strategies for Future Innovation... Nothing wrong with that, of course, but the idea with 8 is to move away from the standard executive summary.

8 does have some of the stuff you'd expect from a more conventional publication. There are contact details for all researchers on Page 23 and on Page 11 there's an official view of KEP's aims from BBC R&D's Rowena Goldman and the AHRC's Joanna Pollock. On Pages 12-13 you can see a map of the connections built by one of the research projects. The eight studies themselves are online at the KEP blog (www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/knowledgeexchange). You can read them now. Many BBC staff already have and their recommendations are already being implemented.

But the real idea with 8 was to do something in the spirit of KEP, which is all about openness, about building networks and about finding new ways to share knowledge and ideas. You hear a lot about this kind of thing at the BBC these days. In May this year, the Director General, Mark Thompson, gave a keynote at the Journalism in Crisis conference at the University of Westminster (where I'm the Course Leader for the BA degree in Journalism) and talked about BBC partnerships in the context of local news.

The AHRC/BBC KEP, which has been running for four years now, is an indication that this isn't just talk, that the BBC is moving towards a more open approach. To reflect that, 8 tries to open things up further, to build more links and push the ideas forward. Rather than simply summarise the KEP studies, we've brought in writers and creatives from outside the BBC to give their take on the overall trends revealed by the research. Their brief was to reflect the individual studies but also to be provocative, to suggest new directions for the research and the BBC.

How provocative? Well, on Page 10, Bill Thompson suggests that the BBC's duty to push for digital inclusion will see its influence and power decline. Overall, the writers here are positive about the more open, sharing BBC championed by the KEP studies. In fact, they want more. Several suggest the BBC should become a kind of open platform, a space where others can build on foundations it lays and maintains.

That's easy to say but implementing it will be rather harder. The KEP research represents a step in the right direction. It tries to go beyond jargon to remind us that different people use media in different ways for different reasons. They're a reminder that the idea of 'public service' can't be taken for granted any more - there are lots of different publics now and their concept of service has changed radically. The KEP studies and 8 showcase some of the work being done towards redefining what a public service represents.

Helen Thomas, head of BBC Yorkshire and a participant in a KEP study into regional archive content sums it up nicely. "In the future, the BBC working in partnership will be the norm. It will be an open organization, which embraces content created by communities, individuals and employees."

So – enjoy 8. Enjoy the essays, the graphics and the pictures – all of which were taken by the KEP participants. Most importantly, read the studies and get in touch, either with the academics, the researchers or the contributors to 8 if you want to find out more.

Jim McClellan
J.McClellan@westminster.ac.uk
westminstermediacomment.wordpress.com

1 TIM WRIGHT

DIGITAL MEMORIES: 'WE'VE LOST CONTROL'

Memory is cheap these days, so cheap we can save almost everything from our digital lives if we want to. But how do we make sense of all the stuff we save? Can the BBC help us reconnect our public and private memories?

In 1980 two pop stars died: John Lennon and Ian Curtis. Lennon's assassination was big international news at the time and now survives in several media archives (including the BBC's *On This Day* website) as a defining moment of that year.

Curtis' suicide made the cover of a few indie music magazines, and whilst it's recently been commemorated in the vogue-ish biopic *Control* beloved of 40-somethings like me, his death has never really been more than a minor blip on the national psyche.

Two pop star deaths, two very different outcomes in terms of commemoration and a place in what we might now call 'the digital archive.' And yet when I try to map my own memories of 1980 onto either of these 'national' events, it's certainly Curtis's suicide that burns brighter and fits in more seamlessly with my own experience of the times.

Lennon was a remote, mythic, *old* figure from the 1960s and 1970s as far as I was concerned. Curtis was young, contemporary and personally relevant. He killed himself on my 16th birthday. Joy Division's albums were the soundtrack to my adolescence (I still play them today). I aspired to his clothes, his haircut, his funny way of dancing, his angst (Embarrassingly perhaps I still do). His death defined 1980 as a grim, sad, grey year (Check it out, it really was). His music reminds me of what I felt like when I was 16.

In short, here is an example of how personal memories can map more easily and powerfully on to one national event than on to another. My personal circumstances, my age, my socio-economic background, my emotional baggage, my own archived media acquired since that time - all glue me to one particular public moment in time rather than to another.

And even though Lennon is undoubtedly the more important figure historically and his assassination a symbol of society's ongoing obsession with show business, celebrity and fame by any means possible, it is Curtis who defines 1980 for me, and it is the memory of his death that elides easily into my memories of me.

Not that I have too many memories of me. None that I can share with you easily, you'll be pleased to hear. When I think of where my memories lie and how I might share them, like many other people my mind first turns to a small number of well-organised photo albums, a couple of teenage diaries, a box of letters, some books, a set of scuffed LPs, one shirt I refuse to throw away and few manky C90 cassettes. This is what remains of my so-called youth.

I then turn with terror to the frankly much larger number of unorganised photos that have either been dumped higgledy-piggledy in a huge box since about 1990. Or - worse - I'm forced to contemplate all the digital images sitting somewhere on my computer, on various memory sticks, or on sites like Flickr and Facebook, generally unloved and ignored ("0 views"), waiting patiently for the time - some time in my old age methinks - when they might finally be tagged and dated properly, printed perhaps, timelined and organised into 'sets' and finally *shared*.

Oh how the rest of my family are relishing that Christmas Day far in the future when grandpa (great grandpa?) finally forces them all to sit down and bask in his digital memories in all their banal glory. I'm sure you and the rest of the world are waiting on tenterhooks for my personalised, digitised 'mono-blogue' of how Ian Curtis and I defined a decade...

If nothing else I hope by now that you're getting the idea of how messy, muddle-headed and downright im-

practical this business of preserving and sharing one's memories can be.

At one end we have media executives imposing their cultural hegemony upon us, choosing to commemorate Lennon not Curtis, asking for memories of the Miners' Strike, but not memories of Norwich City beating Bayern Munich (dammit!). And at the other we have our collective inability to generate and organise personal media in any way that might make it accessible or - dare I say it? - meaningful to anyone else.

Sometimes, in my darkest Joy Division-inspired moments, I actually fear for our memories.

Technology makes our pre-digital stuff obsolete. Mainstream media foregrounds historical events in which ordinary people don't seem to feature in any significant way. And our digital detritus is so badly organised and distributed across umpteen different platforms and services that it's almost impossible to find and track it, let alone share it with loved ones (and/or complete strangers).

And even when we do attempt to make our presences felt (contributing to the Ian Curtis section of lastingtribute.co.uk perchance), we only seem to be reinforcing a sense of how arbitrary and subjective are the forces which lead a person into pooling their memories into the growing ocean of international digitised (mainly internet-based) media - and how choosy and selective people can be about the aspects of national memory they elect to reinforce and validate.

Now, before my message gets too doomy let's celebrate the fact that it's not too late to unpick this mess.

And indeed let's also admit that the proliferation of low-cost screens personal computers and mobile devices, the possibility of broad-

band access (in most places) wedded to practically free web-based services is providing us right now with a wonderful opportunity to develop the kind of digital playground where people might quite easily merge their personal memories with community-based media and link into a fully digital national archive in ways that could be significant and meaningful at both a personal and public level.

And it's the BBC without doubt that is better placed than any other British media organisation to lead the way in terms of developing new forms of memory-making, allowing the general public to hook into and re-use its assets in exciting new ways whilst simultaneously promoting best-practice principles to ensure that what we end up storing and restoring is actually worth the associated effort and cost.

Sitting as it does on the equivalent of 600,000 hours of TV content and about 350,000 hours of radio in its archive (i.e. very close now to a million hours of material), the BBC has more memories locked up in its vaults than most. And it too has the same problem as the rest of us of organising them properly, tagging them, dating them, making them searchable and retrievable, securing ownership and/or the right to republish, converting them into a publishable format - and then working out how to share them with other people in a meaningful way.

Also just like us, a big media institution has the tendency, as it organises and re-organises its memories and its materials, to discern patterns and themes, to pick out particular moments of significance, specific turning points, to discern definite beginnings, middles and ends.

In short it is perhaps all too tempting to turn memories into stories and thus decide on behalf of the rest

The desire to revisit one's own history was a potent factor in wanting to engage with archival sources.

Page 18 The Miners' Strike: A Case Study in Regional Content

of us what we actually get to see and hear; decide what is important *before* the rest of us actually get our hands on the material and start to do our own formal ‘remembering.’

The AHRC/BBC KEP research study ‘The Miners’ Strike: A Case Study in Regional Content’ does an excellent job of highlighting the problems associated with this seemingly selective opening up of archive material to people who lived through the events that the archive describes. As co-author Heather Powell eloquently puts it:

“The choice of the Miners’ Strike 1984/5 for this research was an inspired one.... For those who lived through it, few other events had such an impact on their social and political lives. The memories of those events have been translated into folklore by the communities directly involved. Through this research we can begin to understand what is important to communities about how they are represented in the archive. We can also start to understand the passions and sense of ownership the BBC audience has when engaging with what is essentially their archive.”

What becomes very clear in interviews with miners, other members of the mining community and police officers alike, is that there’s a deep, deep distrust of the story that is being told by the archive material. The complaints listed are becoming the common litany recited against television in general: ‘bias...dumbing down... an economic agenda... stereotyping... anti-northern prejudice... a disproportionate focus on violence and confrontation.’

This is not the place to talk about addressing fundamental editorial issues such as these. But I would suggest that these complaints could well be interpreted as symptomatic of the loss of control people feel about the recording and re-telling of shared experience in general.

Getting at the ‘truth’ of a memory can be contentious at the best of times. Just think of how family stories can be contested fiercely by all who sit round the table - with mum, dad, children and even the dog all remembering something different, all attempting to impose their will and establish their ‘version’ of things.

When we feel that we have no control over the telling, that someone else – a stranger – is calling the shots about what gets presented and represented about our own lives, then a fierce sense of injustice can kick in and instead of sharing our memories, we hoard them. Instead of story and informed opinion, we opt for cheap comment and rebuttal. Just think again of that family meal table – how many times did you combat someone else’s version of events with a sarcastic remark, by shouting or simply leaving the room? Or was that just me?

"I think that everything that the BBC has should be in the public domain. All of us have paid for it in the first instance."

Page 4 The Miners’ Strike: A Case Study in Regional Content



Many believe that much of the audience opinion about the news that gets published, what we call Audience Comment, is often dominated by the uninformed and those who hold extreme (and somewhat distasteful) views.

Page 4 ugc@thebbc: Understanding its impact upon contributors, non-contributors and BBC News

And yet what the Miners’ Strike study also demonstrates beautifully is how the addition of eyewitness testimony, the recording of personal story and discursive, group conversation, the capture of varying dialects, accents and points of view offers a much richer picture not just of the events themselves, not just of the impact on the people who lived through those times, but of what it might be like for any human being to be subjected to those pressures and have to make the difficult decisions as a contracted employee about when to go to strike, when to picket, when to commit civil disobedience, when to stand up for yourself, your family, your comrades or your community.

For sure, all this is a ‘no-brainer’ for most people engaged in professional content-making in a digital age. Anyone can see that offering participants, witnesses and the public in general the chance to attach their own stories and comments to BBC material, and use the material itself as the engine for public discussion and debate is ‘A Good Thing.’

The problem comes, though, in the methods the BBC chooses to adopt when capturing the variety of voices, stories and debates that coalesce around BBC output. And it’s a problem too choosing what platforms, technologies, and content management systems the BBC should support in order to reach out to its audience in this more open, collaborative and participative way.

One suspects that within the BBC, as with other broadcasters, there was until recently a tendency to see ‘interactive’ technologies, and primarily ‘the web’, as the catch-all answer to these conundrums.

And in an associated trend, senior producers and editors bracketed all forms of audience contribution to the process of story-making and debate under the somewhat derisory and impersonal catch-all term ‘user generated content (or ‘ugc’).

This in turn led to an explosion of on-air pleas to ‘email or text us your views’, to the setting up of presenter blogs supporting dozens, if not hundreds, of hastily typed (and hard to search or filter) comments, message boards dominated by a handful of voluble nutters, statistically meaningless votes and polls and a plethora of online photo galleries (of sunrises, sunsets, red setters etc) that remained online with no contextualising editorial, no associated media and no obvious explanation of their original reason for being.

As another of the KEP studies, ‘ugc@thebbc: Understanding its impact upon contributors, non-contributors and BBC News’ indicates, though, the ugc backlash has begun.

This research project attempts usefully to replace ‘ugc’ with the more practical term ‘Audience Material’ and also identifies that there are many different kinds of Audience

Material. It strongly promotes a shift from what it calls Audience Comment to Audience Content and even suggests that more programme makers should be developing Audience Material Policies.

(Some people might think it disturbing that hardly any BBC programmes have such a thing already, despite so regularly soliciting for audience feedback via the phone, via email, via blog, via SMS, via Facebook, via Twitter.)

The shift from comment to content – again, probably universally thought to be ‘A Good Thing’ – has led to some interesting experiments such as the *Island Blogging* programme in Scotland whereby a significant group of citizens have been encouraged to share personal material about their locale and the community in general via personal blogs. Notable too is *MemoryShare*, a bold attempt to allow people to share and browse memories of life experiences online and see them in the context of recent and historical events.

The BBC’s move into web-based ecosystems such as the blogosphere, Facebook and YouTube naturally has implications in terms of ownership and curatorship. More sophisticated BBC producers and editors, for example, are already realising that there’s no longer a need to house web-based Audience Content on a BBC approved site, or even a BBC server.

At Radio 4’s *Today* programme, for example, the traditional message board was closed down in favour of a more ‘distributed’ model of participation involving the use of broader and more general BBC online resources such as ‘Have Your Say,’ the introduction of presenter and guest editor blogs, a suggestion box for stories and packages that the programme might consider developing and a campaign of sorts to get listeners to start to their own blogs, or express themselves through third party services such as Twitter.

Over time the plan has been to make use of linking and embedding as a way of ‘windowing’ audience material on the *Today* website rather than actually hosting and supporting Audience Content. By encouraging the use of the tag ‘r4today’ on all related web content, it has also become possible to search across 3rd party platforms and web environments for *Today*-related comment and content that audience members have published in places far away from the BBC’s online realm.

Quite how many active informed citizens out there have the inclination, the technical skills and the free time to interact in this way is questionable. It still feels very much like a minority sport. In any case, in online spaces such as YouTube or Flickr, the stats suggest that it’s still much easier to watch rather than participate.

It’s also notable that, in the case of the *Island Blogging* project, when the

BBC attempted to withdraw technical support of the in-house blogging platform and encourage the audience to set up their own blogs using third party software, activity amongst the citizen bloggers dipped. Left to their own devices, the general public tends to get on with life and stops recording it.

There is a suspicion here in both these examples, in fact, that the key driver for introducing new ways of participating and co-publishing has not been an altruistic dream on the part of BBC management to engage in community memory-making. Instead, it could all be seen as a wizard way of cutting the cost of supporting an audience whilst still being seen (internally at least) to have a forward-looking cross-platform strategy.

Yes, this new web 2.0 'DIY citizen' approach to Audience Material has the potential to deliver greater freedom of expression, improved dialogue, richer engagement and offers an increased level of granularity and texture in terms of contribution and participation. But, as the *ugc@bbc* study notes, even on a quiet week, some BBC programmes receive at least 100 stills and videos from the general public and yet still very little of the material is used as part of programme making. Most 'ugc' sent into the BBC, one suspects, gets very little attention at all.

There is a strong insinuation throughout the report, too, that the people who send in this kind of material are not representative of the audience as a whole, and therefore extreme caution should be exercised about offering them any kind of platform at all.

It is true that the people's motives for becoming bloggers, vloggers, mobloggers or 'twitizens' can be suspect. You've probably heard one or all of these: they have too much time on their hands; they crave attention; they have a particular and narrow socio-political agenda; they are attempting to hijack a media channel for their own purposes; they are geeks who love technology for its own sake (photosynth.net/Default.aspx), they are trying to get a job at the BBC; they do it because they can (research.microsoft.com/en-us/projects/mylife-bits/); or they are simply 'sad.'

A third KEP research study 'A Public Voice: Access, Digital Story and Interactive Narrative', though, does a clever thing by using a focus on the formal practice of Digital Storytelling to confront head-on this issue of self-publishing and posting as a minority sport, and even confirms that it's not just media professionals who can get snooty about the quality and value of Audience Material: "During focus group discussions many participants placed emphasis on the importance of 'professionalism' and 'quality' ... There was a shared feeling that these qualities needed to be maintained otherwise it would be just like YouTube, which was viewed negatively."

But rather than condemning the authors of existing Audience Material out of hand and writing off 'YouTube culture' as shallow and lacking in quality, this research probes a bit deeper into why Audience Material and digital memory sharing is still considered by most to be a low value, niche activity for the techno-literate. And it offers some ways of marrying the world of online self-promotion and offline storytelling.

Its first important finding appears to be that perhaps we are not yet offering the appropriate tools, environments and/or formats that might encourage people to develop their stories effectively.

In terms of tools, it is becoming clear that the web in itself may be a rather blunt instrument for gathering stories and allowing people to attach themselves to BBC content. For example, in most cases, contributions still require people to sit down in front of a screen and master some kind of input device; at best a mouse and keyboard, at worst a video camera, a wireless internet connection and an often tedious login sequence.

What the Digital Storytelling research project is great at demonstrating is that the unlocking of memory sometimes requires an almost theatrical stimulus – one's presence in a particular location at a certain time of day, the social element of face to face interaction, voices and gesture, the structure of a timeline, the constraints of a particular length of time, the development of a line of thought from one moment to the next and from one 'platform' or 'scene' to the next, from pen and paper to spoken work to video...

This process of memory making and memory sharing takes time and resources, it requires facilitation, education and patience. A lot of the activity takes place hyperlocally and away from a screen. For a time-poor, cost-cutting, screen-based, net-obsessed international media organisation, this all runs counter to its culture and probably seems irredeemably slow and expensive.

However, technology might yet come to our rescue in this regard with the emergence of location-aware mobile applications that might offer us the time and space we need to interact with and interrogate the world around us, to create personal media in our own time and space, not on the broadcaster's time or only in cyberspace.

With the coming of the iPhone, for example, we have a glimpse of a mobile device that allows us to record our voices, take photos, locate ourselves, exchange data, play and publish with very few constraints in terms of technical know-how and social restraint. And with technologies such as RFID tags and 'spimes' (location aware artefacts) it will soon be possible to allow buildings, vehicles and personal objects to speak for themselves so that we don't have to spend time doing it for them.

For example, with all the outdoor war memorials in this country quietly eroding, and the names of our war heroes being rubbed away by the rain, is the answer to retype all those names on the web and get someone like Richard Hammond to stick a camera up the nose of every surviving war veteran? Well maybe.

But a richer, more adventurous and ultimately more social and pluralistic solution might be to turn the war memorials themselves into intelligent, communications hubs which can tell you about themselves and the history they represent (if you ask them nicely) and on to which personal content can be stuck via mobile wireless technologies. Public monuments as both publishers of BBC content and receivers of Audience Content – now there's a thought.

Which then only leaves the second caveat arising out of the Public Voice study; that is, a certain cultural bias about what kind of content is deemed to be valuable, of use or 'interesting.'

For TV producers whose job it is to entertain as well as inform, the infra-ordinary represents a huge challenge. How is it possible to make the YouTube wittering of a teenager or the Twitterings of Stephen Fry into something entertaining?

And yet ignore the seemingly banal and irrelevant stories and one risks excluding important stakeholders and misrepresenting history. In the Miners' Strike archive, for example, women in all communities were seen as under-represented despite playing a central role in the events of the day. Was this because their stories were deemed irrelevant at the time? The *ugc@thebbc* study indicates that people over 60 are less aware than younger people about how to submit Audience Material and become involved in programme making. Does this mean that old people should be left out of the digital revolution?

The fact is that most memories can be subjective, hazy, captured in bits, un-sensational and seemingly boring or irrelevant to others – like listening to someone else tell you about last night's dream or what they had for tea yesterday (the piece of information comedians most often like to suggest is being shared pointlessly on Twitter BTW).

But digital memories do not exist in isolation and they have a quiet but powerful cumulative effect. And they benefit from life on a network where they can be linked, tagged, repackaged and repurposed. The more memories the better, in fact (just as last.fm gets better the more music tracks you feed it).

The challenge for all of us – for big corporations right down to individual citizens – is going to be to make sure all of our memories are available in a searchable, safe and *usable* form. For the BBC that won't just mean opening up a digital archive (which must and will happen

over time), but more importantly will be about developing in partnership with audiences really effective ways of 'prepping' personal media for sharing, merging and mashing in a socially responsible way, and will also be about using a variety of collaborative storytelling techniques and formats – some screen-based, some not – that make it much easier for people from any kind of background to add to pools of public digital memory.

At one end we have media executives imposing their cultural hegemony upon us, choosing to commemorate John Lennon not Ian Curtis, asking for memories of the Miners' Strike, but not memories of Norwich City beating Bayern Munich (dammit!). And on the other we have our collective inability to generate and organise personal media in any way that might make it accessible or – dare I say it? – meaningful to anyone else

And we'll need to allow this pooling without pressing people too much about the 'point' of each contribution. After all, most of us probably can't tell you the 'point' of the scraps of the past we choose to keep. I still have my Ian Curtis RIP button badge, for example. It's cheap, it's not very pretty, it's badly made and it has no real 'point' to it. And yet it's still a little bit of me tucked away in a drawer, waiting for the day when it might become part of a bigger story; the day I can make sense of it all – and work with others perhaps on how to arrange the memories into a New Order...



2 PROFESSOR STEPHEN HEPPELL

TOWARDS A NEW MEDIA LITERACY

Media literacy in the age of YouTube, Twitter and Google? Some argue that online youth cultures now understand more about this than traditional academics and media professionals. So what do this new generation need from the BBC and what can it learn from them?

Back in the 1980s, as part of a research project on “genuineness” in teachers we asked a group of 11 - 13 year olds how bad a teacher might be with technology before they could be considered beyond hope. The children were very precise with their prescription: “when they are mousing off the edge of the table and puzzled by the fact that their cursor has stopped moving” was their crisp definition of hopeless.

Fast-forward to the 21st century and we questioned another group of 11 - 13 year olds, this time about literacy, but it was their teachers’ literacy we were exploring. The children were asked “what would you expect a literate teacher to be able to do?” and their answers included editing a Wikipedia entry, uploading a video to YouTube and being able to switch predictive text on and off on a mobile phone (they laughed when they said this one).

You will note their expectation that teachers, as experts, would be net contributors. Some schools, on seeing this list, worry about the cost of the professional development courses needed to bring their staff up to speed. Yet the many schools that have thought to ask their children to enable that development themselves have been delighted by the seriousness brought to bear by the students as they build effective CPD (Continuous Professional Development) for their own teachers.

In many ways these two tales illustrate the central issues facing us as we explore notions of media literacy: given the pace of change of emerging media, it is all too easy to begin with a deficiency model of viewers and learners - policymakers reason that knowing “how to” needs to be mandated for our economic survival. The result is that many nations have a prescriptive curriculum for ICT or media capability; in practice, for so many (although not all) youngsters, that stultifying notion of “how to” is frankly patronising. They can already construct, but now need help with deconstructing, with critiquing, with judgement.

So – when we talk about ‘media literacy’, we are faced with two key questions: Just which media are involved? And precisely who do we expect to be literate? This essay explores the need for an entirely fresh look at media literacy as we approach the end of the first decade of what is already a remarkable new millennium.

Let’s start with the pace of change. So much of what technology touches can be graphed with an exponential curve - a gentle start leading to a rapid steepening. Breathtaking technological breakthroughs become rapidly mundane and completely ubiquitous. Yesterday’s Quantel Paintbox

becomes today’s MacBook Pro and tomorrow’s ‘phone. This exponential curve has a profound effect on policy. In the last century, there was time for reflection, time to pilot and explore, followed by time to trial the consequent prescription or policy (remember Green Papers?) and then finally opportunity for iteration and development.

That’s all gone now. A mass of new and affordable technology for making media is breaking like waves on a shore. Suddenly children are recreating scenes from films using games as authoring tools (known as machinima), 3D printers are spitting out objects that are otherwise impossible to machine, GPS track sticks are adding a sense of “where” to our sense of “self” and, of course, ingeniously creative media savvy youngsters are inventing everything from new ways of flirting to the viral spoofing of flash mobbing.

At this point, what any academic ideas of media literacy might bring to the party these youngsters are enjoying is questionable. Clearly the approach from those seeking to define modern media literacy to those already living it needs to be responsive and participatory, not prescriptive. The BBC, having announced it is to appoint a small media literacy team to report to Online Access Champion Seetha Kumar has a massive opportunity here as it broadens its role to become a “supporting hand” to the rest of the media sector.

Secondly the education system that seeks reluctantly to embrace media literacy - from school to university - has been built around systemic convenience. So much of what passes as acceptable practice exists only for the convenience of the system, and certainly not for the learners. We have a curriculum wrapped around the factory learning concept of “met before”: as students turn over their test papers, their teachers outside the exam room fret, worrying whether everything on the paper has been properly introduced and covered previously. The students turn their papers over nervously hoping for “no surprises”.

In a world where our lives are characterised by the unexpected - from a collapse of banking to the new weather resulting from global warming - nothing could be less appropriate than a “met before” curriculum. Media is clearly heading towards a place that we haven’t been to before. The curriculum should surely prepare us all with a strategy for the unexpected. But in education, we have substituted valuing ingenuity and unique endeavour for uniformity and conformity. Worse still, we have done this at exactly the time when in economic terms we have ceased to value, or need, uniformity and conformity. With the ground changing so very publicly under their feet, presumably it is the media faculties and researchers who should be pioneering a move back to ingenuity and unique endeavour. There is no better place to start than with a new sense of media literacy.

Of course, in times of severe change, systems fight to protect themselves. But it’s clear now that the central impact of technology economically is that it breaks cartels. Any organisations that seek to vouchsafe their futures by building barriers around themselves - for example by substantial merger activity, or through legislative requirements - will be doomed because technology has tipped the power balance back in favour of folk. Just look at the way online music fans are now calling the shots for the once powerful record companies, whose only response is to plead for protective legislation against “pirates”.

The media industry is also characterised by artificial cartels. Inevitably then, it has come under siege from its formerly passive but now empowered consumers. Currently, it is impossible to think of a broadcasting organisation that is not in fear of its life. In this context, it’s all too easy to see the traditional idea of ‘Media Literacy’ as an ‘old school’ tool to protect professionally produced TV shows with their edited and scripted content, whilst simultaneously sidelining the informal creativity of youngsters shooting videos on their mobiles. Why would one be legitimate media, while the other is seen as the transient chatter of a tech-crazy generation?

Of course, the history of youth culture offers an interesting contribution to this debate too, as subsequent generations seized on the autonomy afforded by whatever media was accessible to them - dominantly music - to make their voices heard. But while most decades can boast a unique youth culture, the current one apparently has no shocking fashion, no Punk or Grunge. Kids are still demonised of course, but for doing nothing, rather than for doing the wrong thing. But look harder and you realise there is a Noughties culture too. It’s just that previously user-generated media and consumer media clashed in the same spaces: music, fashion and dance.

But current youth is not to be found in areas populated by previous generations. The chattering classes are largely not to be found in online forums devoted to machinima or fan fiction. Youth user-generated media leaps virally and unheeded from phone to phone and achieves status via word of mouth in social networks. Youth culture has been led to new and often unseen places. The question is how should media literacy, as a broad concept, respond to that?



So, where might we look to locate a new media literacy? Surely in the in-betweenie space that technology has opened up between ossified old certainties.

How about the space between viewer and broadcaster, which is where we find BBC3's *Lily Allen and Friends*? Allen's use of new media is well known – she used MySpace to connect with and build up a fan base, opening up about her anxieties about weight and body image, all without the mediation of professional music journalists. She now uses Twitter to maintain her celebrity profile, picking fights with uberblogger Perez Hilton and snarking about Susan Boyle. So it was natural when she wound up on broadcast TV for her not to see any difference between old and new media channels, to create this kind of inbetweenie space as she highlighted new music in the MySpace Band and YouTube Hero slots on the show.

Alternatively, try the nearly-now space between “now” and “not now” where txtng lives. Surely the most media illiterate sight in modern Britain is a middle-aged business executive glued to the immediacy of their BlackBerry, misunderstanding that neither txt nor email are phone calls needing an instantaneous reply, and thus completely missing the opportunity that txtng has offered the rest of us to improve discourse through providing a pause to reflect, research, re-present, retract and relish (the 5 Rs).

Taken as a whole, this in-betweenie space is almost wholly unregulated. We regulate the broadcasters, but not the viewers' broadcasts, we regulate teaching quality, but not learners' teaching. This is a digital Wild West and it desperately needs the ability to critique, deconstruct and judge that a newly broadened media literacy might bring.

This all leads us to an exciting conclusion as we strive to get a grasp on media literacy in the 21st century. To summarise - the pace of change precludes policy reflection and prescription, education itself needs to embrace uncertainty and ingenuity, new technology will accelerate and broaden its contribution to a wider definition of media and young users will run further and faster ahead. In fact, **far from being 'digital natives', they are digital**

cosmonauts, leaving the comfort of their orderly world to seek out entirely new galaxies of opportunity.

And it is, inevitably, with these youngest users that we should start to re-imagine media literacy. It should be their actions, pastimes and culture, which determine where media is leading us. And as we follow, we should not be judgemental. Instead, it is to these new places, be they mobile phone clips or geo-tagging video, that the insights and disciplines of media theory should be brought to bear. A curriculum focus defined by the immediate needs and actions of its learners might helpfully prototype a new direction for education too.

Which leaves the question of whether this might prototype a new broader role for the BBC, one also defined by the immediate needs and actions of its learner viewers. The BBC could just passively watch and report, of course. But surely it can do better than that. In a world where Twitter postpones its scheduled maintenance shutdown to allow the post-electoral Iranian protests to continue, it is clear that the global tools flourishing in these new in-betweenie spaces are of real significance. People are using their tech-savvy to make an impact that traditional strategies and channels rarely offered. But what role is there for national public service when a global public are serving themselves?

There has already been much navel-gazing of course and useful finessing of existing practice. The KEP research study “ugc@thebbc: Understanding its impact upon contributors, non-contributors and BBC News” confirms that “The *Today* programme and *PM*, both broadcast on Radio 4, have clearly found that the audience will respond online” and have “designed their website to accommodate their audience's wishes”. The report “A Public Voice: Access, Digital Story and Interactive Narrative” clearly demonstrates that digital storytelling is an effective means for institutions and organisations to connect with members of the public. “Virtual Worlds: An overview and study of BBC Children's *Adventure Rock*” confirmed children's frustrations that it didn't work on their web-enabled games devices and Apple Macs. All this finessing and detail could, of course, improve current offerings.

But surely this is THE defining moment of substantial opportunity. Everything I've talked about above cries out for more than finessing - it cries out for change. Paradoxically, our current moment might be the perfect moment to do something radical .

We have a distracted, squabbling government; we have an Internet built erroneously around resources (with its URLs) but populated by people searching for a way to instead reveal their identities through micro-blogging and beyond; we have a collapse of traditional business models so that a huge blurring has occurred between public and private... and, finally, we have a nation struggling to redefine literacy.

Surely all this defines that moment of opportunity. It is time for the BBC to seize the high ground. If the internet needs a learning layer to allow newly literate learning to proceed, a layer which offers threading, narrative structures, memberships and a temporal base, then the BBC has, for a little

longer, the resources to build it and to contribute what would effectively be an API (an application programming interface) for learning to the world, an open network structure, a public space on which everyone else could build useful tools and services.

Thanks to the new interactive personal media technologies, I can be literate in a 21st Century way, wherever I am in the world. I can build learning for myself, with my community, throughout my life. Why shouldn't those functions be provided by an organisation that has at its heart a mission to “educate, inform and entertain”, that seeks to let “nation speak unto nation” and whose history shows an unequivocal commitment to a literate democracy?

There is a chance here to be substantially proactive, to do something remarkable for the world, before the funding is gone. And for the bean counters there is the comfort that Google, which has given the world great functionality as a service, has a current valuation of over \$100bn and is sitting on a cash mountain with an annual income of greater than \$20bn, compared to a declining BBC annual revenue of under £4bn. If it took some risks, the BBC could perhaps become a Google-like platform for the new form of media literacy.

There is a chance here to redefine learning and broadcasting and to rediscover, in one great leap, the BBC's soul and perhaps to begin a new renaissance led by young voices. Of course the educational and broadcasting fundamentalists will cry out. They will express doubts about the “new” and proclaim faith in the “old”. They will profoundly mistrust the voice, and fashionableness, of youth. They will espouse steady iteration.

But they will be wrong because education, and media too are surely two of the last great cartels of the 21st century. To avoid the fate faced by the music industry, both will need to urgently re-imagine themselves. Why shouldn't they do that together? It is hard to imagine any better place to start than with a core literacy that is already being re-imagined by ingenious children. Far from subverting it, getting media literacy right, and building a new model of global learning on top of that, might just save education and broadcasting too. Just maybe.

'What do children want from the BBC?'

If the young are leading the way when it comes to developing a new kind of actively engaged media literacy, this KEP study, *What do children want from the BBC?*, has interesting things to say about the way they currently interact with BBC content and how the corporation should respond. Focusing mainly on BBC's *Newsround*, its key findings were:

- Children and young people see themselves as citizens and want to play a more active role in the public sphere. *Newsround* provides children and young people with a unique outlet that prioritizes their voices. It makes their ideas feel important.
- Adult news frequently ignores children's voices and perspectives
- *Newsround* is an important tool for citizenship development. It contextualizes information for young people in an appropriate and accessible manner
- Children over the age of 12 feel that they have outgrown *Newsround*, yet express the idea that they are not quite ready for adult news. A teen news provision should therefore be developed.

The team behind the KEP study say it's clear that “children want a news service that is designed for them. They still watch the TV bulletin more than they go on the website, so every effort should be made to retain and extend this provision, complementing it with availability and different types of uses/interactions on different platforms. But at this point in time, it is important to keep in mind that not all young people are technology-savvy, nor do many want to be. At least not in the highly interactive/creative way some assume.”

3 BILL THOMPSON

ONE NET
TO BIND
THEM:A
NETWORK FOR
EVERYONE

A broadband tax might be one way to build a network that reaches all of Digital Britain. But inclusion is about more than technology. Does that mean the BBC can play a leading role in bringing everyone online?

Earlier this year, 17th April to be precise, I found myself sitting at my desk at home watching the live stream from the Digital Britain Summit at the British Library. The summit was one of the major events organised by Stephen Carter's Digital Britain team to promote debate around their interim report, and featured a parade of senior speakers including the Prime Minister, Sly Bailey from the Mirror Group, and national treasure Stephen Fry.

As is now usual on these occasions, there was a live blog to accompany the streamed video from the conference venue, but there was also an active debate taking place on the Twitter microblogging service, with many of the old hands in the campaign for digital inclusion providing a running commentary on the event.

I was disappointed by the quality of the debate, which seemed to consist of the same faces making the same points that we have heard many times before, and towards the end of the day I tweeted:

@billt: We should have got our act together and organised a #digitalbritain unconference for today, with tea & biscuits. And talked sense.

In doing so I unwittingly unleashed a storm of activity that resulted in a dozen separate events throughout the UK over the next three weeks and a sixty page submission to the Digital Britain team that provided a perspective from many people who might not otherwise have made the effort to get involved.

The meetings were organised online and most of the reporting process was done using a collaborative web service called *Huddle*, another demonstration of the importance of internet access for anyone who wants to be an engaged citizen in the modern age.

The content of the discussions was wide-ranging, covering everything from how to encourage entrepreneurship to the details of connecting your community to fibre optic broadband, but a common thread at all of the events was a strong feeling that the proposals in Carter's interim report did not go far enough, and that digital inclusion should be a key priority for government.

When the final report was published on 16th June, it was not possible to claim a direct connection between our deliberations and

the radical suggestion that a small levy on telephone services should be imposed to pay for providing next-generation broadband access to areas of the country that would not be served by commercially-minded internet service providers. However, there was a much greater sense of the necessity of getting everyone online and of offering government support where the market could not deliver.

An Ongoing Debate

The interest in the take-up of online services is not new, and has been a serious policy issue since the late 1990s when dial-up access to the internet started to take off and broadband technologies first emerged. In 2003 the Cabinet Office established a Digital Inclusion Panel, which reported a year later that extra effort would be required to provide access and enhance take-up by unemployed people, older people and those with disabilities. In 2007 UK Online Centres published *Understanding Digital Inclusion - A Research Study*. In the introduction, Helen Milner, the Managing Director of UK Online Centres, called for greater collaboration between government and the private sector to promote digital inclusion.

In particular, she emphasised the need for more work to explore what she terms 'the soft impacts and the social effects' of getting people online. The research carried out under the AHRC/BBC Knowledge Exchange Programme is relevant here as several of the projects look at how digital technologies are changing the environment within which television and radio programmes are made and consumed, whether because of new digital delivery methods or through the emergence of online communities around the BBC's content, and a change to content consumption habits is one of the key social effects of online access.

While there is still a great deal to be uncovered about what drives people to use the internet and how established patterns of media engagement and social interaction are affected by online services, the AHRC/BBC collaboration makes an important contribution to the research base and offers useful insights into how a Digital Britain might work.

Understanding Engagement in the Digital World

The KEP research was deliberately broad, with work ranging from a study of a children's virtual world and the use of archive regional content to the difficulty older viewers have with electronic programme guides. All eight projects share a concern with the consequences for the BBC of the transition from the scheduled broadcast of radio and television programmes, accompanied by largely asynchronous interaction with audiences, to the modern media world. This area has clear implications for how we devise strategies to encourage inclusion since if we can encourage online engagement with popular TV and radio content we are giving audiences a reason to get connected, and once they are online then they are in a position to engage with other services.

The relevance to the broader debate around inclusion is obvious in the KEP study 'Listener Online Engagement with BBC Radio Programming', which looks in detail at online fan cultures around a number of programmes, including *The Archers* and *Wake Up With Wogan*, and contrasts BBC-provided conversational spaces like the Discuss the Archers Messageboard with the fan-created Archers Addicts site. It is less explicit, but also present, in the thinking behind the research described in the KEP study 'Inhibited Exploration in Older Customers of Digital Services', where one of the experiments asks participants whether they wish to 'browse interactive information about a favourite series' and in doing so offers an insight into older people's attitudes towards digital engagement generally. There is clearly a digital inclusion aspect to "Virtual Worlds: An overview and study of BBC Children's *Adventure Rock*", since the 3-D space is really an alternative way of reaching young people in order to 'inform, entertain and educate' them.

Meanwhile the study "The Miners' Strike: A Case Study in Regional Content" examines the use of archive material from the 1984 Miners' Strike to explore how that rich source of material can be used for more than retrospective documentaries. It offers insights into how a formerly passive audience can be encouraged to engage with material presented as part of an interactive archive, and the issues that are raised as the BBC moves from being a provider of programming to a facilitator of engagement.

This approach is also observable in the analysis of BBC Blast, an online showcase and community accompanying an annual TV series allied to a range of offline events and training schemes. The KEP study "Alone Together? Social learning in BBC Blast", carried out by a team from Bristol University and BBC Learning, makes the point that Blast should not be seen as a collection of projects around a television programme but as a learning environment, a space within which young people are encouraged to engage.

Clearly, the connection between the Knowledge Exchange Programme and attempts to engage the whole population in new media activity and hence support digital inclusion is an important one, as one way to drive digital inclusion is to encourage television and radio audiences to engage with the interactive services already available on digital services as a stepping stone to full network use. It also has significant implications for the BBC and its role as a public service broadcaster.

The Former Audience

The importance of the BBC's active involvement with well-grounded research into the way people engage with its output should not be understated, and there is a great deal in the research findings that should be taken into consideration for new projects or in reviewing continuing work. In fact, many of the recommendations advanced in the Alone Together report have already been implemented at BBC Blast as part of an effort to transform the project into a learning environment capable of inspiring young people and encouraging their creative use of the online services.

Meanwhile, the KEP investigation of the use of archive material from the Miners' Strike brings many issues to the foreground that might otherwise have been neglected if the project had simply been an internal BBC project. The Miners' Strike study is clear about this benefit, noting: "Central to this study was a desire to explore the relationships between various stakeholders, between content providers (BBC archives) and a range of public and broadcast audiences. At a time when the BBC is developing new approaches to disseminating archival resources, and engaging with new audiences via a range of digital initiatives and archival supported programmes, the study is extremely timely. The core

of the project was designed to look at how the BBC's regional public audiences might interact with 'sensitive' archival sources, in what sense they could access and utilise these materials as part of their own memories of historical events, what issues and problems might arise, and ultimately how these findings could be used to inform future archival activities, digital accession, academic practice and drive programming.

However there is another and more fundamental issue that informs all of the research projects, one that is directly related to digital inclusion but that also has significant implications for the BBC and other media organisations. All eight research projects deal either directly or indirectly with the way that network societies challenge the model of the audience that has informed the development of mass media including newspapers, radio and television, and they highlight the fact that the current way of thinking about audiences cannot persist in the new media world.

In the old days of one-way broadcasting of radio and television it was possible to disregard the fact that audiences are not simply passive recipients of programmes but participants in a rich discourse built around shared experience and values, a discourse that is mediated by complex feedback loops. The sheer numbers of viewers for popular programmes and the reach of the main channels meant that a simple model was good enough for most purposes, and aggregate measures of audience size and engagement were enough to guide strategy and satisfy those charged with the stewardship of public funds.

Any communications theorist would have been able to point out that models which treat the audience as passive recipients of content were unlikely to withstand close examination, especially when radio and television audiences are concerned. Audience for cinema and live performance may have been beaten into passive submission over the decades, and the raucous groundlings of The Globe Theatre are long gone, but the word 'audience' is simply not adequate as a catch-all term for those who have paid a variable degree of attention to some or all of an audio/audio-visual stream.

We have never really known what the people listening to the radio or watching TV were really doing, how engaged they were or what their experience was. The easy availability of online catch-up and multiple channels mean that all we can really say of an 'audience' today is that, like an electron associated with a nucleus, there is a non-zero probability that an audience member has some awareness of having been exposed to the content in some manner. Anything else is just hopeful speculation on the part of the production team or senior management.

The complexity of the audience was clearly shown in the research done on older viewers, the KEP study 'In-

hibited Exploration in Older Customers of Digital Services', where much of the work done seemed to undermine the hypotheses put forward by (presumably younger and more able-bodied) researchers about why the older population will not use interactive services, explore EPGs or engage with enhanced televisual content. The researchers discovered that the main limiting factor seemed to be related to a TV-watching time budget, recognition perhaps of the fact that TV is not seen as a productive activity: "Many of our respondents do not wish to spend more time watching TV. This in itself is a substantial barrier to the take-up of interactive services to the extent that these services are classed as TV-watching." Given this, the hopes that traditional broadcast programmes may help digital inclusion by luring traditional viewers online may prove to be groundless. Elsewhere in the Inhibited Exploration study the researchers strain hard to find an experimental protocol that will demonstrate the validity of their central hypothesis about resistance to novelty in the older television-watching population, but the data failed to convince this sceptical reader.

Talking Back

If the simple model of an audience as passive recipients of presented content is inadequate, even for older viewers who are generally less digitally literate than younger people, then what sort of model will work? One alternative is to treat those who watch, listen to, read or interact with BBC content as co-creators of a shared experience that is smeared over the timeline. In fact, the KEP study 'Listener Online Engagement with BBC Radio Programming' argues strongly that this has always been the case for radio at least. "Perhaps more than other traditional forms of mass media, radio has always offered a space for listener feedback and participation. With talk radio programming, listeners have been key to producing a mediated, deliberative (if not necessarily representative) environment. In terms of music programming, requests and dedications have long been incorporated into broadcasts. Further, while online fora allow listeners to respond to radio content instantaneously, the process of contacting programmers and DJs is not new: letter writers have never hesitated to deliver their views on radio content. In light of previous considerations of radio lis-

tener engagement and participation, it is important to approach internet-based activities as not new phenomena, but the most recent in a long and varied history."

It is also important to recognise that what may have been true of radio in the past is now equally true of television, thanks to the ease with which video can be streamed to home computers and even mobile phones. In both cases, today's digital technologies have accelerated the process of feedback, created many new channels and structures for engagement and delivered ways for the resulting 'content' to be more adaptive, rather as the normal way of using computers shifted during the 1970s from having large mainframe systems that ran one program after another in 'batch-processing' mode to the interactive systems of today. It means that the BBC is no longer a monolith to be observed but a system to be engaged with, and the former audience is a more equal partner in the interaction than ever before.

It is interesting to note in the Listener Online Engagement study that "easily the most common gripe among BBC Radio message board users is the role and behaviours of the moderators". This is just one indication of the shifting balance of power between the 'former broadcaster' and the 'former audience.' The shift is not, of course, reflected fully either in BBC practice or in the legal system, where those who host forums and discussions may find themselves liable, but the continuing pressure from those who choose to engage with the BBC and other content providers to determine the terms of that engagement may result in change over time. A few months ago the Facebook social network attempted to change its terms of service in a way that was perceived as giving it more control over the material uploaded by users, but a storm of community protest led to the site backing down and eventually holding an online vote on a range of options for its terms of service. If this sort of democratic engagement can be demanded of a private company then it may be hard to resist it when it is asked of the BBC.

In analogue days the dialogue between producers, governors, government, audience researchers, wider society, reviewers, commentators and those watching the programmes was stilted, carried out through limited channels under the control of either the broadcasters or other media organisations, and there are still hints of this approach in some of the research done under the Knowledge Exchange Programme. For example, elsewhere in Listener Online Engagement study we find: "Our recommendation would be that rather than regarding the 'anti-fan' and ironic fan postures adopted by some posters as a threat, the BBC should consider these discussions, like the website as a whole, as a successful adjunct to the programme – a broadening of its cultural wings and a sign of the passionate engagement of some listeners."

"A new focus has emerged for the BBC which concerns representation and how the archive can be best presented to realise our public value remit and our ability to engage with our diverse audiences. The interest is not simply in blockbuster dramas but also in the coverage of social content that says so much about all of us as a community."



If we can encourage online engagement with popular TV and radio content we are giving audiences a reason to get connected, and once they are online then they are in a position to engage with other services

Fortunately this view is not widespread, and the rest of the Listen Online Engagement study acknowledges that the world has changed, noting that “fan cultures, as the independent development of the Facebook site attests, have their own modalities and conventions, and cannot be predicted or indeed controlled.”

This is an important point. In the digital/network world the model of media as one-way communication of a message or some content to a receptive audience is no longer workable. It was never a complete description of what was happening, and work from McLuhan onwards recognises this. Newtonian mechanics was sufficient to support three centuries worth of engineering and astronomy but was eventually replaced by relativity because it could not cope with the very small scale, and now the ‘billiard ball’ model of audiences, which treats audience members as solid objects that have to be hit hard with a sitcom or drama in order to get them to move, has outlived its usefulness.

Sharing the Word

Any strategy for encouraging engagement with BBC content in ways that will also enhance digital inclusion must take account of the impact of online engagement that can occur when content is made available over digital distribution networks. Supporting this engagement will require flexible licensing of content, a willingness to allow fan communities to emerge even when they use material in ways that might be considered infringing, and an ability to host communities within BBC services without trying to control or manage those communities.

This transition may well be a difficult one for the Corporation which has historically been identified with Reithian values or as the nation’s ‘Auntie’, and there are likely to be instances where the old and new models come into conflict. The difficulties involved can be seen in the outcome of the BBC Creative Archive Project (www.bbc.co.uk/creativearchive/) which ended in 2006 after raising many people’s hopes that it marked a permanent shift in the BBC’s approach to making old content available for reuse. The signs are that the baton has been passed to the new BBC Archive team who are currently developing their strategy.

It is also important to ensure that other players can benefit from the BBC’s growing expertise and understanding. The widespread dissemination of the outcomes of the KEP research is a vital part of this, but it needs to go further. In particular, as the BBC integrates the research findings into its production processes and strategic thinking, those changes need to be communicated to other broadcasters and media companies, whether or not they are perceived to be rivals for audience share or online communities.

Other broadcasters will obviously be interested to see how the BBC

manages online communities, exploits its archive and engages with older and younger members of the community, but any information provided cannot be limited to other media players and those who see themselves as rivals for TV/radio



audiences or public service funding. The whole range of engaged authors in the digital age, including YouTube publishers, bloggers and the rest must also be included in the conversations. Doing this poses a serious challenge, since it is important that the BBC does it effectively and efficiently even though it will - as it must - decrease the Corporation’s audiences, reach and influence over time and may even make it harder to justify current levels of public expenditure.

The internet is one of the most powerful agents of creative destruction that we have ever invented, and its impact is being felt in all areas of the economy and the wider society, here in the UK and around the world. As we understand more about how the network can be used to promote the BBC’s public purposes – and the KEP research is part of that process - we are also beginning to appreciate how doing that undermines the relevance and reach of the content it currently offers on television and radio. The BBC has a duty to be inclusive. It clearly realizes this – hence the recent appointment of Seetha Kumar as its Online Access Champion. But it is somewhat ironic that the emergence of the internet has turned the Corporation’s duty to make what it produces available to all who might benefit from it into a duty to hasten the emergence of a digital society in which the very things that it does so well are less significant.

Why Inclusion Matters to the BBC

Digital inclusion is clearly important for government at all levels, since it is only through having online citizens that the work of transforming public services, with consequent improvements in efficiency and much-desired cost savings, can be achieved. (Indeed, in the Digital Britain report, the Government announced that Martha Lane Fox was its new champion for Digital Inclusion). It is also important for the BBC, both because it is a logical development of the Corporation’s historic role as a provider of radio and television to the UK as a whole and because the Charter explicitly requires it. The Charter obliges the BBC to promote its public purposes through: “the provision of output which consists of information, education and entertainment, supplied by means of television, radio and online services and similar or related services which make output generally available.”

These services are not just restricted to those who pay the licence fee, either, since Clause 57 states that: “In this Charter, a reference to a “li-

cence fee payer” is not to be taken literally but includes, not only a person to whom a TV licence is issued under section 364 of the Communications Act 2003, but also (so far as is sensible in the context) any other person in the UK who watches, listens to or uses any BBC service, or may do so or wish to do so in the future.” The BBC is therefore forced to engage in a world that is rapidly moving online and heading away from the old media model of linear scheduled broadcasts of audio and video content to one of interactive, conversational media available on any device at any time, and to do so in a way that does not leave anybody behind.

Unlike commercial broadcasters who may decide that certain segments of the market are simply unattractive, or online service providers who can tell government that cabling up rural areas is too expensive, the BBC must make effort to provide a service for all want it or may want it in future.

Bill Thompson

KEP – THE VIEW FROM THE BBC AND THE AHRC



In the context of the BBC's current partnerships agenda, the AHRC/BBC Pilot Knowledge Exchange Programme now looks very prescient. It started life back in 2005, as a series of conversations between BBC Future Media and Technology staff and arts and humanities academics, conversations that eventually grew into something more serious. Whilst there is a history of BBC Research & Development working with academics from the technology research community, this is the first time the organisation has put in place a formal collaboration agreement to work with arts and humanities academics.

Four years on, those early conversations have led to a series of collaborative research studies now in the public domain, a nascent online knowledge exchange network between academia and the BBC, and a host of 'best practice' lessons on what to do/what not to do when planning a partnership like this. In fact, we think we now have an exemplar model of how a large public service cultural institution can work to best effect with the academic community.

That's not to say there isn't more to be done – the legal framework for engaging with universities being probably the most pressing area to address. But overall the KEP has delivered fantastic results. It has generated recommendations that are already influencing content, services and policy within the BBC, along with academic papers and conferences based on unprecedented access to BBC content and resources. Most importantly, it's laid the foundations on which to build new models of collaboration with academia to even greater effect.

This pilot programme has shown that deep level academic research which analyses public service content and explores how people want to consume and engage with it is key to unlocking the full business potential of digital content experiences. This research has the potential to reshape how we deliver future content, in ways we can all be a part of.

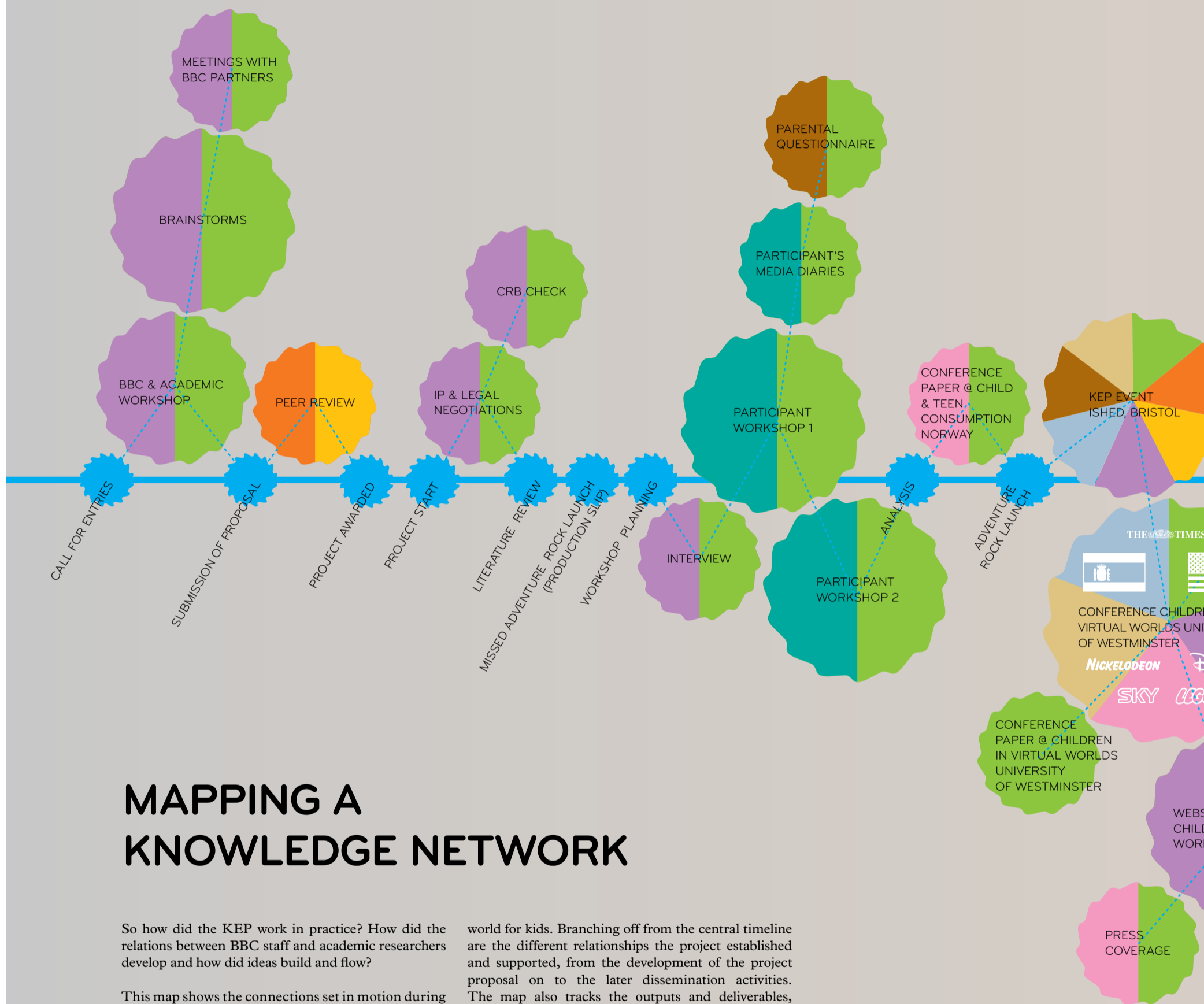
Knowledge transfer is central to the innovation process – our economy relies on the creation of cultural capital through the generation and exploitation of knowledge – and the AHRC has knowledge transfer in its DNA. The breadth of expertise in an academic community that encompasses the entirety of the arts and humanities, from physical theatre and public law to publishing, is tremendous and already contributes hugely to the wealth of our nation. It is vital and urgent, however, that opportunities to realise the potential of this community to make a real difference beyond academia are discovered, developed and delivered.

We hope that this KEP will act as a springboard for the AHRC and BBC Research & Development in their work to remain at the cutting edge of the collaboration and innovation agendas. This relies on our stakeholders being made aware of the programme and its successes. Our hope is that this paper will encourage them to sit up and take notice.

Rowena Goldman, Strategic Partnerships,
BBC Research and Development

Jo Pollock, AHRC Knowledge Transfer Programme
Manager

The AHRC/BBC Pilot Knowledge Exchange Programme: www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Pages/KnowledgeExchangeProgramme.aspx



MAPPING A KNOWLEDGE NETWORK

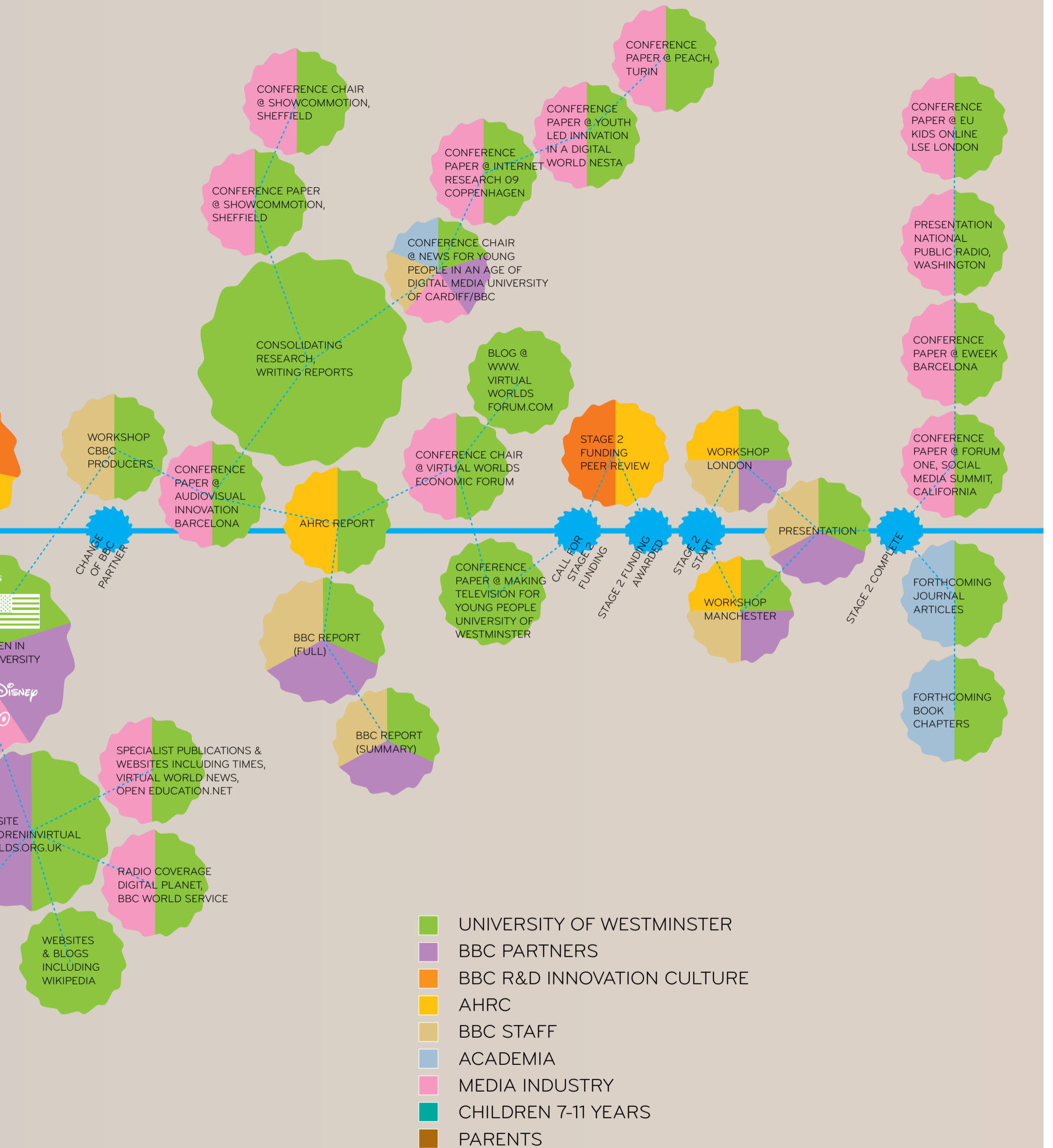
So how did the KEP work in practice? How did the relations between BBC staff and academic researchers develop and how did ideas build and flow?

This map shows the connections set in motion during one KEP study, **'Virtual Worlds: An overview and study of BBC Children's Adventure Rock'**. It expands on an initial concept developed with the BBC by the design agency Radarstation and seeks to translate the innovative but necessarily scattered activity of a truly collaborative, multi-disciplinary project into a format that makes sense. Taking its cue from the KEP itself, it blurs a few boundaries and mixes things up a bit. Think of it as part timeline, part mechanical diagram.

From left to right, it shows the different stages of the collaboration (over two years or so) between University of Westminster academics and the production team working on *Adventure Rock*, BBC Children's virtual

world for kids. Branching off from the central timeline are the different relationships the project established and supported, from the development of the project proposal on to the later dissemination activities. The map also tracks the outputs and deliverables, attempting to bring some kind of quantifiable sense of worth to what can be a rather nebulous concept – that of the value of building relationships.

According to BBC R&D's Brendan Crowther, the toughest aspects of working on collaborative Knowledge Exchange are tracking the people and organisations involved and establishing where the findings are deployed. During the period they were active the eight projects funded by the KEP built up a staggering number of relationships and touch points. Perhaps now we've got this map, people working on collaborative projects in the future will at least have a rough idea of where their journeys might take them and who they might meet on the way.



For any modern parent, it's a familiar scene. You stand over your children's shoulders, however covertly, watching as their nimble fingers flutter over the keyboards, nunchucks and touch pads of their digital devices. An Arsenal-themed Powerpoint sits under three separate browser windows – one for chat, one for music sharing, one for Bebo or Facebook.

Someone's sending links of pics for the Powerpoint; fingers flutter back a rebuke, adding their own snippet of information-plus-emoticon. (The mobile intrudes regularly into the exchange, an angry buzzing fly trapped in a tin). And like some kind of domestic water-feature, the sports or cartoon channel shimmers, murmurs or explodes at the other end of the room, the tv merely an ambient input – or waiting to be turned into the full spectacle of a console game.

Yet strip out the flashy and mutable interfaces of these technologies, bracket off the sheer plenitude of material available to the digital child, and what kind of behaviour do we have here? Nothing too far, I'd suggest, from the classic moment of play – that developmental scene present in most human societies that have achieved some distance beyond scarcity or sheer survival, and can thus provide a surplus of toys and materials for their irrepressibly ludic young ones.

Despite the hi-tech means, collages are still being made here, songs are still being sung and learned, teasing and hazing is still being conducted (across the input boxes), intensely imagined worlds of heroism and camaraderie are still being constructed and explored (frame by frame, level by level).

It's not that our children aren't 'digital natives', whose amateur (i.e. passion-driven) literacy and facility with ICT presents such a challenge to less hyper-mediated educators, broadcasters and parents. It's more that play, in the very way it constitutes our basic, complex-mammalian humanity, has itself always been digital – if by 'digital' one means the ability to compose and recompose culture and experience, with absolute combinatorial freedom, using abstractly redefined elements and materials.

The evolutionary urge and animus of play is to serve what the great play scholar Brian Sutton-Smith calls "adaptive potentiation". The very principle of variation that play seems to stand for – all those ways of 'taking reality lightly' that stretch from the crudest jokes to the most elaborate glass-bead games, from dressing-up to situationist art – functions to aid human survival and flourishing.

Our play moments generate hypotheses and possibilities, rehearsing us for the complex business of getting along with other complex, linguistic and self-conscious human animals. But play also deliv-

ers an emotional payoff, primarily optimism and hopefulness. We get a surge of positive, coping feelings from the games we construct, enlist others to, and try to succeed at ourselves. We are energised by the simulations we build by ourselves and with others to address some deficiency, or mitigate some challenge, in the real world. This child-like, but not necessarily childish indefatigability (or "neoteny", as the academics have it) is a particularly essential survival trait.

If this is the deep meaning of play in human socio-biology, then what be-



PARENTING THE PLAY-KIDS?

The net is one big playground for kids, a space where they can productively fool around with ideas, identity and media. But should Auntie join in? What can the BBC do for the Playful Generation?

comes particularly powerful about our digital platforms and technologies is that they actually match, map and mimic the essential variability of play to an unprecedented degree. These children may be such 'digital natives' because they might well be the first generation of humans whose 'playful nature' has been given such powerful and appropriate tools of virtualisation, recombination and communication. Their phantasmagorias of play can now be made into robust worlds and environments, in which the playmates are numerous and global, and the experience can be as physical (e.g. the Wii console) as it is pixellated.

This will certainly be a generation of children who expect to manage their company's inventories via game consoles, or do their five-way business meetings via smart mobile phones. But their natural embrace of networks-and-digitality may have deeper, perceptual consequences. As the futurist and programmer Marc Pesce said in *The Playful World* a few years ago:

"Our children will have a different view of the "interior" nature of the world, seeing it as potentially vital, intelligent, and infinitely transformable. The 'dead' world of objects

when faced with the Playful Generation is an incessantly thorny question. The BBC's challenge – as a public service media organisation with a remit to maintain certain standards of content quality, inclusiveness and educational value, its operations funded by compelled state subscription than by consumer choice – is particularly spiky.

There are two particular challenges for the BBC as a 'state' entity. One is the fact that so many of these interactive platforms derive their vigour from the commons of the web – itself a well-constituted 'play-space'

reaches of this interactive technium. As the veteran web guru Kevin Kelly wrote recently in *Wired* magazine, noting the unstoppable culture of collective play and free sharing of web 2.0, "when masses of people who own the means of production work toward a common goal and share their products in common, when they contribute labour without wages and enjoy the fruits free of charge, it's not unreasonable to call that socialism." If the internet in its social mode is indeed tending towards restoring the reputation of collective action, the effect this is having on the rest of the media landscape is profound. For so many private media industries on the web, from news to music and movies, there is a battle royale on to establish the very basis of commerce. It's a battle between immaterial products dropping to zero cost because of digital ubiquity, and intellectual copyright lawyers desperately trying to re-license the almost un-licensable.

Meanwhile the BBC's digital platform occupies a curious space in this landscape. As a public service it's able and willing to serve the 'commons' values of the Web, in terms of its commitment to online news and services, and user-friendly content initiatives like iPlayer. The success of the fit between the web and the Beeb causes some consternation among UK commercial web enterprises (the arrival of Channel Four's 4iP fund for public service new media hardly improves their mood). But it's not inconceivable that the next wave of development of interactive culture in the UK might happen on a more stakeholder-like model, with public and private investment and planning, instead of the venture-capitalised, 'build-it-up-and-sell-it-off' buyout model of Silicon Valley.

So what public service role might the BBC perform in the emergent tumult of interactive culture? It might be to bring some kind of institutional or infrastructural gravity to an otherwise weightless, Darwinian whirlwind of applications and ventures. Perhaps, when faced with a legion of young players, it might be useful for BBC policy makers to return to some of the deeper play paradigms for guidance.

The ethology of play – its role in animal behaviour – tells us that play happens in conditions of relative surplus, and relative safety. The lion-cubs fight and chase, groom and explore – in short, pursue their adaptive potentialities – in an area which is usually delimited and overseen, even at a distance, by parents. Play also usually happens as an expiation of surplus energy, which builds up as a result of adequate nutrition and standards of health in the animal.

To what extent might the BBC, in the new media landscape, perform this distant paternal role? Not the 'paternalism' of old, but the parent as a guarantor of the robust secu-

before intelligence and interactivity will not exist for them, and, as they grow to adulthood, they will likely demand that the world remain as pliable as they remember from their youngest days."

A generation demanding that their material and social world remain as pliable, as infusable with imagination and desire, as their childhoods: is this a step-change to be welcomed or feared? It seems, at least, to be a possibility we should be prepared for.

Yet how organisations, institutions and infrastructures should change

that grounds and supports a multitude of initiatives and enterprises, yet which is governed neither by state nor market. And secondly, it's a commercial and enterprise culture that almost entirely propels the development of the interactive experiences that young people are embracing so avidly. When Anglo-American children reach for their messaging, gaming, or blogging software, they naturally find it in civil or market society – and not with the state, however 'enabling'.

There are many questions, of course, about exactly how viable the commercial models are for vast

rity of the 'ground of play'? By both nurturing the capacities and health of digital players, and also providing tools and platforms (or even cleared savannah!) for their play, the BBC could find its secure footing in the interactive society.

From reading some of the AHRC/BBC Knowledge Exchange Programme essays, one can see the BBC's role as the 'distant parent of the play generation' already being realised. We have to recognise at the start here that the BBC has had a long history of thinking developmentally and educationally about its television programming, from idiosyncratic approaches like the late (and sorely lamented) Oliver Postgate to the work of Anne Wood, with shows (like *Teletubbies* and *In The Night Garden*) informed by cutting-edge research in child psychology.

It's fascinating to read children's assessments of the utility of the classic BBC news programme *Newsround* in the KEP study "What Do Children Want from the BBC? Children's Content and Participatory Environments in an Age of Citizen Media". The researchers are right to carefully draw out the already existing models of citizenship that lie in the minds of the show's target audience, the 7-11 age-group – the need to "know what's going on in the world". (If I can make a personal note here: very often my youngest daughter would make a clear declaration that "*Newsround* was the best show ever", precisely because its editorial agenda gave her a sense of mastery over a world of news.)

They are also right to pick up the demand from the children themselves that *Newsround* could open

itself up more to the possibilities of news creation, audio/visual/textual, that lie within the hands of the play generation themselves – literally, these days, as the mobile phone adds ever more multimedia functionality. As the technology editor of BBC Online News Darren Waters said at a recent conference on Twitter and real-time media, the BBC is evolving its own strategies on 'citizen journalism' – finding ways to establish protocols on monitoring and verifying content that comes in from outside the corporation.

Perhaps one constituency they could easily involve in forming these strategies are the budding 'citizen journalists' of a children's news audience. And, as the Children and the BBC study points out, the BBC also needs to begin to embrace a distinctively teenage audience, somewhat lost in the gulf between *Newsround* and the often punishing, baffling or tedious agenda of adult news. Indeed, in terms of the emotional intensities that shape much perception of daily reality in childhood and teenagehood, there might be much to be learned from applying social media tools to the experience of children's news.

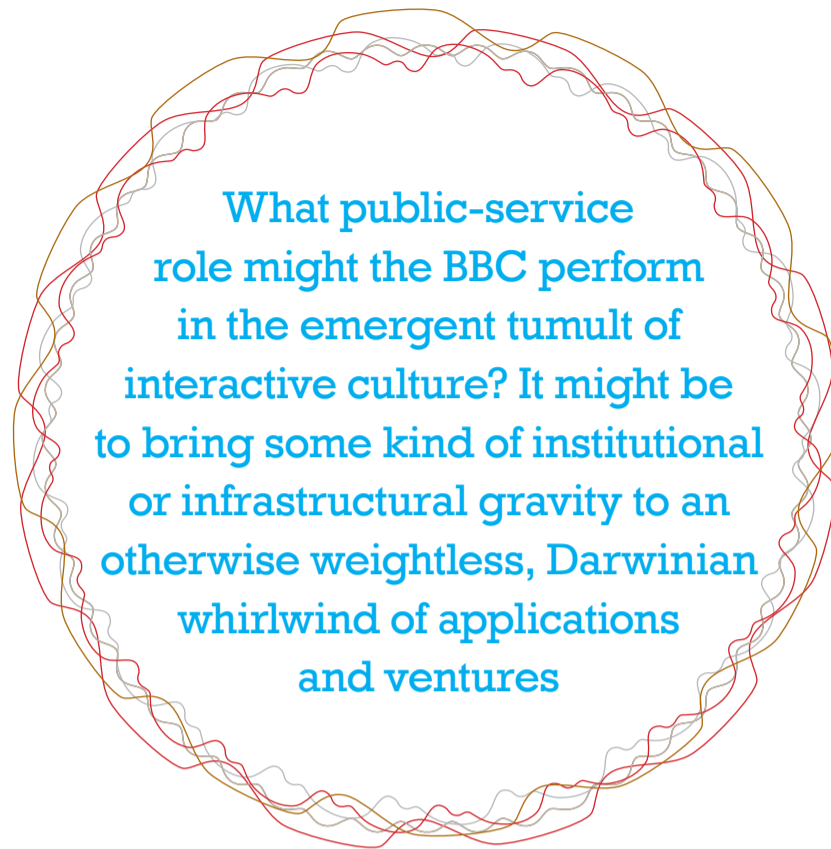
As the media analyst Clay Shirky said recently, these playful communications platforms do lend themselves to waves of mass emotion driving awareness of news facts – positive in the light of something like the Obama campaign and its harnessing of national idealism, negative in the way that the swine flu epidemic creates waves of panic on platforms like Twitter. Is this a real awareness building and critical media literacy opportunity for the BBC and young audiences – perhaps 'playing' with the idea of social media frenzies, do-

ing a 'Memewatch' and subjecting them to critical analysis? Channel Four have provided a lead in this area with their multimedia show for activist kids, *Battlefront* (www.battlefront.co.uk), which mixes media criticism with advocacy of issues, all of its content very much driven and created by the users/viewers.

Yet I was delighted (and not at all surprised) to notice from the paper that the news topic valued by all children over all others, by a very clear points lead, was – sports! Again, as a play-ethicist, I would want to stress that the play moment for 21st century kids – however 'networked-individualist' they are – will still be rooted in some of the psychological constants of development. In short, their whole bodies, as well as their minds, need excitement, exertion, testing, and basically throwing about in these growing years – and it's no surprise to see that sporting activity, our most esteemed physical play form, is what kids most want to watch from their news show. For them, physical bliss, self-possession and change is always big news.

To the Corporation's credit, it seems to realise (without much forethought) that developing the capacity of young players is a multi-sensorial, multi-disciplinary affair – an event in real time and space, involving bodies, percepts and affects, and not just something which can be exhausted in a platform, interface or gamespace. The paper "Alone Together: Social Learning and Blast" is a detailed assessment of the impact of the BBC's Blast project, an extremely well-meaning initiative that aims to nurture and encourage the performing and creative talents of the BBC's young viewership.

It's not as if the BBC hasn't seeded the environment with playful and powerful technological riches before: remember the BBC Micro?



What public-service role might the BBC perform in the emergent tumult of interactive culture? It might be to bring some kind of institutional or infrastructural gravity to an otherwise weightless, Darwinian whirlwind of applications and ventures

Yet there are some fascinating tensions revealed by the report, mostly around the lack of integration between the live Blast road shows (3-4 day events where classes and competitions around all kinds of media skills and art forms are stages) and the online community - which to some extent fuels participation in, and archives the results from, those shows.

Clearly, in a wider online environment which hardly lacks in opportunities for upload of material which is then shared with peers, the Blast site itself somewhat palls in comparison with the rude, anarchic vigour of Bebo, Facebook, MySpace or YouTube. The children and teenagers themselves seem to recognise that posting such material to a BBC site implies a kind of cultural approval or status above and beyond the usual social-networked melee - and in the message boards, seem to seek out the expert "mentors" that respond to their work.

But in a media environment where voracious meritocratic talent shows command mass audiences (and mass hysteria) on one side, and hundreds of millions of iterators and mediators decide to upload their content for whatever audience they can find or amass on the other, BBC Blast sits quite curiously - part arts college, part community centre, with little of the user-generated content prioritised or thematised either by the site's managers or its peers.

It's instructive to compare the Blast site to something like the Ning social-network platform. Ning gives users

The nature of virtual worlds means that the audience ceases to be 'out there', external to the BBC

Pg 8 Virtual Worlds: An overview and study of BBC Children's Adventure Rock

the chance to build their own powerful and media-rich website, with copious opportunities for members to initiate groups and forums, all of these easily embeddable with audio-visual content from inside and outside each Ning network. Many of these sites have been able to support quite easily the kind of "pedagogical" role and function that Blast aspires to. Yet the pedagogy is formulated by a pretty equal combination between the site instigators and the users themselves, seeking out from each other (and from wider sources around the web) what they need to improve their craft, practice or fan obsession.

To return to our central image: should the BBC be 'playmate' with this emergent, often wild play of community formation - that is, join the civic/market space of facilitatory social tools, and let the carnival commence? Or should it be 'parent' to a different kind of play - more developmental, more focussed on 'professionally-derived' techniques ('how to make a radio item', 'hip-hop Shakespeare', etc), on guiding people to a 'creative career' (that'll be career as in a crazed stagger, no doubt...)

There is clearly a civic demand for authoritative craft and expertise online, with quite a few successful peer-to-peer public learning networks. Instructibles (www.instructibles.com) gives anyone the chance to show others their techniques in craft, repair or modification: Now Play It (www.nowplayit.com) does the same for music, using big-name stars; School of Everything (www.schoolofeverything.com) aims to be an E-Bay for informal learning, bringing enthusiastic learners and teachers together to trade and share. Not to mention the vast archive of instrumental tuition and virtuosity that amateur and professional performers freely and happily upload to YouTube and other video platforms.

I wonder whether this report also shows that Blast Online should be more about what the media theorist Simon Yuill calls "distributive practice". Should Blast be a repository and conservatory for transmitting good technique, in as many art forms, and to whatever enabling depth of complexity, as is requested? This would make it much more than a "me-too" of existing user-generated content platforms.

The difficulty, but also the exciting possibilities, of situating the BBC in the contemporary matrix of play culture is only made more acute by the paper on "Virtual Worlds: An overview and study of BBC Children's *Adventure Rock*". This is an excellent reflection on the strategic challenges of creating an immersive, 3D online gamespace for 7-12 year olds. The authors and game-makers seem well aware of the developmental possibilities of virtual worlds for children - in terms of an active relationship to media, an experience of agency and world-creation, the rehearsal of responsibility for others, etc. Their sagacity is reminiscent of *The Sims*' creator Will Wright's observation that all his games have been inspired by Maria Montessori's theory of toy-play as the most powerful educational tool.

It's certainly understandable, as the Virtual Worlds study says, that the

A symbiotic relationship between news production and active citizenship is widely regarded as central to the health of democratic societies. Do news organisations in the UK view children as citizens or, at the very least, as 'citizens in the making'?

Pg 40 What Do Children Want from the BBC? Children's Content and Participatory Environments in an Age of Citizen Media

BBC needs to "keep up" with commercial immersive virtual worlds (*World of Warcraft*, *Lego Universe*, etc) in order to maintain audience share in the future. Though this might sound strange coming from a play advocate, I wonder whether the BBC should get too deeply involved in the hugely capital-intensive enterprise of creating massive multi-player online worlds, at least with the same ambitions for richness and graphical excellence as commercial rivals. (And one should always remember just how "non-commercial" some of the core investments are in these "synthetic worlds", to use the American economist Edward Castronova's term. By which I mean the heavy investment in gaming platforms by both military establishments in the US, and state-totalitarian sources in China).

Perhaps looking towards a "distributive practice" of game culture might be more in tune with the Corporation's ends, if you accept the framing of the BBC as "parent of play". For example, the subculture of machinima - that is, modding and hacking game engines to enable stories to be told - seems to me to be crying out for the kind of TV broadcast/online-platform integration that the BBC managed with the *Bamzooki* virtual-bot game shows. Simon Yuill's main project is to create what he calls a 'social versioning system' for game-creation. In this, local communities are given both the tools to create virtual worlds, and encourage to reflect on the social, economic and ethical rules they embed into those worlds. This strikes me as a classic developmental template for the BBC to explore with its audiences. It's not as if the BBC hasn't seeded the environment with playful and powerful technological riches before: remember the BBC Micro?

The BBC's overall relationship with a now mainstreamed culture of dig-

ital play - always driven by young and teenage audiences but now, of course, including the 'greystation' generation of older gamers - is a crucial matter for the Corporation's continuing legitimacy as a public-service media organisation. From my own multi-disciplinary perspective of the role of play in human flourishing, I'm arguing that the BBC should adopt and develop the stance of an enriching, nurturing "parent of play", rather than an eager and heedless co-player.

There are plenty of other beasts, both sleek and rough, in the digital jungle - whether cavorting on the commons, or at battle in the marketplace. In these varied terrains, many enterprises can pursue their "adaptive potentiations" to their hearts' content - all of which diversity and change brings energy and incessant change to our now dominant play culture. But beneath the tumult, there are deeper, socio-biological contours of play in human nature: the need for a platform of stability and resource upon which all the enriching experiments of play behaviour can flourish. For me, this is a great opportunity for the BBC - but to grasp the moment, I believe it must develop its own, public service version of a play ethic. By which I mean an ethos that justifies defending, sustaining and supporting the 'ground of play' as a crucial moment of human development. We know the one that's encoded into the very DNA of that famous nubby-brick manufacturer: lego. Which means: to play well. What might the BBC's version of that be?

Children and young people see themselves as citizens and want to play a more active role in the public sphere.

Pg 29 What Do Children Want from the BBC? Children's Content and Participatory Environments in an Age of Citizen Media

5 KATHRYN CORRICK

BEYOND PERSONALISATION

Audiences online now expect to do a lot. Interactivity is not just about time shifting and personalising any more. It's about participation, remixing, collaborating. How can the BBC engage the new active audience in relationships that work for everyone?

On the 16th June this year, the government's official Digital Britain report was launched. Its conclusions sparked debate and discussion and will no doubt continue to be picked over in the future. Many early readers criticised the report for fence sitting, for not going far enough or thinking radically about the future. However, in one respect, the Digital Britain report is a sign of how much business as usual is being changed by interactive media technologies.

Flick through the report and on page 10, you'll find a description of the Digital Britain unconfereces. There are further references on pages 225 and 226, describing the contributions from the unconfereces that made it into the final document. Indeed, Lord Carter actually attended a report follow-up unconferece in Birmingham on 17th June and joined in the discussions taking place.

Much of what does appear in the Digital Britain report comes via the usual official channels, the usual government and business suits. But the unconfereces represent a new kind of contribution. So what is an unconferece?

The working definition that's developed over the last few years is that it's a participant-driven event centred on a theme, problem or purpose. Some have suggested that it does for event participation what the Web 2.0 did for the net. The idea is to create conferences that develop and evolve in response to contributions from the participants. Agendas and schedules aren't set up beforehand. They emerge as participants get involved. Ideally,

there's no audience at an unconferece, just lots of participants.

On Page 8 of this newspaper, Bill Thompson talks about how he fired off a frustrated tweet about the level of discussion at the Digital Britain Summit, a rather more conventional sort of conference involving the great, the good and Gordon Brown, which took place in April this year. Bill suggested doing an unconferece instead. That initial tweet bore fruit in hours, rather than days. It resonated with many people who were following the Digital Britain summit online and carrying on a real time conversation about it via Twitter – coordinating contributions by using the hashtag #digitalbritain. And it led to several weeks of frantic activity as people around the UK organised Digital Britain unconfereces, generating ideas that eventually found their way into the final report.

It's worth looking more closely at how these events were organised. They're a great example for organisations that want to think about how best to work with a newly active audience. Once people had declared a desire to get involved, a Yahoo Group was quickly set up to co-ordinate efforts and link initial volunteers together. The result: the idea of a set of UK-wide, volunteer-organised events with the aim of producing an alternative report that was as widely representative as possible but also offered positive, realistic contributions for the final Digital Britain report. It would also extend the work of Joss Swin and Paul Johnston of WriteToReply.com with their commentable version of the Interim Report and 'Fake Digital Britain Report'.

A week after the Summit - and with a nod from the Digital Britain team that they were listening - a website was launched (digitalbritainunconference.wordpress.com) with these simple instructions: "Anyone can attend or hold an event and associate it with Digital Britain Unconfereces, you'll just need to summarise your discussions and hold it by 13th May 2009! Yes, time is very tight."

By the 13th May, twelve unconfereces had taken place from Glasgow to Truro in the South West. All attendees were encouraged to read the Interim Report and the level of engagement and serious thinking across each event was exemplary - subjects covered went from next generation broadband and digital inclusion through to issues of rights, opportunities for building billionaire businesses and an Uploaders Manifesto. The events included a virtual discussion focusing on rural issues related to Digital Britain and a family unconferece held in Tutbury, Derbyshire, as well as large events of over 50 people in London and Manchester. Meanwhile the tweets and use of the hashtags kept the conversation alive and everyone up to date.

The results of each event were compiled into one document, edited and summarised by a volunteer team of four editors. The unconferece report was duly sent to (and warmly received by) the Digital Britain team on 26th May - just over six weeks after the original idea was hatched. A few days later it was also put online and those involved with and supportive of the conclusions were encouraged to add their name as a signatory.

It should be noted that most of those involved have never met and very few of them know each other; each event was organised locally. Such a speedy reaction and strong collaboration under similar circumstances would have been impossible even a few years ago. Now it's relatively easy to make happen, thanks to the real-time connections of microblogging and a collection of freely available, easy to use utilities and social media services such as WordPress, wikidot, Eventbrite (an event organising and ticketing service), Yahoo Groups, UStream (a few of the events were video

streamed), Huddle, Flickr, Scribd, Facebook and more.

As one of the unconferece report editors, Alastair Duncan (former CEO of MRM Worldwide from 2004- 2008) commented: "This is not an example of 'citizen journalism'. Nor is it just 'user generated content'. It is a solid and co-ordinated effort by a considerable number of smart and committed people, living by the keystroke, connecting as individuals, with a concrete belief that Britain has to be a successful and leading country in all aspects of the digital world."

In *Here Comes Everybody*, his best-selling examination of new online group-forming tools and their effects on society, the American new media academic Clay Shirky argues that "when we change the way we communicate, we change society." It's a big claim. But the unconferece story shows that the web really can act as a new lever or catalyst for communication and collaboration in the real and virtual world. In this particular instance, it helped strengthen participation and citizenship within the democratic process - one of the key BBC public purposes.

The collaboration represented by the Digital Britain unconfereces represent the highest levels of user activity online. More importantly, for the BBC, it also shows how adults can work together, moderate themselves and work with an organisation to make something happen without being confrontational.

The AHRC/BBC KEP research studies show that the BBC is doing all it can to learn how to work with interactive technologies and the people formerly known as the audience. To be fair, over the last ten years, we've all been learning what interactivity really means. Initially, people focused on the idea of individual user control, of content on demand, of personalised schedules and time shifting. That's clearly important - look at the success of the iPlayer. But now interactivity has developed beyond personalisation to include the idea of participation, of co-creation and collaboration, involving professionals and audience in a potentially open-ended process.



Often when a website offers the opportunity to comment on an article, video, photo or other piece of media, it is not always made clear as to why and for whose gain this opportunity is being given - and whether the comment will be heard or in what context

“We are on the threshold of new forms of broadcasting and collective engagement in content generation and selective scheduling. Traditional models and orthodoxies, programming and gate-keeping roles are being re-defined, and as this study forcefully demonstrates, a new participant public is keen to engage with the BBC, not just as passive consumers but as active partners.”

Page 6 'The Miners' Strike: A Case Study in Regional Content'

The KEP studies look closely at how the BBC is changing its approach in response to interactive media technologies. They reflect the changes the Corporation is trying to make as it gets involved with its audience. The BBC is affectionately called Auntie but it's not without good reason. Online, some BBC message board users in particular feel that the approach taken is “Auntie knows best”. In the KEP study ‘Listener online engagement with BBC Radio programming,’ one user complains that “the moderators treat us like children!”

In contrast, those involved in the unconferences were able not only to have their say but know that, in doing so, they were part of a larger process leading towards a goal, and that their voice might not only be heard by their fellow unconference attendees but also by government, that their conversations might make a difference.

The important thing there was that technology was just an enabler, something that allowed people to create a collaborative community. The Listener Online Engagement study shows that, when it comes to specialist music fans, a similar sort of community develops around BBC content online. “The online activities were communal rather than individual; they were set within a virtual environment rather than determined in any simple way by technologies; and they involved cultural activities which were developments of, but distinct from off line fan activity. It is necessary, therefore, to place contemporary radio broadcasting in a wider context than seeing the internet as a new channel through which radio can be broadcast, or a new medium to promote those broadcasts.”

It is also worth pointing out the social capital gains in being involved in these kinds of activity online. These gains extend both within the virtual environment (increase in Twitter followers, links and comments to blog posts, personal mentions by others, becoming more well known within the ‘community’) as well as beyond

it. That's one reason for the BBC to encourage this kind of activity.

What's important from a BBC perspective, though, is to think through how the desire within individuals to increase their social capital can be utilised and to understand that any solution will not be universal across BBC services. Simple examples might include user moderation of message boards and allowing the rating of user comments by a simple “Like this” button (see Facebook as an example). The KEP study “A Public Voice: Access, Digital Story and Interactive Narrative” also reveals that, when taken to the level of story telling and media creation, users can also experience improved self-confidence, self-esteem, aspiration, and acquire new skills.

The KEP research also shows how much social capital a moderator or official BBC voice may have, when joining in the conversation online. It can have the power to either encourage further contributions or halt them, even if unintentionally. The KEP study ‘Alone Together? Social learning in BBC Blast’ shows that this was a particular problem for BBC Blast and offers useful advice. “Mentor expressions of preference carry more weight than the teenagers because they represent the adult expert voice. The mentors need to approach the message boards as a potential learning space, and need to be aware that their answers are not simply responses to a particular post. Instead they represent how to answer questions and offer criticism. They have the power to develop or prevent the discussion and encourage or dissuade users.”

Another useful lesson from the unconferences is that they happened because the Digital Britain team themselves said they were listening (via email to the organisers). They also gave channels via which they could be contacted and showed they valued the exchange by joining in the conversation, and responding encouragingly. Often when a website offers the opportunity to comment on an article, video, photo or other

piece of media, it's not always made clear why and for what and whose gain this opportunity is being given - and whether the comment will be heard or in what context.

The KEP study ‘ugc@thebbc: Understanding its impact upon contributors, non-contributors and BBC News’ has useful things to say about this area. Part of the problem, it suggests, is the catch-all phrase ‘user generated content’ itself, which doesn't describe all the possible nuances and types of content sent in. The study recommends instead that the phrase be replaced with ‘Audience Material.’

Allowing audiences to submit material to the BBC immediately says, “we're listening”, but without responding to every comment, it is not always easy to prove this. In addition, high volume causes all sorts of organisational headaches, from moderation to finding the newsworthy and usable photograph amongst the mountain of contributions. Quoted in the ugc@thebbc study, Peter Horrocks (editor, BBC Newsroom) notes: “The dilemma is that the insatiable resource requirement around just dealing with comments doesn't seem to me is generating enough, or will not in the future, generate enough extra value for the kind of effort that we need to put into it.” Peter Rippon (editor, Radio 4's *PM, iPM, World at One and Broadcasting House*) adds: “I don't think the BBC should be providing platforms for just noise which you can find anywhere on the Web anyway.”

But listening is important and can lead to many positive benefits, as the ugc@thebbc report points out elsewhere: “If it were not for these important spaces for debate, many news stories and the case studies and eyewitness accounts which accompanied them would never have been found.” One way forward is suggested in the ugc@thebbc study by Head of Editorial Development for Multimedia Peter Clifton, who talks about “actually focussing more on the real added value insight in User Generated Content”.

One example might be the use of real-time responses and the inclusion of the real-time layer of conversations that can now be experienced on services such as Facebook, Twitter and other microblogging services. It is now commonplace for mass open conversations to happen on Twitter whilst a TV programme is in progress. Many have suggested that media proliferation and interactivity has led to fragmentation and the end of national viewing experiences. Interestingly, perhaps we're seeing the rise of new kind of shared multimedia experience. Twitter is creating shared spaces simply through the use of hashtags.

Hang about on Twitter (circa 2.5 million users in the UK, roughly 7 percent of the internet users) when *The Apprentice*, *Britain's Got Talent* or even *Question Time* is on and you'll soon find many viewers are Twittering as well as watching. Users have designated programmes with their own hashtags (in the case of the programmes above #apprentice, #bgt, and #bbcqt). These can be used to search for comments within Twitter and so keep up with what others are saying virtually in real time, creating a very large chat room. For example:

@naois: anyone else shocked kate didn't win #apprentice was so sure she had it - implacable and yasminas chocs seemed vile

@helenthornber: Reviewed the tweeting from @GraemeWatson and I last night whilst watching the #apprentice & drinking the 2nd bottle of wine - funny!

This phenomenon happens with events, like the Digital Britain summit mentioned before, and was spotted by those within the BBC's Have Your Say and those running the news site and used to good affect during the June 2009 UK Council and EU elections. The BBC team integrated viewer tweets into a live update page, mixing in texts from viewers as well as official commentary and News 24 live video feed. This gave viewer comments context and added texture to the overall story being told, immediately extending the journey of the audience in both directions (to and from Twitter and the BBC). The presence of other material aggregated from across the BBC together with links to more content and visualisations created a rich audience experience, but also one that reflected audience views.

Such integrations of content only solve part of the jigsaw. Some lessons about how to create responsive structures can be drawn from the experiences of computer manufacturer Dell over the past few years. Back in 2005, Dell was in trouble when it came to customer service. New media pundit Jeff Jarvis famously described his personal 'Dell Hell' experiences (and Dell's lame initial response) on his blog, *Buzz-Machine* (returning to the subject in his recent book *What Would Google Do?*) But it was UK writer Charles Arthur that first observed in the

July of that year: "Want to complain on Dell's website about its customer service? Too late - the Customer Support Forums, operational until last Friday, have been shut down, apparently to try to quell bad publicity there about Dell products and especially after-care service."

A month later Jarvis, chipped in with an open letter to Michael Dell and Michael George, pointing out that when you lose a customer, you also potentially lose the custom of the customer's friends, due to wide spread use of [then] blogs and customer rate and review sites (an early form of user generated content). Dell took a while to respond. But a year later, they were trying to make up for lost ground, telling customers: "We're spending more than a \$100 million — and a lot of blood, sweat and tears of talented people — to fix this... In the coming days and weeks the people responsible for improving Dell customer service are going to join the conversation."

One response to improving customer service was IdeaStorm, launched in 2007. Customers can post business ideas, vote, promote or demote ideas and also see what ideas have been implemented by Dell through this process. Their aim was to build an online community that "brings all of us closer to the creative side of technology by allowing you to share ideas and collaborate with one another. The goal is for you, the customer, to tell Dell what new products or services you'd like to see Dell develop. We hope this site fosters a candid and robust conversation about your ideas."

To create this atmosphere of listening, Dell explains very explicitly how everything works, suggesting that the company expect and is prepared to listen to and what will be done in return. The process is made very clear and expectations are managed carefully. By the beginning of June 2009 (two years after launch) the Dell Community had contributed 11,789 ideas, promoted (or voted) for ideas 667,042 times and sent in 84,543 comments. In return Dell has implemented 337 ideas. Some of the implementations are quite small but some have been significant — such as the ideas to not eliminate the choice of XP as an operating system and to offer Ubuntu pre-installed as an alternative open source non-Microsoft operating system.

Good structures enable an efficient use of everyone's time and resources and also ensure that each contribution has value and can be filtered both by the organisation/company and the community or contributors itself. As the Listeners Online Engagement study notes: "Ultimately, in order for BBC Radio to best serve its listeners' requirements in terms of message board provision, it needs to first decide what its purpose is and how it understands and communicates its own interactivity — whether it aims to encourage interaction between users or between user and BBC. Features and tools

can then be modified to better reflect those goals."

This thought should be extended to all BBC online engagement activity. IdeaStorm works because there is a carefully crafted structure with a clear purpose that in turn focuses Dell's ability to listen and respond. The same structure won't work everywhere. The BBC needs to pay attention to specifics, to tailor its approach to the needs of different audiences using different services at different times. The KEP research is part of that process and is perhaps just the beginning of larger effort to look closely at what the audience is doing online and listen more effectively.

Beyond UGC – five types of audience material

The KEP study *ugc@thebbc* argues that we should use the term 'audience material' rather than 'ugc', which it refers to as a 'catch-all' that covers up the complexities of what happens when audiences interact with the media. The study goes on to suggest there are five main types of 'audience material':

1. Audience content - this includes audience footage, audience experiences and audience stories (i.e. tip-offs of stories not on the BBC news agenda)
2. Audience comments – that is, opinions shared in response to a call for action
3. Collaborative content – produced by the audience with support and sometimes training from BBC professionals
4. Networked journalism – professionals and amateurs working together to get a story
5. Non-news content – photos of the weather or wildlife

Ideas and conversations about BBC programmes are already happening across the BBC website and, as the Listener Online Engagement study shows, the level of trust in the BBC operating spaces such as the message boards is high — despite the 'Auntie knows best' feel. The passions that are shown by users of Dell computers are small in comparison to those held by BBC users such as *Archers* devotees and specialist music fans. The Digital Britain unconferences were a small example of what can happen when you get this right. Imagine what could happen if the BBC found the right way to channel the ideas and passions of its audience.

6 BRONAC FERRAN

MODEL BEHAVIOUR?

Many believe knowledge exchange networks will play an increasingly important role in innovation. Does the AHRC/BBC KEP establish some useful pointers for the future?

The idea of a partnership between the BBC and the Arts and Humanities Research Council was first suggested in 2005 by Matt Locke, then head of BBC Creative R&D. Even then it was clear that this kind of high profile partnership would offer enormous opportunities to both the BBC and academia and act as a flagship for emerging Knowledge Transfer strategies. Matt recalls that among his aims in establishing the partnership was the desire to speed up BBC research cycles, make research more accessible beyond the organisation and more iterative and responsive to shifting trends such as the move towards social media.

So four years on, how has the AHRC/BBC Knowledge Exchange Programme done? Has it delivered on Locke's original aims? Is it a valuable prototype for research-led innovation? Does it offer useful models, not just for the BBC, but for other organisations looking to build knowledge in a more open, responsive way?

The focus on social media now looks particularly far-sighted. Since the KEP was first discussed, platforms and services which allow us to communicate, share and critique have become part of everyday life: Google maps, the iPhone, Twitter, Flickr, Facebook, You Tube. Meanwhile services still in development such as Google Wave continue the relentless march of technological progress. Social media creates all sorts of challenges for traditional media organisations. In the words of Chinese blogger and social entrepreneur Isaac Mao: "The emergence of Social Applications that can communicate and cooperate, by allowing people to output content from one service to another, is letting users pump their memes into a pipeline-like ecosystem. This interconnectedness allows memes to travel along multiple online social networks and potentially reach a huge audience. As a result, such a micro-pipeline system is making Social Media a true alternative to broadcast culture. These new technologies are reviving Sharism in our closed culture."

In fact, in the last few years it's become clear that the 'media and technologies formerly known as new' have been combining, converging and occasionally colliding with established mainstream media, resulting in new platforms and applications. Services like BBC iPlayer and plans to 'remobilise' the archive as new content for a new context signal the Corporation's desire to stay ahead of the game. But nowadays such progress more often than not involves combining the human and the social with technological innovation. Success in social media often depends on the degree of insight by designers into human interfaces and social behaviours as well as the potential of new media technologies.

That's one place where the contribution of the KEP research is clear. The eight studies cover a wide range, touching on everything from the challenges of collected, connected and generative content and the combining of old or existing content to new contexts for display and distribution, design for user participation, the rethinking of ownership of public and private data and questions around identity, representation and responsibility in an era of collaborative networks. More importantly, by generating a programme that has supported the exchange of

knowledge, skills and methodologies between UK Arts and Humanities academics and BBC staff, while also involving 'the public' in diverse forms, the KEP has led to forms of action or practice-based research combined with invaluable reflection and interpretation.

In return for gaining unprecedented access to material and being able to participate in processes of debate and decision-making that are normally internal to the BBC, academics brought a capacity for critical reflection on contemporary trends, as well as methodologies for analysis and skills of interpretation. That said, the willingness of the BBC to let academics move in and root around their day-to-day activities was a risk and something I find particularly impressive, given the capacity of academic researchers to ask difficult questions. Whether all organisations would be brave enough to follow this approach is a matter for discussion.

Developing Synergy

One aspect of the KEP that worked well and should be applied elsewhere was the early identification of the priority research themes. That encouraged BBC departmental hosts to get involved and attracted high calibre academics. Rowena Goldman, who took the initiative forward within the corporation, says that identifying themes wasn't hard, given the "sheer depth of knowledge within academia. This knowledge had synergy with areas of interest in BBC Future Media and Technology: audience behaviour with regard to digital technology; the barriers and incentives to take-up of digital services; editorial challenges around user-generated content; the opportunities afforded by mobile devices; children/young people as early adopters and the whole gamut of how multimedia plays out in people's everyday lives."

Exploration of this notion of 'everyday lives' has produced some fascinating material for the BBC, particularly relating to the way it's attempting to redefine public service media. The KEP study 'A Public Voice - Access, Digital Story and Interactive Narrative' makes a strong case for re-thinking the nature of the knowledge presented via broadcast channels in a time of participatory media. It tells us that in academia as well as mainstream media, certain voices have been excluded - 'displaced from the coherent communication economy' - due to being too vernacular or plain; it recalls tales, songs, rhymes and sayings which are 'talk'd of, exchanged in conversation, expressed in discourse' and which were in pre-broadcast days 'the vehicles for the preservation and transmission of supernatural knowledge and imperfect history.' The report convincingly concludes that: 'according to a range of commentators, conversation is a buzz word for the future ethos of media,' adding that 'the appearance of digital narration allows for a greater audience, a reflection on the phenomenological world and the sharing of new and old knowledge. In this way there is everything new about it and nothing new about it'.

The idea of re-combining the old and new, connecting existing content with new platforms and new contexts, is also at the heart of the BBC's Archive and iPlayer initiatives. In his 2005 Reith Lectures, *The Tri-*

umph of Technology Lord Alec Broers pointed out that “most modern technologies are created by bringing together and developing capabilities which already exist. The genius lies in the way they are brought together and improved.” Taking his ideas on, perhaps we’re now living after the triumph of technology – where its importance has been acknowledged and we now have to work out how best to manage it, for public and private good.

Excavating Value

One KEP study that addresses this process of re-combination and re-contextualisation directly is ‘AHRC/BBC Open Archive Project - The Miners Strike: A Case Study in Regional Content’. It explores the 1984-85 Miners Strike, ‘remobilising’ existing broadcast material by means of various research-based techniques including focus groups with people involved in the strike and featured in some of the news reports. As 2009 is the 25th Anniversary of the strike, the report also takes a contemporary turn. Its findings raise important questions for the BBC about how it might allow future access to its previously broadcast material – particularly in terms of questions of ownership, representation, identity and responsibility. In the focus groups, ex-miners commented on their rights of access to BBC archive material depicting events during the strike: “History belongs to us all and if such items exist then everyone should have access to them. After all, we paid for it.” These views are strikingly similar to opinions expressed at the Edinburgh Television Festival in 2003 by former BBC Director General Greg Dyke: “It’s not really our content – the people of Britain have paid for it and our role should be to help them use it.”

The researchers on the project were also aware of the value of their partnership which crossed academic, broadcast and public spheres: “Through this research we can begin to understand what is important to communities about how they are represented in the archive. We can begin to understand the passions and sense of ownership the BBC audience has when engaging with what is essentially their archive. We are on the threshold of new forms of broadcasting and collective engagement in content generation and selective scheduling. Traditional models and orthodoxies, programming and gate-keeping roles are being re-defined and as this study forcefully demonstrates, a new participant public is keen to engage with the BBC not just as passive consumers, but as active partners.’

This project loops relevance from past into present, connecting with those who have been the subject of broadcast material dealing with socially challenging and politically significant events. It tackles unresolved issues about how national TV represents regional events and provides scope for a renegotiation of ownership and authenticity, opening up what the authors of the Public Voice study call “the space for recuperation,” something that can emerge through research which sensitively excavates layers of buried meaning. Again, this all has particular relevance for the BBC in its attempt to redefine its relationship with the public. But other organisations that want to use social media to build new relationships with their users would do well to look at this research.

The Borderline between Learning and Knowledge Exchange

Stepping back slightly, one of the key things the KEP research reveals – and something that could have interesting policy implications in the future – is the shifting terrain between ‘learning’ and ‘knowledge.’ The idea of knowledge as an emergent and collaborative process has become very current over the last four years, not least due to the nature of networked media, which encourages and facilitates distributed innovation. But how do institutions – such as media and academia – best adapt to and capitalise on such models of networked organisation? The KEP research is a useful prototype here, something that can contribute not just to new discussions in media organisations but also to debates about the future of teaching, learning and research in universities now.

One of the challenges that arose for participants in this programme, including the BBC and the AHRC itself, was the need for working methods that facilitated interaction between different fields.

The contracts between the BBC and the lead universities involved in each project were based on the Lambert Review Report guidelines for knowledge transfer between academia and industry. However, as many of the academics have pointed out, the nature of non-commercial research and the desire, on occasion, to use social software to disseminate findings meant that, in practice, the legal agreements were sometimes constrictive. The single most important lesson learnt from the programme may well be that the legal teams from both communities would do well to sit down and realign the goal posts for any future partnership model. However, the joint contract that the BBC and AHRC developed for the programme is still robust enough to have been used as a template by the AHRC in other Knowledge Transfer contexts.

There are many examples of mutual learning from the KEP that could be further utilised. Making the learning and knowledge accessible is a vital task, one which may require going beyond the lengthy and scholarly reports to help draw out key recommendations or insights. Lizzie Jackson, one of the ‘critical interface’ figures involved in the research (who during the period of the programme moved from a role at Future Media & Technology in the BBC to one at the University of Westminster) has recommended the introduction of training sessions and that resources could be made available to others at the BBC and academia drawing on the lessons of these unusual collaborations.

From Mass Observation to Mass Conversation

But what of the broader issues around this collaboration? As a public service broadcaster, the BBC’s responsibilities include transparency and accountability. There is a strong argument that the BBC has an obligation to share aspects of research co-funded with another public agency. The recent appointment of Sir Tim Berners-Lee, asked by Gordon Brown to help make UK public data transparent, interoperable and publicly accessible, reflects a growing policy trend towards openness. Jack Straw has recently suggested that organisations in receipt of public funding should be encouraged to publish data freely.

The AHRC/BBC Knowledge Exchange Programme – An 8 Step Plan

In the Beginning: It all started with a conversation between BBC Future Media & Technology and the Arts and Humanities Research Council to explore mutual benefits of knowledge exchange between BBC staff and arts and humanities academia.

Tell Me More: A series of jointly hosted Knowledge Exchange Summits was held between the two communities to bring everyone together and provide a catalyst for dialogue.

Heeding Advice: In consultation with the two communities, a paper was produced outlining possible scenarios for a formal partnership between the BBC and the AHRC.

Formalising the Relationship: One of the strongest recommendations was for a Pilot Funding Call for collaborative research projects. This resulted in the selection of 8 co-funded Knowledge Exchange Awards.

The Future of the Collaboration: To support and grow the community beyond the funding call, an online knowledge network was developed, beebac, where academics, industry practitioners and BBC staff could collaborate.

Drilling Deeper: At the end of the Knowledge Exchange Awards, five of the 8 projects were allocated additional Knowledge Infusion funding to enable further examination of the key findings and the production of usable concepts and prototypes.

Getting it Out There: An extensive programme of dissemination has been undertaken by the BBC and the AHRC, including the distribution of the project reports, press releases, exhibitions, conferences, presentations, learning lunches, seminars, book chapters and articles, a BBC Knowledge Exchange blog and this very publication.

Time for Reflection: The BBC and the AHRC are currently engaged in an extended period of evaluation and assessment to inform future models of collaboration between academia, industry, research councils and other publicly funded bodies.





This is a particularly strong argument where knowledge is generated through collaboration with the public. The methods of research employed by the KEP research teams support iterative feedback and reflection on BBC projects at beta-stage. There is a sense here of public experiment - building on models such as the famous Mass Observation projects in the 1930s, which sought to make 'an anthropology of ourselves' in another period of intense socio-political transition.

Whilst the BBC's concerns are of course primarily the delivery of high quality content, it is also an organisation that needs to adapt and explore ways to engage differently with its stakeholders and partners. The idea of being at least in part an open access laboratory and test bed for future media is something the BBC might seek to further encourage, building on current initiatives like Backstage. Apple's mixed ecology approach (opening up its platform for new iPhone applications which in turn benefit its sales) provides a good model for how to combine quality with innovation, standards with access.

Measuring Success

Professor John Ellis Chair of the British Film & Video University Council asked me recently, 'how do we create value from non-commercial activities?' That seems to go to the core of the question I'm exploring here.

If the knowledge generated by the KEP is emergent and relationship-based then it will continue to develop and accrue value over time - it doesn't stop with publishing reports. Knowledge is embodied and transferred through people. Through ongoing evaluation we can track this value over time in projects inside and outside the BBC. The results of arts and humanities research are often long-term and can only be fully appreciated through an appropriate lens. Media timescales are frequently speedier and swift application of knowledge can require the deployment of new techniques. The beautifully distilled and timely KEP study 'User-Generated Content: understanding its impact on contributors, non-contributors and the BBC' is doing just that via the placement on secondment of Dr Claire Wardle, within the BBC's English Regions team. While embedded there, she is sharing the insights in real life studio contexts. The success of this relatively cost-effective and light touch investment has been already acknowledged.

Similarly, two Arts Council England-funded placements a few years ago in the BBC's (then Creative) Archive allowed artists Vicky Bennett and Chris Dorley-Brown to spend six months within the BBC. Though low cost relative to the AHRC/BBC Knowledge Exchange projects, these achieved spectacularly successful results. In the same vein, as part of the Arts Council England/AHRC Art and Science Research Fellowships programme a few years ago, a social anthropologist took on the role of 'attached observer', charged with distilling and integrating knowledge across the different projects through network building and a final report that consolidated value and brought it to broader audiences. In addition, there must be room in future iterations of KEP to involve leading external agencies such as The Watershed in Bristol. These kinds of organisations have strong connections to the public, academia, technological research, artists, designers and media companies and can act as brokers and halfway houses, facilitating a different kind of knowledge sharing from the 'lab' to the public domain. This would extend the work at work of the KEP, taking it to another, more accessible level.



We can go further still. Britain (as the Digital Britain report has affirmed) is a place of extraordinary inventiveness and creativity. It has a high reputation for design research and development. With the right incentives, human and technological skills can be combined to advance our competitiveness. Building links across sectors to achieve collaborative R&D (between private and public sectors) is a prerequisite for this achievement in the game of world-leading innovation. Finding appropriately open mechanisms both to deliver and disseminate this engagement is a crucial step.

This KEP is a pilot programme that has started to move us along this track and developed important models and prototypes that can be built on in future. Finding other ways to stimulate collaborative exchange, experimentation and productive interaction - between and across BBC departments as well as with external researchers, perhaps from a broader group of disciplines (design, anthropology, software, hardware) is the next challenge. There is scope for other models of investment, other partnerships and for further extension of the critical lessons learned in this important pilot. The BBC's initiative in setting up this project before the full impact of social media had hit was visionary and far-sighted but the real value now lies in how fully it decides to develop those ideas. The BBC now has its prototypes. It just needs now to decide what it's going to do with them.

We're now living after the triumph of technology. Its importance has been acknowledged and we now have to work out how to best to manage it, for public and private good

KEP – A WHO'S WHO

This paper is one of the outputs from the AHRC/BBC Knowledge Exchange Programme led from within BBC R&D by Innovation Culture and at the AHRC by the Knowledge Transfer Team. Innovation Culture provides a central support resource for a wide range of BBC divisions, making it more effective to undertake collaborative work. The AHRC's Knowledge Transfer Team is charged with supporting bespoke KT schemes, working with the academic community to embed a culture of impact and KT. The KEP has a number of homes on the web where you can find out more or contribute. *beebac* is an online network for BBC staff, media practitioners and academics. It enables you to find people and projects

you want to be involved with, explore areas of mutual interest and exchange ideas and resources. Sign up to the beta trial of *beebac* at beebac.welcomebackstage.com. You can download all the KEP studies from the blog at: www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/knowledgeexchange. For more information on the KEP please contact the team:

rowena.goldman@bbc.co.uk
brendan.crowther@bbc.co.uk
adrian.woolard@bbc.co.uk
j.pollock@ahrc.ac.uk
s.amor@ahrc.ac.uk



WHAT DO CHILDREN WANT FROM THE BBC? CHILDREN'S CONTENT AND PARTICIPATORY ENVIRONMENTS IN AN AGE OF CITIZEN MEDIA

Dr Cynthia Carter – University of Cardiff:
cartercl@cardiff.ac.uk
 Prof. Maire Messenger Davies – University of Ulster:
m.messenger-davies@ulster.ac.uk
 Ian Prince – BBC World Service:
ian.prince@bbc.co.uk



INHIBITED EXPLORATION IN OLDER CUSTOMERS OF DIGITAL SERVICE

Professor Stephen Payne – University of Bath:
s.j.payne@bath.ac.uk
 Michael Evans – BBC Research & Development:
michael.evans@rd.bbc.co.uk



VIRTUAL WORLDS: AN OVERVIEW AND STUDY OF BBC CHILDREN'S ADVENTURE ROCK

Professor David Gauntlett – University of Westminster:
D.Gauntlett@westminster.ac.uk
 Lizzie Jackson – University of Westminster:
lizzie_jackson@hotmail.com
 Rachel Bardill – BBC Children's Interactive:
rachel.bardill@bbc.co.uk



ALONE TOGETHER? SOCIAL LEARNING IN BBC BLAST

Professor Angela McFarlane – University of Bristol:
A.McFarlane@kew.org
 Helen Thornham – London City University:
Helen.Thornham.1@city.ac.uk
 John Milner – BBC Learning Formal:
john.milner@bbc.co.uk



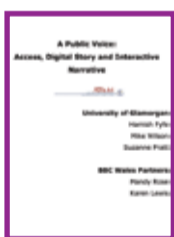
UGC@THEBBC: UNDERSTANDING ITS IMPACT UPON CONTRIBUTORS, NON-CONTRIBUTORS AND BBC NEWS

Dr Claire Wardle:
claire.wardle@bbc.co.uk
 Daniel Dodd - BBC English Nations & Regions Interactive:
daniel.dodd@bbc.co.uk



AHRC/BBC OPEN ARCHIVE PROJECT: THE MINERS' STRIKE: A CASE STUDY IN REGIONAL CONTENT

Simon Popple – University of Leeds:
S.E.Popple@leeds.ac.uk
 Helen Thomas – BBC Journalism:
helen.thomas-rhu@bbc.co.uk



A PUBLIC VOICE: ACCESS, DIGITAL STORY AND INTERACTIVE NARRATIVE

Professor Hamish Fyfe – University of Glamorgan:
hfyfe@glam.ac.uk
 Mike Wilson – University of Glamorgan:
mwilson@glam.ac.uk
 Mandy Rose – BBC Wales FM&T:
mandy.rose@bbc.co.uk



LISTENER ONLINE ENGAGEMENT WITH BBC RADIO PROGRAMMING

Professor Tim Wall – Birmingham City University:
Tim.Wall@bcu.ac.uk
 Lyn Thomas – London Metropolitan University:
l.thomas@londonmet.ac.uk
 Tristan Ferne – BBC Audio Music and Interactive:
tristan.ferne@bbc.co.uk

What do you think the BBC will look like in 10 years time?

Professor David Gauntlett: “In general I think the BBC has to become a true facilitator of people's own creativity, enabling them to easily create and share media experiences. This will co-exist with a smaller amount of high-quality landmark productions by professionals. But these professionals will always be challenged by the amateurs to do better!”

What surprised you most about the findings of the KEP study?

Dr Cynthia Carter: “How strong young teens seem to want a news service of their own and how important the news is to children and young people, despite widespread views that they find it ‘boring’.”

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13 UNIVERSITIES

12 MONTHS

8 PROJECTS

7 BBC DEPARTMENTS

6 ARTICLES

1 NEWSPAPER

ENDLESS OPPORTUNITY

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