NEW MEDIA: NEW PLEASURES?

STeM Working Paper

Final research report of a pilot research project

by

Dr Aphra Kerr,
Dr Pat Brereton,
Julian Kücklich, M.A.
Dr Roddy Flynn.

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STeM: Centre for Society, Technology and Media
www.stem.dcu.ie

1. INTRODUCTION[1]

This paper is based on the findings of a DCU funded pilot project which ran from Oct. 03-March 04. Developed by Dr. Aphra Kerr, Dr. Pat Brereton and Dr. Roddy Flynn, all members of the STeM research centre, they benefited considerably from the presence of Julian Kücklich, a visiting PhD student, funded under the EU's Marie Curie Programme.

The project team all have experience researching and teaching about traditional and new media and their theoretical expertise ranges from political economy of the media to cultural studies, literary theory and social theory. The project was funded by the Research Advisory Panel in DCU and builds on previous STeM projects including Computer Games: Production, Texts and Users (00-03), gamedevelopers.ie (03-04), European Media Technology and Everyday Life (00-03), Cost A20; The Impact of the Internet on the Mass Media in Europe (00-2003) and Transformations in Irish Broadcasting (02-03), as well as previous Marie Curie student projects on interactive television and the internet (see http://www.stem.dcu.ie/)

This project was motivated by one core question: do new media provide new pleasures to their users? The answer has important implications for designers of new media, regulators and media educators. However the question is deceptively simple and brings with it three inter-related but complex challenges which this pilot project set out to explore:

1. How do we define pleasure and where do we situate our work in relation to previous work on pleasure?
2. Can we differentiate between the pleasures provided by traditional media like cinema and new media like DVDs?
3. Can established research methods capture the pleasures provided by new media?

In choosing which new media to focus on we were conscious of the mix of expertise and interests in the research group but also the fact that these media were now part of the enlarged media curricula being taught in our School of Communications. At the outset the team decided to focus on the commercial entertainment services and products provided on four types of new media in Ireland:

1. Digital Television – satellite (SKY) and cable (NTL)
2. DVDs –
3. Video Consoles – PS2, GameCube, Xbox, Xbox live, GameBoy Advance.
4. Personal Computers - [2]

The project team began by conducting a comprehensive literature review of current research and concepts used to study the relationship between, and pleasures provided by, both old and new media. This was complemented by sessions where the researchers explored the features, services and content offered on video consoles, DVDs and digital television services. Both these activities helped to inform our understanding of the complex pleasures of new media.

There is a long tradition in media studies of textual analysis and subjective theorizing about the pleasures of the text. One of the questions underpinning this project was our sense that new media might challenge such a tradition, given the flexibility offered to the user in terms of determining the flow and content of their entertainment, as well as the dynamic nature of the content itself. As such, the team embarked on a limited exploration of the relationship between our observations and those of other users. This involved comparing our understanding of new

[1] The authors would like to acknowledge the support of the Research Advisory Panel in Dublin City University and to thank all the participants who took part in focus groups and interviews. We would also like to thank Prof. Paschal Preston, Prof. Farrel Corcoran and Dr. Barbara O'Connor for their comments on the first draft of this report. As this is a working paper, based on a pilot project, we would very much welcome comments and communications on any aspect of the report.

[2] Originally we had hoped to study one MMORPG but in the end this was not possible. Our households played networked PC games using broadband and one played networked console games using Xbox Live.

media pleasures with findings from a focus group, conducted with seven media students in early Jan. 04, and from in depth interviews conducted with users of new media in their homes.

In this paper sections two and three outline various approaches to studying pleasure in the media more generally, and approaches to studying pleasure in new media more specifically. Section four focuses on a number of compound and discrete concepts which we found useful in term of discussing new media pleasures. Section five outlines the various research methods we employed in the project while section six outlines the main issues arising from out theoretical and empirical work. This is followed by a brief section where we reflection on the project and point the way for future research.

2. APPROACHES TO STUDYING PLEASURE IN THE MEDIA

The first question faced by this project was 'How do we define pleasure and where do we situate our work in relation to previous work on pleasure?'

The definitions and theories of pleasure which we identified in the available literature ranged from what can be pejoratively categorised as dismissive Marxist criticism, which is hugely critical of what it regards as 'cheap' mass popular pleasures compared with more radical and cerebral avant-garde art forms, to the cultural studies perspective which often appears less preoccupied with ideology and more concerned with the valorisation of audience pleasures and their heterogeneity. Meanwhile, conventional textual studies of media focus on inherent and contextual meanings twinned with audience pleasure, sometimes from a more benign 'uses and gratifications' model of media consumption but other work takes a more radical feminist perspective. From the outset it was clear to the project team that we would have to be realistic about what we could cover in the short timescale.

In this section we will analyse the work of two people, John Fiske and Nicholas Garnham, who we felt best represented firstly a cultural studies approach to pleasure and secondly a political economy of the media approach to pleasure. While we are aware that this section is necessarily a simplified representation of the arguments made by the different schools of thought, we are confident that it will suffice to offer an insight into the theoretical and methodological complexity of media pleasures and provide some context for the following sections in this report.

Fiske points out that pleasure is 'multidiscursive, that is, means different things in different discourses' (Fiske 1987:224). While our literature review focused on the varying definitions and research methods advocated by political economists of the media and cultural theorists, we acknowledge that we have not examined in any depth a crucial psychological and feminist literature. Indeed until the 1980s, notions of pleasure were usually defined in relation to the psychological sensations of the individual user and 'as the anticipation of (and) enjoyment of that which is felt to be desirable or gratifying'. Feminist critics in particular foreground unconscious desires as a key constituent of pleasure, applying terms like voyeurism and the 'male gaze' to affirm the gendering of audience pleasures. This project however, given its limited time and scale, decided to focus primarily on the social, ideological and discursive aspects of pleasure.

2.1 Cultural Studies

One of the key proponents of the cultural studies perspective is John Fiske, who is possibly best known for his work on television, especially the key text *Television Culture* (1987) but who has also written about digital games. Fiske's starting point is to challenge the concept of the 'mass audience', as constructed by the cultural industries, and point to the multiplicity of needs and desires which different people bring to the media. He admits that the cultural industries can exert some, if limited, control over who watches what, and the meanings and pleasures their products provide, but suggests that the power of audiences as producers of pleasure and meaning is 'considerable.' (pg. 313).

For him, media texts are not purveyors of meaning but rather 'provokers' of meaning and he argues that institutionally validated cultural capital (as conceptualized by Pierre Bourdieu) is constantly being opposed and negotiated. With regard to cultural resistance Fiske distinguishes between two types, one semiotic and one social. For him, the two are crucially linked so that an individual's oppositional and negotiated readings of a text are not inferior to social and collective resistance and may indeed pose a direct challenge to the dominant ideology. This process of individual liberation and empowerment paradoxically exists alongside and may even help to sustain the capitalist industrial system.

For Fiske, playing digital games is much like other leisure activities in that it is a 'time to produce meanings of self, and for the self, that the world of work denies.' For instance, his work on video game parlours notes that these venues offer the player opportunities to resist social control and space to exhibit power and control; experiences often denied within capitalist society (Fiske and Watts 1985). Indeed players feel like they are beating the machine and, on a symbolical level, resisting the system when they are able to play for long periods of time using only a small amount of money. In this instance pleasure is located in the self and in the body (the physicality of playing games) rather than in society. He also notes that this resistance and empowerment may be limited to the period of the media activity and may not lead to social action/change afterwards.

Fiske compares the loss of self and society in game playing to the concept of 'jouissance' as conceptualised by Roland Barthes in 'The Pleasure of the Text' (1973). For Barthes, a textual theorist, there are two different types of pleasure produced by a text: *jouissance*, which is an intense physical pleasure operating beyond culture and ideology and *plaisir,* which is a cultural and more mundane and conformist pleasure.

For Fiske, society is always trying to curb pleasure, particularly *jouissance,* which is regarded as an indulgence and a waste of time. This is exemplified by the long tradition of censorship in the media and the confinement of transgressive pleasures in the severely regulated institution of the carnival. Yet he argues that there is always the potential for resistance to the dominant ideology and the censorship of pleasure. For both Fiske and Barthes one strategy of resistance is to *play* with the media work/text (Fiske 1987). The pleasures which result are a function of and related to the viewers' social situations. Thus, for some, pleasure can be found in affirming and conforming to the dominant ideology, while for others it is more in the negotiation or rejection of the dominant.

This theoretical position draws upon Stuart Hall's preferred reading theory which argued that viewers whose social situation mirrors the dominant ideology tend to reproduce the dominant reading in a text (Hall 1973). While Hall's work has been widely debated, the notion that there are structures of preference in a text which viewers negotiate in the reading process is still a widely accepted theory today. However, audience reception theories have argued that viewer/reader subjectivities are not unified and stable and thus the text and subjectivities remain 'discursive constructs'.

It should be noted at this point that it is by no means unproblematic to regard new media content as texts. This notion has been heavily debated over the last decade, particularly in the field of digital games studies. Despite the postmodern notion of the text as an intersection of various discourses, which is by no means stable historically and interculturally, the concept of textuality retains connotations of immutability and dominant authorship. As both of these concepts are severely challenged by new media, many scholars have suggested to discard the term and rather use spatial metaphors, such as 'possible worlds' (see e.g. Ryan 2001, Manovich 2001). As these terms are equally problematic, we use the term text to refer to the sum of possible experiences a given media 'programme' potentially offers its users. The question of digital textuality will be discussed in greater detail below.

Not only are there different readings of a text but there are also varying modes of reception. Thus studies of television viewing have noted that the activity of perception can vary from rapt attention to background listening. Some theorists of television studies therefore argue that television has relatively less power over the viewer than cinema given the variety of activities which can take place in the viewing context. In addition, television can play an important role in the politics of the family and the power relations between people living in the household. This is related not only to access to the television and remote control but also programme content and its ascribed legitimacy. Further research points to the how the meaning of the text can be produced in discussions with others outside the home. This is particularly evident within the proliferation of fan cultures (Jenkins 1992).

2.2 Political economy of the media

Nicholas Garnham is a well known political economist of the media whose book *Emancipation, the Media and Modernity. Arguments about the media and social theory* (2000) provides a useful insight into how critics coming from his perspective view pleasure and approaches to studying it. The starting point of any reception/audience study, Garnham argues, is a recognition that the media are systems for the economic production and distribution of cultural goods and services and that this places severe constraints on what can be consumed, by whom and where. Therefore, the process of meaning-making cannot be studied without an examination of how the media constructs and understands its markets and how this effects both production and consumption. To this he adds the importance of other social structuring factors like class and gender.

Garnham has critiqued Fiske's work, arguing that his dissolution of both text and audience into an 'endless process of ungrounded semiosis which was defined as resistant by fiat' (2000:125) avoided both the issue of the 'impact' of messages and the 'social determination' of interpretative frameworks and behaviour. Importantly, for Garnham Fiske's work also fails to adequately distinguish between behaviour and action: 'behaviour being habitual and unreflexive while action is consciously intentional' (2000:111). And while the move from a focus on the impact of the media to its 'use' is welcome Garnham warns not to confuse, or equate, use, with a simplified notion of an 'active' audience.

This point seems especially relevant in respect to research on new media. If one recalls the plethora of euphoric writing about the Internet in the mid-1990s, it quickly becomes apparent that the celebrated switching of identities, to name but one notable example, has rather quickly become one behaviour of many in our cultural repertoire. In respect to our subject, this means that the pleasures associated with new media at the time of this writing might just as quickly pall as the media develop and their users become more experienced. While it is entirely possible that they will be replaced by other, maybe even greater pleasures, this cannot be easily determined at present.

For Garnham, the pleasure one finds in media consumption is shaped by both media content and social structuring factors extraneous to the media, such as income, education, gender and age. Thus for him pleasure is not 'free-flowing' or 'freely-defined' by the user but rather the media act to 'channel' and direct pleasure in particular ways. Furthermore, drawing upon the work of Pierre Bourdieu, he argues that social factors, like class, act to structure both the economic and cultural resources available to the user and thus one's willingness and ability to consume pleasure from a particular mode of cultural consumption.

Garnham offers some key terminological and methodological pointers with regard to conducting audience research. For him an 'active' audience is not necessarily one which resists the dominant ideology. He argues that one needs to distinguish between behaviour and action and that audiences can **actively** pursue habitual, unreflexive and non-emancipatory behaviour, and **actively** construct repressed and constricted identities. He is strongly critical of the presumption that an active audience is also a resistant audience.

Garnham defends more macro and meso level approaches to both defining and understanding the audience and criticises what he calls the 'strong social constructivism' approach within contemporary reception studies. Thus he talks about the persistence of a mass audience and about different ways of segmenting the audience but not to the level of the individual. For him individual behaviour and interpretation is mediated by social location and group filiation.

However, the persistence of a mass audience is further challenged by digital media, which allow the user to 'customize' their content to varying degrees. The World Wide Web, despite the concentration and commercialization that has taken place over the last decade, remains a 'many-to-many' medium that is not easily classified as either a mass medium or a personal

communication medium. In a similar way, digital television also leads to a fragmentation of audiences or so-called ‘narrowcasting’.

Making a strong call for the need to be able to generalize ones findings, Garnham is highly critical of the overly strong focus on the everyday, the individual and the ethnographic (2000:113) in cultural studies. For him this work fails to adequately deal with the relationship between structure and agency. Further, he argues that such work associates everyday media use with popular culture and pleasure defined in opposition to, and more positively than, elite culture and rational analysis. Such a priori distinctions and evaluations need to be exposed, thus allowing, he suggests, this work to avoid ‘crucial analytical problems’ (2000:128).

For Garnham pleasure is not necessarily good. He questions ‘whether all pleasures are “good”, much less socially progressive, and whether the active pursuit of pleasure cannot be the basis for social control and manipulation as easily as for its liberation,’ (2000:134). While Garnham's argument is more refined than the model presented by the Frankfurt school, he still seems to assert that pleasure associated with 'mere entertainment' is 'bad pleasure', i.e. a waste of productive time given that it is mainly confined to habitual and unreflective behaviour and not extended to conscious and emancipatory action.

This is a complex debate that can be traced all the way back to the debate between Walter Benjamin and Horkheimer and Adorno. In this context we have taken some of Garnham’s critiques on board, particularly the questioning of the ‘active’ audience and the distinction between behaviour and action, but at the same time we find that we agree with Fiske in believing that there are forms or levels of pleasure that are not exclusively in the service of ideology and power and may derive from the subversion of social norms rather than their affirmation. This form of pleasure may take the form of 'transformative play', as outlined below.

2.3 Working with both cultural studies and political economy?

Attempts have been made to reconcile these different perspectives, particularly in new media studies. In Kline et al.'s *Digital Play* (2003), for example, the authors identify the gaps between media studies, political economy studies and cultural studies. They argue that political economy studies tends to dismiss pleasure and digital games in particular as 'mindless entertainment' (2003:41) but that cultural studies tends to emphasise the pleasures of media consumption without taking into account the power structures that "control most of what we watch, listen to and play" (2003:45). Unfortunately, in their actual analysis of the process of meaning-making in the digital games industry they focus on the macro-level – including the establishment of proprietary technological standards, marketing and cross-over between individual game genres – and fail to deal sufficiently with how meaning is negotiated in the consumption of digital games.

In our search for some common ground between an institutional and a user-centred perspective, we found some interesting concepts in the emerging discourse of game design theory. Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman's book *Rules of Play. Game Design Fundamentals* (2003) theorizes pleasure primarily on the basis of the dichotomy between *game* and *play*. For them, ‘meaningful play’ develops to a certain extent in response to the rules of the game, but stems to an equally large extent from the players' efforts to resist these rules. Affirmation and resistance are therefore always already inscribed in the process of playing.

Salen and Zimmerman start their chapter on pleasure and play with the statement: "Pleasure is, perhaps, the experience most intrinsic to games" (2003:330). There is an abundant variety of pleasures that can include "any physical, emotional, psychological or ideological sensation" (ibid.). However, the opposites of pleasure (e.g. boredom or frustration) are equally important. The authors then discuss pleasure in the context of rules. Drawing on the work of Vygotsky (1976) they point out that play creates demands to act *against* immediate pleasure. This delayed gratification maximizes pleasure. There is a pleasure inherent in submitting to the rules as well as in testing the limits of these rules in the process of play.

In turning to typologies of pleasure, they draw on the game designer Mark LeBlanc's (1999) typology, which includes sensation, fantasy, narrative, challenge, fellowship, discovery, expression and submission. Psychologist Michael J. Apter (1991) has a slightly shorter list, which includes stimulation, fiction and narrative, challenge, exploration, negativism, cognitive synergy and facing danger. Caillois' categories (agôn, alea, ilinx and mimicry) are presented as a further typology. In conclusion, Salen and Zimmerman point out that not all games contain all these different types of pleasure and that "pleasure is always already exceedingly complex" (2003:336).

Shifting to a more design-centric point of view, the authors focus on game design as the 'sculpting of desire'. They use the example of *Quake* to point out that good game design leads to pleasurable experiences both in the short and the long term. There is an 'evolution' of pleasure over time. This is partly due to the fact that games will always create a unique experience, although the rules stay the same. This so-called 'same-but-different experience' is fostered by a core mechanic that is flexible enough to allow variations such as the very simple move-and-shoot mechanic of *Quake*. It is further assisted by transformative play which increases the replayability even further.

It should be made clear at this point that the 'evolution of pleasure' is hard to back up due to the lack of longitudinal data in new media research. As has been pointed out before, the pleasures of new media may pall over time or give rise to new pleasures. In any case, we must be aware of the fact that there is usually a dialectic of evolution and *de*volution in media pleasure. Stand-alone media products such as DVDs and videogames are usually subject to 'planned obsolescence', i.e. they are produced in such a way that they will only provide their owners pleasure for a limited amount of time.

In order to theorize aspects of replayability, Salen and Zimmerman introduce Brian Moriarty's (1998-2002) concept of *entrainment* (from the French verb 'entrainer': to carry along, to trap), which is achieved mainly through rhythmic repetition both on a macro and a micro level. According to Salen and Zimmerman, games can be regarded as entrainment engines. The goal of the game plays an important role in this process, as it shapes and structures the experience of play by providing short-term and long-term goals. Goals are "navigational beacons" (2003:344) in the 'possibility space' of the game.

In summary, Salen and Zimmerman assert that pleasure is an emergent phenomenon, which is contingent on the game designer's ability to create meaningful play at every moment of the game. But they also concede that "[p]leasure is difficult to design because it is an open-ended, multi-faceted and exceedingly complex concept" (2003:355)

This perspective seems uniquely valuable in marrying the concepts of cultural studies and the political economy of the media evoked above. Salen and Zimmerman stress the point that it is the player who creates pleasure by interacting with the rules of the game, but it is the designer's role to create rules that enable the player to interact meaningfully with them. From Salen and Zimmerman's point of view, society and social groups can be regarded as rule-systems on a larger scale, which explains how meaning is simultaneously constructed individually and determined by the social environment. While this validates Fiske's concept of individual pleasures and meaning-making, it also harmonizes with Garnham's view that the producer of a media text has a certain amount of control over the impact of her message.

In the context of this study, one of the most important concepts developed by Salen and Zimmerman is that of 'transformative play': "When play occurs, it can overflow and overwhelm the more rigid structure in which it is taking place, generating emergent, unpredictable results. Sometimes, in fact, the force of play is so powerful that it can change the structure itself. […] We call this important form of play *transformative play.*" (2003:305) As Salen and Zimmerman define play as the margin of movement within a rigid structure, transformative play is a movement that loosens the rigidity of its surrounding structure, thus changing it in the process.

3. APPROACHES TO STUDYING PLEASURE IN NEW MEDIA

While there is some literature on pleasure and new media, there is much less work on DVDs and digital television than one might expect. Much of this work is concerned with the second and third questions identified in the introduction, namely:

- Can we differentiate between the pleasures provided by traditional media like cinema and new media like DVDs?
- Can established research methods capture the pleasures provided by new media?

It would appear that literary theory is winning out in terms of approaches to studying pleasure in new media, with much less attention given to political economy and cultural studies. One reason for this may be the fact that traditional media and communications schools have only slowly started to pay attention to new media, establish new media courses and grapple with their specificities.

Traditionally, the 'pleasure of the text' is seen to stem both from the immersion in the fictional world and an appreciation of the textual strategies used to bring this world 'alive'. On a higher level, the breach of certain textual conventions, as well as the use of rhetorical figures of speech and allusions, can be appreciated by proficient readers. However, as pointed out above, the old media concept of text does not fully correspond with new media such as digital games, which are more fluid. In attempting to identify what distinguishes new media from old media, Martin Lister et al., note that whereas analogue media "tend towards being fixed, digital media tend towards a *permanent state of flux*." (p.16). Lister et al. note that this state of permanent flux is enhanced with those digital texts that never need to exist as a hard copy. This point affirms our assumption that the interactive nature of digital games means that the text itself is ever-changing. Bill Nichols (2000) asserts that "[c]ybernetic interactions can become intensely demanding, more so than we might imagine from our experience with texts." (97)

It is at this point that Philippe Bootz's (1997) distinction between *texte ecrit* (text as written), *texte-a-voir* (text as seen) and *texte lu* (text as read) becomes significant. In traditional texts there are two tiers: code (encoding) and representation in the reader (decoding), whereas games (and other electronic media) arguably exhibit a three level structure. Of course no text has meaning immanent to it: meaning can only be created at the moment when the reader engages with the text. The only way we can make meaning in a text is to apply our subjective categories to it: this is inescapable. In new media texts, however, there is a third tier *between* encoding and decoding, namely the physical manifestation of the user's individual choices (*texte-à-voir*). That this distinction makes sense is foregrounded by the fact that we can record play sessions, i.e. the material representation of gameplay on the screen, but we cannot record 'reading'.

The specific pleasures of new media can be identified more easily in regard to the experiences that traditional text does not allow for. Thus, the 'database' format of many new media texts (e.g. digital games, dynamic websites) allows for a different experience every time the user accesses it. However, it is important to keep in mind that these differences may be minimal, and the variable experiences cannot always be clearly differentiated from the different readings of a text. This changeability of the new media text is closely associated with the unpredictability of these texts: a reader reading a novel for the second time will more or less be familiar with the plot, while new media texts might change considerably over time. It is also important to point out that – contrary to common beliefs – new media still depend on written text to a great extent. This is not only true for the World Wide Web, but also for digital games and interactive TV, which often require their users to navigate through multiple menus.

In the study of digital games the tension between existing approaches to studying media texts and new approaches for new media has led to a split between 'narratologists' and 'ludologists'. The former argue that there is sufficient continuity between literary texts and digital games to

justify narratological analysis, while the latter deny this approach arguing instead that the media and formal characteristics of digital games effectively prohibits the telling of a coherent story and therefore of narratology as an approach.

However, even the 'narratologists' now recognize that narrative and meaning-making is often secondary in digital games to other pleasures, such as the exploration of virtual space and the immersion in a fictional world. Tendencies in other media – such as the emergence of 'reality television', mockumentaries, and other non-narrative driven formats – seem to indicate that other forms of engaging with cultural products might be equally, or in some cases more, useful. Indeed, one might be able to argue that 'meaning is losing its meaning', i.e. hermeneutic interaction might no longer be the main mode of engaging with media texts.

Genre categorising and differentiation modulated by the inherent ‘mixing and matching’ evident within contemporary postmodernist aesthetics appear equally relevant for new media study with the possibility for original generic formats being created (Lister et al.). In this pilot study, complex taxonomies and categorising cannot be fully articulated and much less evaluated, but the team were nevertheless aware of the potential pleasures which the use and abuse of genres can give.

In their study of ‘playability’ in digital games, Järvinen et al. (2002) set up a distinction between pleasure and enjoyment by asserting that pleasure can be effortless, while enjoyment requires psychic energy (i.e. attention). Furthermore, they point out that there is attention in a material ("input") as well as in an immaterial sense ("interpretation"). This seems to resonate with Espen Aarseth's (1997) concept of the 'ergodic text', in which the user "also performs in an extranoematic sense" (1). While this does not imply a radical break with the pleasures of older media such as film, it indicates a shift of emphasis from textual hermeneutics to a form of interaction that is at once more mechanical and more oriented towards the experiential.

According to Andrew Darley (2000), digital games involve 'kinaesthetic performance', which is the primary source of pleasure which they provide. A related pleasure is the vicarious sense of presence in a fictional world. Narrative pleasure (which stems to a significant degree from narrative closure) is secondary. This view is mirrored in Darley's definition of interactivity as 'vicarious kinaesthesia'. This mode of interaction results in a fusion of the categories of space and time: "Indeed, it becomes difficult to untangle space from time [...] so intimate is their relation." (158). According to Darley, the increased sense of presence in computer games is achieved at the expense of depth of meaning. A similar shift can be discerned in the history of cinema, as films become less narrative-driven and increasingly spectacular. In moving from cinema to new media, a further shift of emphasis takes place which redefines the relationship between narrative and spectacle.

This seems to resonate with the resurgence of a play aesthetic that Marshall (2002) notes in regard to new media: "In the last decade of the twentieth century, the key insight to permeate the various culture industries, but particularly film and television, is that play is not limited to childhood or sports. [...] The success of video and computer games in the past two decades is that they have been able to translate that pleasure of play […] into adult entertainment culture." (73) Again, a similar change can be observed in older media. While to some observers the emergence of non-fiction comics (such as Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*) signals a trivialization of academic discourse, others see it as a maturation of the medium. Thus, the 'ludification' of the mediascape does not necessarily lead to an infantilization, but rather to a re-evaluation of play.

There is considerable overlap here between theorists of new media and play theorists such as Roger Caillois, who, according to Lister et al. does not "privilege paidia [play] over ludus [games]. […] [E]ven ludic games need room for improvisation: 'the game consists of the need to find or continue at once a response which is free within the limits set by the rules. This latitude of the player, this margin accorded to his action is essential to the game and partly explains the pleasure which it excites.' (Caillois 1962: 8)" (2003:270). Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that "the pleasure of the game is that the rules are made and remade, transformed and shifted by

the players." (Marshall 2002:80). As Schott and Kambouri point out: "As games are released [...] to the private sphere, the pleasures and practices involved in game play may become widely divergent from those [...] foreseen by designers and commentators in the game industry" (2003:52).

The process of interpretation, on the other hand, might also be considerably different in new media. Thus, Ted Friedman points out in regard to digital games that "[w]e cannot here talk, as film theory might, about occupying subject positions in our identification with this game [*SimCity*]. For Friedman, rather, the player must identify 'with the computer itself ... the pleasures of a simulation game come from inhabiting an unfamiliar, alien mental state: from learning to think like a computer'" (Friedman 1999, quoted in Lister et al. 2003). While the pleasures of film still depend to a certain extent on the 'othering' of certain positions, Friedman's statement seems to suggest that the pleasure of playing a computer game might lie in the possibility to put oneself into the position of the other – in this case, the machine as opposed to the human player.

While this seems to resonate with arguments made by proponents of cyborg theory, such as Donna Haraway, it must be kept in mind that identification in digital games cannot be compared directly to the process of identification in literature and film. In games, the 'avatar' is merely a vehicle for the player's agency, therefore identification is contingent to a large extent to the 'emptiness' of the character. Whenever the avatar shows signs of an independent will, the illusion of control is broken and the player's immersion diminished. Identification seems to be most seamless in first-person shooter games such as *Doom* or *Quake*, where the player's point of view is identical with the avatar's perspective. Interestingly, these are the games that make the cyborg identity of the computer game player most evident. The seminal first-person shooter *Half-Life* used the device of the 'head-up display' (or HUD) to explain the numerical information visible on-screen. Since 1998, this has become a staple in digital games, including games like *Deus Ex*, which made the 'cyborgification' of the protagonist an explicit theme of the game.

Our literature review seems to indicate that the pleasures of new media consumption are manifold and heterogeneous. It is most likely that different users of different media will experience unique combinations of both 'cultural' and 'sensual' pleasure. Indeed it would appear that there is a more opaque process of engagement with new media, which often promotes a more fluid quotient of pleasure(s) for users. Thus, it is not central to the experience of playing a videogame to decode the intertextual references that it encapsulates, but it might add to the pleasure. Similarly, the exertion of control over the way a DVD is viewed might take precedence over the decoding of the various cultural codes that constitute the 'text'. It is not our intention to privilege one form of pleasure over the other, but rather to identify and explore combinations of pleasures that new media can give rise to. The focus in this study is on the individual's experience of pleasure in new media and its relationship to social structures including the forces of capital.

Following an extensive literature review, the research team identified a small number of concepts which kept reoccurring and which we felt were constitutive of, and central to, new media pleasures -. these were control, immersion, performance, intertextuality and narrative. Each of these concepts in themselves were quite complex and seemed to offer a variety of positions along a continuum between, for example, being in control and not being in control and could be combined to produce more complex pleasures. For example, immersion, control and performance are seen in the literature as fundamental to the experience of play and in some instances these concepts can combine in such a way that they produce a state which has been described as "flow". An initial mapping of these concepts and how they might link together is represented in illustration 1. This was used as a heuristic device by the group and served to visualise some of the potential relationships to be described in more detail in the next section of this report.

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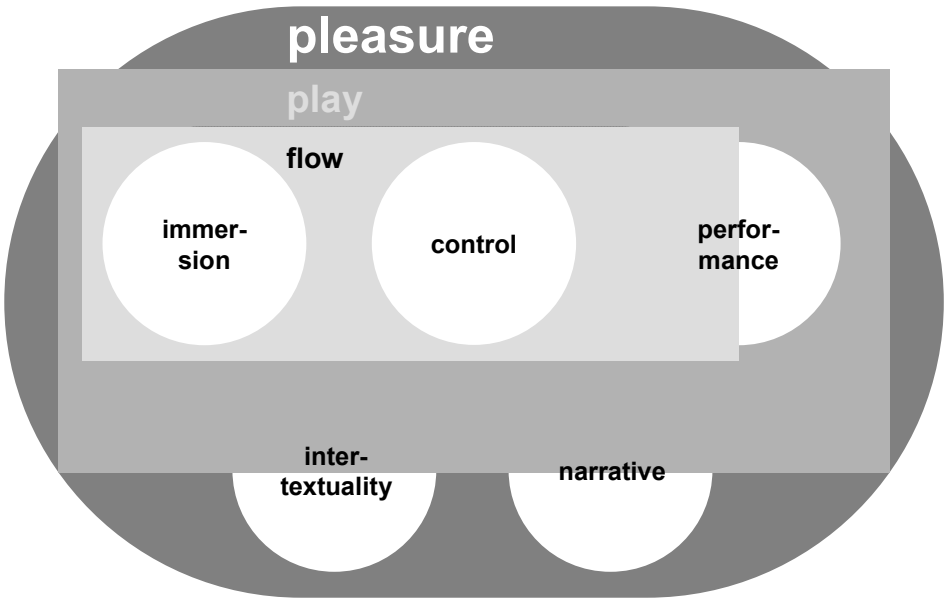

Illustration 1: compound and elementary concepts

4. COMPOUND CONCEPTS

Play

Play is posited here as a key concept to understand the interaction of users with new media. It is posited in the literature that play incorporates the concepts of control, immersion and performance and that the specific pleasure of play is contingent on these other three pleasures.

The close relationship between play and **control** is recognized by play theorists Avedon and Sutton-Smith, who define play as "an exercise of voluntary control systems," while games are defined as "an exercise of voluntary control systems in which there is an opposition between forces, confined by a procedure and rules in order to produce a disequilibrial outcome" (1971: 7). Specific forms of play can also be regarded in terms of control. Thus, competitive play (in Caillois' terminology: *agôn*) is a struggle for control between two or more players. Games of chance (*alea*) involve the pleasure of relinquishing control to dice or cards. Performative play (*mimicry*) involves taking control of one's own identity, while vertiginous play (*ilinx*) is dependent on the pleasant sensation of losing control over one's body and/or senses.

The link between play and **immersion** is provided by Johan Huizinga, who stresses the importance of play's separateness in space and time. Thus, play involves both a form of temporal immersion that might be experienced as a loss of time, and a form of spatial immersion that might

be experienced as a loss of awareness of one's surroundings. Many games also immerse their players emotionally, which is often experienced as the fear of losing or the exhilaration of winning.

Performance plays a central role not only in performative play (*mimicry*), but also in many games that require specific skills. Typically, the latter are played with others, or even in front of an audience. Players experience the pleasure of performing their skills and the recognition earned through their exercise. Other games cast players in specific roles, challenging them to act according to this role. While this pleasure is traditionally associated with theatrical performances and role-playing games, it is also found in digital games and internet chat-rooms (cf. Turkle 1995). P. David Marshall (2002) highlights the difference between identification in narrative media and identification in games: "[T]he player is moved by electronic games beyond filmic narrative identification into a hybrid state of 'game play' subjectivity." (73)

While we concur with Marshall that in new media there is a shift in emphasis from the narrative to the performative, this should not be construed as an attempt to establish a binary opposition between old media (like film) and new media (like digital games). There is clearly an element of spatiality in film, and films like David Lynch's *The Straight Story* (1999) certainly invite a form of spatial immersion. At the same time, narrative remains to be an important element in new media including many digital games. While some games are pure games of skill with a rudimentary narrative structure (e.g. *Tetris*), other games use the means of literature and film to tell often quite elaborate stories. Theorists such as Jenkins and Manovich recognize this by using the concepts of 'spatial narratives' and the 'spatialization of time', respectively. This draws attention to the fact that narration in digital games is always intertwined with spatial progression. In fact, it could be argued that space in games is 'spectacular', as the production of space is arguably one of the most cost-intensive factors in game-production. The 'money shot' of Hollywood film is thus replaced by the 'money spot' in games.

As the pleasure of play derives from the pleasures of control, immersion and performance, it can be seen as a compound pleasure, in which the total is greater than the sum of its parts. Play is posited here as the unique pleasure experienced when control, immersion and performance are combined. The specific pleasure of play seems to stem from the fact that it is separate from everyday life: "[T]hough central to culture, play is always, according to Huizinga, separate from ordinary or real life: it is 'a stepping out of "real" life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own' (Huizinga 1986: 8). Separated from the materially necessary activities of work and the satisfaction of bodily needs, it occurs in interludes in daily life. Play is only superficially ephemeral, however; through its often regular repetitions and rituals […] it is integral to everyday life." (Lister et al. 2003: 269).

However, play is not always experienced as pleasant by players. In subsuming adventure games under the category of ergodic text, Espen Aarseth has foregrounded the fact that many games require its players to 'work' in order to gain a certain level of mastery. A recent study that compared game players in the UK and in Japan found that many of the British teenagers interviewed "admitted to spending hours alone at their consoles, honing skills and perfecting the moves that they would later use to humiliate their schoolmates." (*Edge* 2003). T.L. Taylor's (2003) study of 'power gamers' in *EverQuest* points into a similar direction. She points out that these highly goal-oriented players were primarily interested in playing 'efficiently' in order to advance in the game as quickly as possible. "What was striking to me," Taylor writes, "was the willingness of power gamers to go through very hard work to achieve their goals. It was not the activity itself that became the measure of 'fun' but the possibility for success that pushed them forwards" (303).

In highlighting the importance of repetition to the experience of gameplay, Torben Grodal (2003) draws attention to the fact that games are not necessarily suspenseful and novel throughout, but may go through phases of rote or boredom. What seems to be at work here is a mechanism of 'delayed gratification,' which players must endure to achieve a heightened sense of pleasure at a later stage.

Flow

The concept of flow was introduced by Mihaly Csikszentmihaly to describe a state of consciousness, which occurs when the information coming into awareness is congruent with one's own goals and which produces intense feelings of enjoyment and creativity.

> 'The universal precondition for flow is that a person should perceive that there is something for him or her to do, and that he or she is capable of doing it. … optimal experience requires a balance between the challenges perceived in a given situation and the skills a person brings to it (Csikszentmihalyi and Csikczentmihalyi 1988:30).'

In other words: flow is the experience of hitting the 'sweet spot' between the annoyance of a task that is perceived as trivial and the frustration of a task that is perceived as too difficult. This is also described as a balance between challenge and competence, or between complexity and boredom. The state of flow requires a combination of immersion and performance but is greater than both. An exercise of control systems that occurs in combination with a high level of immersion thus results in a state of flow. As immersion and control are always a part of play, flow can be seen as both an element of play, and a state that can be achieved through play.

Csikszentmihaly points out that there is a 'paradox of control' involved in states of flow. While the individual experiencing flow will perceive herself as being in control, i.e. capable of fulfilling the task at hand, this control is never total, as this is a precondition for the task to remain challenging. The subject in a state of flow is thus simultaneously in control and out of control.

In regard to immersion, Csikszentmihaly points out that the state of flow is characterized by the loss of self-consciousness and the transformation of time. In the interaction with narrative media this loss of self-consciousness can involve identification with the main character of the narrative. But it can also occur in more abstract tasks such as creating a website or playing a game of solitaire. Temporal immersion involves a loss of the sense of time, which might be perceived as a 'transformation' of time – the experience of a flow state may speed up time or slow it down, depending on individual factors.

As in the case of play, the pleasure of flow is seen as greater than the pleasure of control and the pleasure of immersion taken together. Brenda Danet (2001) lists flow as one of the components of interactivity (along with ephemerality and theatricality). Interactivity, in turn, is posited as one of the reasons for the inherent playfulness of electronic media. Apart from interactivity, Danet mentions hacker culture ("Playfulness is absolutely central to what hackers do" [26]), the 'frontier' spirit of (early) Cyberspace, and the anonymity of the internet (especially in MUDs and MOOs) as further factors that foster the playfulness of new media.

ELEMENTARY CONCEPTS

Control

The pleasures of new media are seen to be more dependent on the exercise of control of both the user over the text and the text over the user – this creates a feedback loop that allows for a unique experience. This is recognized by theorists such as Rune Klevjer (2001) who outlines an 'aesthetics of control' for digital games. The idea of control also informs Aarseth's (1997) notion of the cybertext. More recently, James Newman (2002) has contributed to this debate by introducing his concept of on-line and off-line states, which he sees not as discrete states, but as the end points of a continuum, ranging from an (ideal) state of detached viewing to an (equally ideal) state of total engagement. Michele White (2003) sees a similar "dialectic of being in control and being out of control" in the relationship of webcam operators and spectators.

Typically, control can take place on several levels – in the form of choices a) about the interaction, b) within the interaction and c) about the mode of interaction. While the first kind of control is also found in old media – e.g. choosing a television channel or buying a book – the other two are more closely associated with new media. The control options available within an interaction have been addressed under the label of interactivity – however, it is felt that this concept is too unspecific to accurately describe what takes place between the user and the text (see Kiousis 2002 and Downes and McMillan 2000). Furthermore, the term 'interactivity' must be regarded as a political, rather than a descriptive term, as it is used by many new media advocates to emphasize the amount of the user's control over the medium, while de-emphasizing the medium's control over the user (see Aarseth 1997).

One of the most interesting forms of control concerns the choices the user makes with regard to the mode of interaction. This is addressed under the label of 'meta-control' (Kilker 2003) and includes practices such as 'cheating' in digital games (i.e. deciding whether to play by the rules or with the rules) and the 'modding' of game consoles and DVD-players, which allows users to play copied games and imported DVDs. The circumvention of software and hardware content control systems has special relevance for the pleasures of advanced users of new media.

The concept of control is strongly linked with the concept of agency, which is evoked as one of the key pleasures of the electronic text by Janet Murray. In this context, it is important to note Janet Murray's unproblematised assertion that "actual movement through real space [that] brings corresponding movement in the fantasy world, is an important part of the fascination of simple joystick-controlled videogames." (Murray 1997:108). She supports this with reference to the CD-ROM games *Star Trek: The Final Unity* where the player must utilise diegetic tools (tricorder and transporter) via the mouse to complete tasks. Murray's reference to the importance of the incorporation of belief-creating virtual objects is significant because it may not be the case that those objects need replicate their real-life functions when used in the game – what is important is simply that the objects react in some predictable fashion in response to a user command, thus creating the feeling of control over these objects.

Control in digital games may also go beyond the interactive possibilities of the game itself. As Marshall (2002) points out: "Computer-developed games are highly structured entities; however, within those structures, the best games encode 'tricks' or 'cheats' which allow a myriad of transformations possible for any player." (73)

Performance

New media are seen to possess a performative aspect, insofar as they allow for and foster the users' experimentation with alternative identities (Turkle, 1995). This is true for computer games as well as internet chat rooms etc. The pleasure of leaving one's identity behind and taking on someone else's identity is regarded as a key pleasure in digital games, especially when they allow players to take on the roles of personae from successful films such as *The Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003). This is also recognized by Janet Murray, who uses the term 'transformation'. The performative aspect has links to old media such as cinema and literature, where the process of 'identification' is believed to work in a similar way.

According to Andrew Darley (2000), digital games also involve "kinaesthetic performance", which he sees as the primary source of pleasure. This can be linked to Roger Caillois' category of vertiginous games (*ilinx*). In fact, it might be useful to differentiate at least two different levels on which performance can take place: an aesthetic and a hermeneutic level. Users derive 'sensual pleasure' from the aesthetic interaction with media texts. The hermeneutic element of other media might be de-emphasized in many new media, but it nevertheless still forms an integral part of the experience. The intellectual or cultural pleasures users derive from media texts are the result of a hermeneutic interaction – a form of making sense that can take many different forms and that

might include the user's own codes, such as in the example of homosexual readings of *Xena*. Thus, the aesthetic and the hermeneutic interaction can be seen to inform one another.

The aesthetic aspect of performance is frequently highlighted by proponents of new media as 'liberating' the user from the constraints of older media, especially with regard to digital games. However, this aspect of gameplay use should not be over-emphasized as the general experience of the game is likely not to differ too much between individual players. Exceptions are games such as *Deus Ex* in which the players can choose different paths between the entry and exit points of the individual levels. In fact, many games are rather *more* limiting than some literary texts.

The issue of performance raises questions about the roles offered to users of new media, especially in digital games which often seem obsessed with 'militarized masculinity' (see Kline et al. 2003), thus excluding female and casual players. Of specific interest is the amount of control given to users in respect to the creation of alternative identities. In digital games, the representation of the player in the game is often referred to as the 'avatar'. The design of the outward appearance of the avatar and the improvement of its social standing are of great importance in multi-player online games (MPOGs) and especially in massively multi-player online role-playing games (MMORPGs).

Another performative aspect of new media pertains to the performance of users in a social environment. Research has shown that British teenagers spend considerable time with newly acquired games, in order to be able to 'outperform' their peers (cf. Edge 2003). This aspect of new media might not be limited to digital games, however, as the mastery over technology (e.g. home entertainment systems consisting of multiple components) can be similarly demonstrated, and may well be a source of considerable pleasure for the owners of this technology. The improved social status that is expected from these performances might also explain the often considerable financial investment in new technology.

Immersion

Immersion is seen as one of the key pleasures of new media by theorists such as Janet Murray (1997), Marie-Laure Ryan (2001), J. David Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999). While Murray conceptualizes immersion as contingent on transformation and agency, Ryan usefully develops a typology of immersion, including spatial, temporal and emotional immersion. Bolter and Grusin focus on the convergences between ‘immediacy’/‘hypermediacy’ and opacity/ transparency to foreground the continuities between old and new media. Arguably, a 'hypermedial' interface, which typically displays different forms of information (textual, pictorial, graphical) simultaneously, is less immersive than an 'immediate' interface such as the cinema screen, which relies on the seamless integration of visuals and sound. This simple binary distinction is challenged by complex interfaces such as those of digital role-playing games that require the user to navigate between different menus. From Bolter and Grusin's point of view, this must be regarded as a breach of immersion, but this is not necessarily experienced as such by the players themselves.

Janet Murray confidently asserts that as a species we evince a universal desire to "leap out of our everyday life into the pages of a favourite book" (p.97). Given this, she argues that the "experience of being transported to an elaborately simulated placed is pleasurable in itself, regardless of the fantasy content" (p. 98). This desire is used by Murray to explain our desire to consume fictional texts, all of which she constructs as immersive to a greater or lesser extent. However, this seems to indicate a problematic conflation of her concepts of transformation with the concept of immersion. Immersion is regarded here as not primarily deriving from taking on someone else's identity, but rather from the 'willing suspension of disbelief' and the resulting 'loss of self'.

Nevertheless, immersion and performance are closely related. This is also how immersion differs from mere 'suspension of disbelief'. Immersion has a performative element that requires the user

to actively participate in the fictional world, usually by making choices about how to proceed. Interestingly, this often requires the use of techniques that run contrary to the suspension of disbelief. In a digital game such as *Grand Theft Auto 3*, for example, immersion is only possible because the game makes its 'gameness' explicit – e.g. by pointing out specific characters and locations extra-diegetically (i.e. through large arrows above characters' heads). This allows the player to react to the game almost instinctively, thus increasing the depth of her immersion. It is still unclear to what extent this depends on the 'naturalization' of digital games' unique codes and conventions.

In the context of this study, Ryan‘s concept of temporal immersion is perhaps the most interesting, as she asserts that “temporal immersion incites us to rush through the text toward the blissful state of retrospective omniscience. Temporal immersion is the reader’s desire for the knowledge that awaits her at the end of narrative time. Suspense, the technical name for this desire, is […] a certain type of experience – namely “an emotion or state of mind arising from a partial and anxious uncertainty about the progression or outcome of an action.” (Ryan 2001: 140) Thus immersion is posited as being caused by (or perhaps as actually being) the creation of uncertainty within the game. We thus seek to address this fear of the unknown by rushing through a text until that uncertainty has been resolved. With regard to narrative Ryan argues that temporal immersion describes the reader’s observation of the gradual reduction of a number possible outcomes to a final, single conclusion over a period of time (i.e. the duration of the narrative).

Intertextuality

The appreciation of traditional textual objects, such as novels and films, is dependent to a certain measure on the decoding of intertextual references to other media in these texts. Thus, the pleasure of consuming these texts can be seen to be contingent to a certain extent on the user's ability to identify and decode these allusions. This intertextual element also exists in new media, especially since media content is increasingly brought to the consumer through different channels simultaneously. The *Pokémon* and *Lord of the Rings* franchises can be seen as primary examples of using the intertextual web for marketing purposes. The increasing dependence of the digital games industry on licenses and sequels emphasizes this tendency additionally.

P.D. Marshall (in Harries 2002) sees the shift from old to new media primarily in "the intensification and elaboration of the intertextual matrix" (69). The "elaborately cross-referenced media products" can be seen as "the industrial responses to the heightened value of both interactivity and play for audiences" (ibid.). For Marshall this is problematic because producers, who use it to resell the same products over and over again, largely control this process. But intertextuality is also important from the point of view of genre. Games are often based on genre fiction, especially science fiction, horror and espionage. Having a general understanding of genre conventions makes it easier to understand the heuristic protocols of the game.

Intertextuality is certainly an important element of DVD consumption. Especially as evidenced within ‘add-on’s’ extensive foregrounding of intertextual details regarding the production of the film is supplied, which ensures value-added ‘new pleasures’ for the user, while at times also reducing the mystique of special effects. Clearly there are multiple overlapping pleasures to be considered: the pleasure of consumption, of literally being allowed to buy one's way into a fictional universe (almost literally so in the case of MMORPGs such as *Star Wars Galaxies*) as well as the pleasure of play. The intertextual back-story may be vital to generate the initial pleasure of consumption but may fade as the consumer becomes a player, i.e. actually takes the game out of the box and begins playing it.

Intertextuality thus emerges as a concept that is both limiting and liberating. The ‘intertextual matrix’ created by the media industry severely limits the choices of the users, but intertextual references also destabilize and de-authorize the text, thus laying it open for the users’ own interpretative strategies.

Narrative

It has been pointed out above that many theorists of new media regard narrative as a concept of the past, inseperably linked to the discourse of modernity and linear progress. They posit open spaces and modes of explorative consumption as new models for the reception of and the interaction with new media. But then of course, narrative has been declared *passé* innumerable times, and has still emerged again and again in literature and film. As outlined above, the so-called 'narratologists' have met strong resistance in the field of digital games studies, as their attempts to make sense of these new media forms using the terminology of literary and film studies has been conceived as 'theoretical imperialism'.

But even the most dogmatic 'ludologists' cannot deny that narrative still plays a certain role in many digital games. While games of skill such as *Tetris* and sports games such as *Virtua Tennis* do not feature much of a story, other games such as *Ico* and *Deus Ex* rely heavily on the plot line that the player has to follow. While the ludologists would argue that these games are less playful than more open-ended games like *SimCity*, these are nevertheless perceived as games by their players, rather than as a form of interactive film. In DVDs and digital television, the dependence on narrative can be seen as the continuation of the tradition of film and broadcast television.

It is interesting to note that digital games are increasingly used to *produce* narrative text. As Henry Jenkins points out, the *Sims* 'scrapbook' function is often used as a storytelling device: "Indeed, while the scrapbooks were intended to record game actions, many players report that they play the game to get the images they need to complete narratives they want to tell." (251) Similarly, 'novelizations' of computer games (such as the narrative based on the classic LucasArts adventure game *Sam & Max Hit The Road* [http://www.fortunecity.com/meltingpot/neches/158/snm1.htm]) and 'walkthroughs' are fixed textual representations of the more fluid game format. These examples point to the continued usefulness of more traditional approaches like narratology to understand new media.

This review of concepts is based on our literature review, our own play sessions and a focus group with some university students. We hypothesised that a broader range of people however might give us some useful insights into how these concepts and the relationship between them might be altered by demographics, user experience, the hardware and software being used and the context of use. In sections 5 and 6 we explore the usefulness of these concepts when examined in relation to a small number of different types of users in different contexts

5. METHODOLOGY

As one of the aims of this pilot study was to assess different methods to address the question of pleasure and new media, a wide variety of methodological tools and techniques were used over the course of the project. This section will share some of our insights into the usefulness (or lack of usefulness, as the case may be) of each method.

The first step in this process was an extensive **review of literature** from both new and more traditional media studies, which provided the team with a number of key concepts and perspectives. The review included work on pleasure and media consumption (e.g. Fiske 1987, Silverstone 1999, (Garnham 2000) and on new media in general (e.g. Lister et al. 2003, Bolter and Grusin 2001, Manovich 2001). These readings were complemented by literature focusing on play (Avedon and Sutton-Smith 1971, Caillois 1961, Salen and Zimmerman 2003, Kline et al. 2003) and writings analyzing individual new media (e.g. Kilker 2003, White 2003, Newman 2002).

What was interesting about the literature review process in this project was that it resembled a reading group. Each week the team would agree to read a particular chapter of a book or journal article and then come together the following week to discuss it. In the academic context, this discursive and collaborative approach to doing a literature review is rare, and the consensus was that it led to a better understanding of the literature. At the same time this approach had perhaps a downside; it took the team a long time to get through the core texts and it was difficult to decide when to stop reading.

Parallel to the literature review, the researchers set up **media use sessions** to gain first-hand experience of the media to be studied. These occurred in group sessions in DCU and in homes of friends and colleagues. Each researcher also carried out individual sessions in their own homes. The media use sessions involved gaining access to, using and evaluating the conventions and controls of digital console games (e.g. *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, *Half-Life*, *Rez, Enter the Matrix*), the range of bonus materials offered on DVDs (e.g. *Artificial Intelligence*, *8 Mile*) and the functionality and services offered by digital television packages in Ireland (*Sky Digital, NTL Digital*). The media use sessions were very useful in relation to the weekly theoretical discussions and proved invaluable when it came to the subsequent face-to-face interviews with media users. They were also helpful in identifying the differences between individual consumption and consumption in a social context.

In the initial research meetings there was much discussion as to the usefulness of qualitative content analysis techniques to explore some of the pleasures available to users of particular new media products. Other work had found, for example, that the dynamic nature of digital games posed particular challenges for these research techniques (Kennedy 2002).

In order to explore these challenges two of the researchers linked console machines to video recorders in their homes and **recorded a 'play session'** of '*Enter the Matrix*'. The video recording captured the researchers' choices, successes and failures in the game and the videotape was then given to a third researcher. The third researcher critically analysed the recorded text to see to what extent one could read off the pleasures of a game from watching it as opposed to actually playing it. The final stage of this exercise involved the researchers coming together to discuss the tensions and harmonies between the players' experiences and the observers' impressions. What emerged was that there was quite a distance between the players' pleasures and the observers' reading of the pleasures. Another interesting issue were the differences between the two recordings. These differences related to differing styles of play and competence levels.

This research technique was useful in terms of highlighting the methodological and theoretical complexities faced by researchers with regard to new media texts. It also highlighted the differences between watching and playing a game and the diversity of subjective pleasures the same text can generate. While the latter is arguably no different from the findings of numerous

audience studies of traditional media texts; the group felt the extent to which the actual media text, rather than the individual readings of the text, changed, problematised the whole notion of a new media 'text' and the diverse pleasures it might offer.

This recording or screen capture technique has been used elsewhere in studies of PC playing sessions (Wright, Boria et al. 2002; Wright and Briedenbach 2002) but in this instance the technique was used as a way of problematising the concept of the 'text' and exploring the extent to which a traditional qualitative content analysis approach works in relation to new media, more generally, and digital games more specifically. The team felt that it would be rather time consuming to apply this video capture and discussion technique in a larger research project and perhaps video capture might be more useful in the field as a way of getting players to reflect upon what they were doing and experiencing during a particular play session.

There is always a danger in any media study of over-valorizing the opinions of the researchers. Having explored the literature and built up the team's knowledge of the media under study, it was time to discuss notions of pleasure with users outside the research team. In January 2004 the team ran a focus group made up of 7 undergraduate students from the School of Communications who were familiar with the media in question. The discussion was facilitated by two researchers and the audio recording was transcribed and subsequently discussed by the research team.

The focus group proved very useful in terms of clarifying terms, exploring use patterns and establishing what people enjoyed and did not enjoy about digital games, DVDs and digital television. It emerged that the concept of pleasure, and it apparent opposite un-pleasure, was a difficult topic to discuss, even for media students. In the end terms like enjoyment and difficulties, annoyances and limits were used as ways of approaching our discussion of pleasure. Interestingly, the group used terms and expressions like control, immersion, performance, flow and 'being in the zone' frequently without prompting.

The data, which emerged from the focus group, was used to draft two questionnaires: one self-administered structured questionnaire and one semi-structured set of questions to be used in face-to-face interviews.

The next stage was to recruit interviewees. From the beginning the team were faced with the limited time and other resources of a small scale pilot project. In a three-month project only about 6 weeks could be devoted to recruiting, gathering data, analysing and writing up. In addition, it was clear that the goal of this empirical work was to extend the team's understanding of particular theoretical concepts rather than to select a random sample and to generate statistically valid findings as to the distribution of new media pleasures across the Irish population. What we were interested in exploring was how our core concepts were experienced by different types of users, with different levels of experience, different technologies and in different contexts. While our sample was not going to be representative we still tried to locate as broad a range of users as possible who used two of the three media under study regularly. We felt that it would be very useful to see where people used these new media and thus we decided to interview people in their homes.

In the final instance the project recruited five different types of households: a person living alone, a family with children under 15 (U15), a family with children over 15 (O15), friends co-habiting and partners co-habiting. Initially we had wanted to recruit six households, one female living alone and one male living alone, but it proved extremely difficult to find anyone living alone in Dublin, probably due to the high cost of rent! In the end we did locate one male who lived alone.

In order to locate these households we posted a notice on www.gamedevelopers.ie and we made announcements to two different undergraduate classes in the School of Communications. These communications allowed us to get in touch with a range of people and in some cases volunteers suggested other possible interviewees, in a classic snowball sampling technique.

Each household received **two self-administered questionnaires** along with a stamped self-addressed envelope. E-mail was used to prompt responses and each response was used to prepare for the face-to-face interviews.

Three things emerged from this exercise. Firstly, some of the questions could be made more useful by adding more variables, e.g. a temporal dimension. Secondly, open-ended questions often elicited very short answers and thirdly, people more often than not did not answer the ranking questions properly.

Despite the literature review and focus group we also discovered that some of our terminology remained ambiguous. People had problems for example with a question which asked what analogue television channels they watched on their digital television service – they pointed out that they were all digital signals - and with a question which asked what was their favourite digital television programme - in this sample interviewees had favourite channels rather than favourite programmes. Finally, while the term 'features' was acceptable with interviewees when used to refer to the extras on DVDs and the services offered by digital television, but interviewees pointed out that they would not use the term to refer to the various controls offered by digital games. These issues are relevant not only to this project, but also to other new media research projects in STeM.

Eleven people in total (1 pilot and 10 others) returned questionnaires. The age profile of this group ranged from 8 to 55, but the majority were in their twenties. Three of the sample were female and all but one were Irish. All of the interviewees lived in Dublin and four of them had studied an IT related course to third level. Four of the interviewees were still in school/college and one was a part-time student (see Table 1).

Table 1: Overview of questionnaires

Interviewee	Age	Sex	Education	industry	Income in €	House type
1	26	M	Degree	telecomms	15-30,000	Cohabitor
2	25	F	Diploma	education	15-30,000	Cohabitor
3	55	M	Degree	financial services	70-100,000	Family (O15)
4	21	M	L. cert*	N/A	0-15,000	Family (O15)
5	34	M	Degree	IT	30-50,000	Individual
6	23	M	Degree	IT	30-50,000	House share
7	29	M	Pg cert**	Education	30-50,000	House share
8	11	F	NA	N/A	0-15,000	Family (U15)
9	41	F	Pg. Cert	Education	0-15,000	Family (U15)
10	8	M	NA	N/A	0-15,000	Family (U15)
pilot	21	M	L. cert	N/A	0-15,000	Family

* leaving certificate
** postgraduate certificate

The **face-to-face semi-structured interviews** were more like small focus groups whereby all interviewees were involved in a simultaneous tape-recorded discussion about their use of new media in the home. Reference was also made to their use of new media while commuting, at work and in college/school. Two researchers attended each interview session in order to support each other and pay attention to the spatial and inter-personal dynamic in the household. Key issues examined were:

- the relationship between the use of different media in the household context
- the dynamics of media use within the context of the particular household

- temporal and spatial aspects of new media use
- control and new media enjoyment
- performance and new media enjoyment
- intertextuality and new media enjoyment
- immersion and new media enjoyment
- boredom/repetition and new media
- tricks/cheating and new media transformations
- narrative and new media
- play and flow in relation to new media

The semi-structured interviews allowed the researchers to clarify any ambiguities which had arisen in the questionnaires and to explore the usefulness of our core concepts in relation to demographics, experience, context of use and particular examples of media products and services identified in the questionnaires.

A clear problem with this research technique is that it only offers a snapshot of the domestic leisure context and one can only gather a small amount of information in a standard length interview. In addition, these types of interviews are very time consuming in relation to their arrangement, execution and subsequent analysis. Finally, the team had to always remember that this exercise was being conducted in order to improve our knowledge of how context might influence the enjoyment of different media and not to posit universal findings.

As each face-to-face interview involved two researchers, the team decided that it would be useful for one of the researchers to produce a **map** of the domestic leisure space. This technique had already proved useful in a study in Australia (Flynn 2003) and the STeM group were keen to establish its usefulness in the Irish context. The aim of this technique is to map the layout of the domestic leisure space and the viewing/playing positions that interviewees usually adopt. The maps also included data about the position of the living room/bedroom within the home, the preferred position of the respondents vis-à-vis the media device used and the position of different media devices in relation to each other.

The hand-drawn maps of peoples' homes were inputted into PowerPoint and provided very strong images of the households without the distraction of unnecessary colour. They also proved very useful in subsequent discussions with other members of the research group who had not been present at the interview.

The next stage of this pilot project involved **transcoding** of the interviews, with two researchers simultaneously, but in different locations, coding the transcripts of the household interviews. These reviews of the interviews were then circulated to the group and compared with each other and the draft literature review document to establish if the empirical work could contribute to, or extend, our understanding of pleasure.

Finally, the document you are reading is the result of an intensive **hermeneutic process**. This involved the circulation of the report between all members of the project team for repeated editing and commenting. This process proved useful, but the cessation of this process felt arbitrary as it was dictated by temporal constraints rather than the closure of the hermeneutic process. However, at some point someone had to take responsibility and conduct the final edit.

Table 2 Overview of New Media: New Pleasures Research Methods

Research Method	Pros	Cons
1. Literature Review	Framing Discourse Finding new areas for analysis	Too much literature, not knowing when to stop.
2. Media use sessions	Analysis of praxis Increase awareness of new media.	Time consuming and maybe too specific/limited to actual texts and time/space use
3. Recorded play sessions	Analysis of praxis and own pleasures Explore performance issues	Time consuming and very specific
4. Focus Group	Quick, efficient overview Good to unpack theories and concepts	Danger of biasing research Difficulty in creating a representative sample Needs good recording equipment.
5. Self-administered questionnaire	Objective, efficient, comprehensive. Helped to frame face to face interviews.	Unable to decode environmental and media context. Unanswered questions and ambiguities. Open ended questions difficult to phrase. Need consistency checks.
6. Face to face interviews in the home	Efficient. Richness of individuals, context, relationships. Demonstration and discussion of performance and pleasures.	Hawthorne effect, performing for interviewee. Need to have more than one interviewer for multiple interviewees. Time consuming. Can be influenced by factors outside the control of the interviewers; e.g. school results, visitors.
7. Maps	Can draw comparisons between and visual spatial context. Informs discussions with researchers who were not present.	Suggests objectivity, when in fact maps are highly subjective
8. Transcoding of interviews	Detailed textual record of interview. Richness. Everyday language. Different interpretations of the same record.	Differing styles of transcription and levels of interpretation. Time consuming. Can lose colour/subtext of interview if not detailed enough
9. Hermeneutic report writing	Mapping the empirical to the theoretical and bringing it all together	Can be lengthy unless there is a lead editor and a timetable for finalisation

6. ISSUES ARISING FROM EMPIRICAL WORK AND FURTHER QUESTIONS

Given the small sample of households examined in the fieldwork stage of this project we cannot generate any generalisations from our population and are not in a position to answer the questions posed in the introduction. In this section we point to some interesting findings, which illustrate, or in some cases challenge, the work reviewed in the literature review.

Play

It would appear from our interviews that play is used as a descriptive term not only in relation to games media and content, but also in relation to both new and old media more generally. For example, interviewees in these households talked about playing a DVD and a video. When asked why they used the term to refer to pressing a button they answered because that is what was written on the button. They also talked about 'playing with' the browse function on their digital television service.

This draws attention to the fact that 'play' has a variety of meanings in everyday language, even if the researchers had acquired a very specific understanding of play during the course of the project. As the concept of play is only defined very vaguely (even in the academic literature on the subject), the use of this term by the interviewees must not be overrated. Nevertheless it is evident that play can be used as a generic term for the use of both old and new media devices. We were clearly interested in a more interactive and participatory form of play than the pressing of a button and the movement through menus. As described in our literature review we were primed to look for links between play and control, immersion and performance, and to repetitive, laborious and transformative modes of play.

In the five households examined interviewees were engaged in playing digital games on personal computers, on consoles, on handhelds and on mobile phones. Some of the households had also accessed and played digital games via their digital television service. Some DVDs also provided games as part of their add-ons.

For our interviewees, play could take the form of non-transformative play, i.e., playing with the content of a console, PC or mobile game, or it could take the form of transformative play, whereby the player tries to subvert the original goals of the designers by playing with and in some cases transforming the rules and code of the system. The extent to which one could move from non-transformative to transformative play was related to the type of platform being used and the technical competency of the user. In general, while the potential exists for transformative play, our households were content to play within the rules of the game and engage in non-transformative play.

Interestingly, most of the play the interviewees engaged in or described would seem to fall in Caillois' *agôn* category, i.e. competitive play. *Alea* and *ilinx* were strikingly absent, and if mimicry played a role in the ludic pleasures of our interviewees, this was merely hinted at. To most players, the appearance and characteristics of the game protagonists was interesting only in their effects on gameplay. The promise of enacting the role of Legolas (*The Lord of the Rings*) or Harry Potter seemed to hold only limited appeal for the interviewees if this was not implemented in a fashion that engendered interesting challenges.

Play/Performance/ Competition

For Caillois and Sutton-Smith play is closely related to competition and control. In the households interviewed for this study, interviewees engaged in both intra-personal play, i.e., competing against the computer and themselves, and in both offline and online inter-personal play, i.e. competing against other people. These two levels of play are interlinked and some of our interviewees admitted to practicing against the computer in order to compete at a higher level

against other people. Competition was an important element of playing digital games but not for all, as the following quotations show.

> 'Well, most people play games to compete against someone else or compete against a computer or compete with themselves even, if it is not challenging you just get bored.' HH1, Int 2. Female, aged 25.

> 'It is maybe me, I am the least competitive person around, but, I would like to see gameplay coming out of something that is not necessarily the whole beating someone or winning someone, the interaction with the object. Like Sean made that presentation, […] at the beginning the doll is nothing, but spending more time, and learning how to play with the doll, and it doesn't require a winning condition, it is just you take pleasure in playing with it' HH1 Int. 2. male, aged 26.

> 'You had to practice your ass off, putting in the hours everyday..driving the track till its late.' HH4, Int 6., male, aged 29.

> 'I practiced my ass off. Let's say we'd be doing a qualifying run for our race and you only have one lap to get it right and I remember… just the sense of competition, it was like walking out on to a soccer field and everyone watching you..and you knew they (others in the house) were in their rooms watching you and the nerves..' HH4, Int.7, male, aged 23.

For most of the interviewees playing against other people was preferable to playing alone against the machine. For example, in Household 3 our interviewee, who lived alone, noted that while the built in artificial intelligence in the boardgame on his mobile phone wasn't bad, a 'half-decent player' would beat the phone. He explained that the phone always played according to pre-defined rules, no matter how often one played, while in a real game the two players would adapt to each other's playing styles. Inter-personal play can take place both offline (with multiple controllers connected to a single console) and online (via the internet) and in both social situations both formal and informal rules and regulations apply.

> 'It is better fun when you know people. It's a really good server, because there's no messing, not too slagging – it's policed really well.. if you start using bad language you just get kicked off and banned..everyone's nice to one another and I like that. HH4, Int. ?

> 'The racing games have a quick turnover, you only have a short round, so the racing games are good for that kind of thing, one against one, then you pass the controller to the next person.' HH1, Int 1.

> 'There are Swedish and English and German .. people online who are all really cool and I would chat with them… you just went on and just had a chat, talked crap, hung out… You'd be racing for two or three hours and you would be chatting away..and I think everybody agreed that the game saved them about €400 in going-out money.. you could hear people's doorbells in the background and they said 'hang on' and then they would bring a guest along.' HH4, Int 4.

An important aspect of enjoyment in game playing is playing against someone whose skill level is relatively close to one's own. Thus competition is linked to ones performance level or competence and playing online placed extra pressure on one to perform because online players tended to be very good and one didn't know in advance the other's playing style. It is not a pressure that everyone enjoys.

> 'Playing online – you have to be reasonably skilled. You have to be able to compete. In terms of racing games it can't be that after one lap they're 40 seconds ahead, there's no point. Most of the gaming I do is offline. I'll practice a bit on a certain track and find people who are on that track and go play with them. A lot of the people online are very, very good – it wouldn't be enjoyable if you couldn't compete with them.' HH4, Int. 6

> 'You're playing against people that you don't know. I am fascinated by the fact that you can have eight different people from eight different countries play at the same time. …

> online it's always a challenge. You could actually physically see people improving as they went along, their skills improving. …When you are playing against people you know it becomes kind of predictable. HH 2, Int. 4

> 'Any feedback I've had from multi-player online games was really people weren't really enjoying it. It is still a very early stage.. The shoot-em-ups on the Internet, …*Counterstrike*, terrorists versus counter-terrorists, is the most successful multi-player [game] but as far as role playing is going … everybody is complaining that you have to go in there and the bigger guys, if they find a weak character, cause you gain experience in the kill, they just slash you needlessly, so the only way to get experience is by killing all the giant rats. Boring, you have to kill a hundred giant rats.' HH1, Int. 1.

The final quotation points to competition and the boring practice or work-like, element of playing digital games. Whether it is collecting 1,000 gold coins or killing 1,000 giant rats, sometimes game playing can be tedious but as some argue, this delayed gratification may ultimately increase one's overall pleasure if one attains one's goal. But it is a fine balancing act and for some this exercise in patience gets too tedious and they cease playing. It would appear that for our interviewees one's tolerance and the amount of time one is willing to invest in game playing may decrease as one gets older.

> 'You are buying these devices to relax, so frustrating games..the first game I remember playing was Monty on the Run on the Commodore 64. I never got past level 3. If that happened now I would throw the cassette out the window.. But when you are younger it is a challenge, you'd try 50 million times to get past the first stage, 50 million times to get past the second stage,' HH2, Int 4.

Control

When asked to describe playing digital games to a person who is alien to the planet most people used the terms 'feedback', 'interaction', 'control', 'reponse', and 'competition'. They also talked about 'exploring strange new worlds'. In describing DVDs, people talked about 'watching' and 'listening'. In relation to digital television it was 'browsing', 'watching', 'background noise.'

An important aspect of control in new media is the mode of interaction and this includes the remote control or joypad and the on-screen menus/world. HH1 in particular was a fan of the Gamecube's controller in terms of its tactile response but acknowledged that for first person shooter type games the PC's keyboard and mouse is a better choice. In HH5, the younger members of the family had problems holding and using the controller and sometimes got mixed up as to 'who was who' on the screen. But the children liked the fact that they could 'do stuff' and 'be' different characters. Interestingly even those with digital television still saw television as a passive activity compared to digital games:

> 'When you watch TV it's a passive thing. Whereas in a game you are actually physically manipulating, especially with the online stuff coming through now, you are actively engaging in a social event. It's being able to do something you couldn't really do. I was always crap at football, but I can put up Senegal and beat Brazil with some practice.' HH2, Int. 4.

When they cannot gain control or perform at the required levels, players may resort to 'cheats' but some, as in HH1, distinguished between 'nasty' and 'good' cheats. Nasty cheats include altering the underlying code of the game (a form of meta-control or transformative play) or using cheats that make your character invincible ('God mode'), while good cheats might be 'walkthroughs', i.e. documents that show players how to proceed in a given game. Cheating was a major issue in online games and all interviewees who played online had found servers that they trusted because they regulated cheating.

> ‘People register their servers..they run leagues, they enforce rules, there’s very little cheating. I think no cheating is one of the major things because people don’t like racing someone who has modified some files that makes their car go faster … this game has a software structure in place that doesn’t allow cheating.’ HH4, Int 6.

But not all interviewees viewed digital games on consoles or PC as a cultural form over which one had more control. For a non-game-player in HH1, ‘digital games’ represented a lack of control, being told what to do, when to proceed and to repeat things because one did not achieve the necessary points to proceed. This powerlessness was also discussed in relation to learning how to navigate and understand digital games and investing enough time in them in order to complete or advance in them. HH1, HH5 and HH3 talked about the problems involved in learning to operate and the problems using a PS2 or a PC as a DVD player. HH2 talked about the inability to skip past the menu and advertising on DVDs.

> ‘I would much prefer to sit reading a book using my own imagination than getting involved in a a game and the computer telling me right do the next level or repeat the next level cause you didn’t get enough points. Things like that I find quite annoying.’ HH1, Int. 2.

> ‘Since we only got the PS2 at Christmas we haven’t really gotten used to it (for DVDs). … I prefer the video, because I am used to it.’ HH5, Int. 8

> ‘I bought a couple of DVDs earlier this year. I watched them via the PC but obviously the computer has got a lot of background noise, cause the discs are spinning … so it is a medium which can be quite distracting. It is not particularly attractive as a DVD player. [A friend] brought a DVD player over last October and it hasn’t left the house since …I can’t remember the last time I bought a lot of videos, I just think they (DVDs) are easier to deal with…’ HH3, Int. 5

> ‘Well, I think if we had a proper TV and a proper DVD player underneath it or whatever it wouldn’t be a problem, we would be able to put the DVDs on but the way it is set up now we have the video here instead, so it is just as easy to get a video.’ HH1, Int 2.

HH1 and HH3 noted that when they had lived abroad they got used to a range of services on interactive television which were not offered in Ireland. For example, in order to pay to watch a particular football match HH3 used the remote control to go through a number of onscreen menus only to be told that the final transaction required a telephone call where they had to repeat much of the same information. NTL in particular was singled out for their lack of two-way interactive functionality although the ability to browse channels while also watching was seen as useful. This distracted mode of viewing television is an interesting finding in relation to understanding how people use the television in their home.

> ‘There are a couple of features on NTL which allow you to browse other programmes while actually watching a programme that is on at the time, again you are not particularly focused, generally I prefer to use the browse function which keeps the programme on rather than using the full menus ‘ HH3, Int. 5.

Interestingly, people varied in their opinions of, and willingness to tolerate, the levels of control offered by new media. For some, digital television offered a greater choice of channels and control over one’s viewing pattern where for others the same system and set of choices equated with not enough control. For some, one had to browse too much to find anything of interest, while for others browsing equated choice and control. For some, repeating the same action over and over in digital games meant a lack of control but for others digital games epitomized greater control over media content.

For some, DVDs offered a facility to browse to particular scenes in a film and replay it over and over, while for others the fact that one couldn’t fast forward as in videos was a frustrating lack of control. For some, phases of ‘repetition’ and ‘work’ in a game are all part of the, albeit delayed, pleasure of digital games, while for others this signals pure displeasure which they are unwilling

to endure. Significantly these findings signal the varying levels at which a state of flow, i.e. the balance between challenge and competence, or between complexity and boredom, is achieved by different people.

Flow/ Immersion/ Performance

Playing digital games on different platforms and watching digital television and DVDs involved varying levels of immersion:

> 'TV can be mind numbing after a while. Instead of sitting for one hour you end up sitting for ten hours and wondering what have I done this evening.. I tend to watch a lot of rubbish as well, like I end up sitting down and just getting lazy..' HH1, Int. 2.

However in digital games, when a certain level of immersion is joined by a certain level of performance one can achieve an optimal state which Csikszentmihalyi (1988) has called 'flow', or what one interviewee called being 'in the zone'. This state involves a loss of self-consciousness, but, paradoxically perhaps, a very engaged and kinaesthetic form of pleasure. To stay in a state of flow one must increase the complexity of the activity and take on new skills and challenges. In digital games, this increasing complexity is built into the progression between levels but can also be adjusted using the menus provided by the game. Further, digital games usually contain clear goals and provide clear and unambiguous feedback, other key elements of the flow experience (1988:32)

> 'You get more involved, as in lose track of time, with PC games than with console games. You would be missing meals, you just get so involved. You'd say, 'its two o'clock, I'll have lunch in an hour, why is it ten o'clock?' that's never happened to me on a console, but it has happened a couple of times on PC.'

And later..

> 'In Halo it gets to the point that you just do stuff on instinct. You don't even think about it. It becomes an extention of your body. I played a few games and I'd just suddenly get short (and I'd say) 'How did you see me?' and he'd say 'I didn't, I just shot.' It is kind of like you get in the zone. I like it because you can adjust it and all my friends have their different settings saved, different sensitivities and button set-ups.' HH2, Int 4.

Narrative

Narrative played a somewhat less obvious role in our household's consumption of new media although this varied between media.

In relation to digital games HH2 had played Halo at least four times (but possibly more often). While *Halo* can be characterized as a narrative-driven game, the plot certainly ceases to be interesting after playing through the game several times. However, the different difficulty settings and cooperative mode made the game appealing to our interview even after all these repetitions:

> [I've played *Halo*] once on the easiest setting, once on the medium and I don't know how many times on the hardest setting. And a few cooperative ones as well. HH2, Int. 4

Meanwhile in HH4 one interviewee felt that stories and plot were important, particularly in single player games.

> I think the stories are important actually. I rarely play single player games but one recent game where the story really impressed me was *May Payne II.* In between levels they had cut in comic book scenes in a film noir style. I'd never seen a story done to that level – a cop investigation in a game. You finished a level and you sit back, its real dark with all the thunder in the background. It really drew you in.' HH4, Int. 6.

With DVDs favourite scenes were sometimes re-watched in preference to watching the whole film. People tended to buy DVDs of films they had already seen and liked but the key selling point of a DVD was less the film itself, but rather to get access to the add-ons and/or restored versions of older films. Music DVDs were bought if the band or particular concert were liked.

> [LA Confidential] has loads of extras. There's some really good production notes on it, documentaries, interviews, an interactive map of LA … it's just very well put-together.
> - […]
>
> It's getting better all the time. When they're filming, they have all this stuff in mind now. Star Wars, the first three are coming out on DVD, and they won't come out until they're ready. Because they're digitizing all the old stuff and updating special effects, etc and it looks perfect. HH2, Int. 4
>
> There are the extra features in it which give it so much more extra meaning. … and the fact that you have an archive that is searchable, .. you can just pick the scenes that you want to re-watch. HH1, Int. 2.

While interviewees did have favourite programmes and channels on digital television they often used it as a background medium while they did something else, or they channel surfed/browed while also watching a programme. If one really liked a particular programme digital television allowed them to view it many times given that it would be shown on many different channels.

> The only time I would actually watch TV would be when I was eating something. Or I put it on before I go to sleep.
> […]
> I wouldn't watch soaps, it would wreck my head. I watch The Simpsons, because it's funny. I would watch decent enough comedies. I watch stuff like Horizon – decent, well-produced programmes. HH2, Int. 4
>
> Like Sex and the City, the last episode was last Thurs and it was on again Fri, Sat, Sun, Monday, Tues,
> Q – how many times have you watched it?
> At least two and a half times. HH1, Int. 1.

Intertextuality

Intertextuality was discussed at length in the interview with HH 5. In the choice of digital games, intertextual references to films and books seemed to play a certain role for choosing these games over others. In answer to the question 'Do you like games whose characters you already know from films or television?', interviewee 10 answered:

> Yes, because when you haven't seen the movie, you don't know who the characters are. You have to look at the book and find out their names, etc.

However, intertextuality seemed to be unable to make up for a bad game, as exemplified by the brief discussion of the *Harry Potter* game:

> Int. 8: I read all [Harry Potter books]. I also saw the films.
> Int. 9: Didn't you have a PlayStation 1 *Harry Potter* game? You never really played that.
> Int. 8: The graphics are terrible. The faces are square.

In other cases, intertextual references did not even seem to be an incentive to play a certain game at all, as became apparent from the discussion of the *Lord of the Rings* game:

Int. 9: We got Lord of the Rings for [Int. 8], but she didn't even open it.
Int. 8: I don't like fighting. I do like Tekken 4, but …
Int 9.: She's reading all the [Lord of the Rings] books at the moment.
Int. 8: Yes. I read to the end of the novel where the world changes and they are all going home…
Interviewer: Which character in The Lord of the Rings do you like best?
Int. 8: Legolas. I love him.
Interviewer: Legolas is one of the characters you can play in the game, isn't that right?
Int. 8: Yes, but I still didn't want to play.

In the final analysis intertextuality did not play as important a role in the new media pleasures of these households as we had anticipated. This requires further exploration but may also suggest that the relationship of intertextuality to our other core concepts may need to be rethought.

Spatial, Social and Domestic Context.

In this paper we have focused our attention on textual pleasures. Appendix A contains a description of the spatial, social and domestic contexts of our households and Appendix B contains a number of maps which proved useful as both a mnemonic and a heuristic device for the research team. The relationship between consumption context and textual pleasures was somewhat beyond the scope of this pilot study but is an aspect of new media pleasures which we would like to explore more in future research.

Final Thoughts

We faced a number of non-trivial theoretical and a methodological difficulties when we choose to explore new media pleasures. It may be useful to others if we clarify these here.

1. The tension between on the one hand reviewing all the different approaches to studying pleasure and the need to complete the project on time. In any future project we would broaden our theoretical approaches to include a feminist perspective on pleasure.

2. The difficulties we faced as researchers formulating questions about pleasure and the difficulties interviewees had articulating their pleasures.

3. The complexity of distinguishing between action and behaviour and between jouissance and plaisir in empirical contexts.

4. The temptation to go beyond people's behaviour and statements to produce some psychological explanation of their activities.

5. The need to look at the ongoing changes in the relationship between the consumption of new media and the consumption of older media.

6. The need to explore in greater depth and detail how our core concepts are influenced by factors like demographics, personal experience, hardware and software and contexts of use.

7. The need to take account of the variety of consumption contexts which exist from sitting rooms to bedrooms, public transport, work and education and the continuing atomisation of media consumption.

In this working paper we have tried to highlight some useful concepts and methods while also pointing to some of the difficulties we encountered when attempting to study textual pleasures in relation to digital television, DVDs, game consoles and personal computers. While we remain confident about the usefulness of our core concepts we are less so about the how the relationship works between them, the potential range of combinations and the uniqueness of these pleasures to new media. We also felt that the work benefited from our 'playing' with traditional research methods and introducing new methods like the videoed play sessions. It is clear however that in a larger project such methods might be too time consuming to employ.

A key finding for us relates to the complexity of contemporary multi-media households. Interviewees 'dipped in and out' of media consumption as they negotiated the various demands of everyday life and demonstrated an ability to consume several media simultaneously with varying degrees of attention.
While new media offer increased potential for control and play if the content is not appealing, of the right level, and easily accessible, then this potential is not sufficient on its own to grab and hold attention from competing media. At the same time this potential for control is making consumers more demanding of more traditional media and more frustrated with their limitations. For more mature consumers of digital games the potential to play and perform against other people, both offline and online, is a key pleasure.

This pilot project provided a space where full time researchers, lecturers and PhD students could come together to explore and debate emerging theories and an opportunity to get into the field and see what people in the real world are doing and thinking. There is no guarantee that funding will be found to take this project forward but we would like this working paper and future writing to stimulate discussion and debate about pleasure and how it relates to new media.

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APPENDIX A – DESCRIPTION OF CONSUMPTION CONTEXTS

HH1 were a couple cohabiting in a small apartment. The TV and the computer were in the same room and since they only had one television; the digital service meant that while one watched something on one channel the other could be surfing the menus for what might be on other channels. In other instances; one could be watching television while the other sat close by, facing the opposite direction and wearing headphones while playing on the computer: 'the computer is my space and the TV is (hers)'. In this household, the two inhabitants, limited by space and personal interests, had to negotiate who got to watch what channel and how much time got devoted to game playing.

This household watched DVDs on the computer but this was seen as awkward, as the whole table with the computer on it had to be moved in front of the sofa. As a result they still watched more videos because the system was attached to the television and easy to operate.

> 'Well, I think if we had a proper TV and a proper DVD player underneath it or whatever it wouldn't be a problem, we would be able to put the DVDs on, but the way it is set up now we have the video here instead, so it is just as easy to get a video.' Int 1.

> 'I think that personally, well I am not a very technical person anyway, and I think if you have something and it does the job, there is no point in getting something better. So our video recorder works fine and there are still loads of choice of videos. So I wouldn't be to pushed about changing it.' Int 2.

HH2 which was a household with grown up children had a range of media in all the bedrooms, in the study and in the living room. Most of their media consumption took place in a highly personalized context, the father in the study, the older son in his bedroom, the younger son and the mother in the sitting room. Occasionally they would watch something all together in the sitting room.

> 'I have a widescreen inside (my bedroom). The TV in my room is also bigger than this one (in the living room). I don't really have a reason to leave my room… I have a 5.1 surround system inside..it's great for games. I also have a decent surround system on my PC, 4 speakers and a subwoofer. I do really care what sound sounds like' HH2, Int. 4.

For the eldest son, perhaps paradoxically, playing games and DVDs was a way of socializing without spending money. Meanwhile, he watched television while eating or while in bed. He listened to radio over the internet because he didn't want to listen to the advertising. Music DVDs were background listening when he might be working on college projects. Music videos were downloaded from the internet rather than watched on MTV. He watched television news for 'speculation', while he sought background information and analysis in newspapers and online, particularly on the BBC News website.

This interviewee also talked about how he buys a lot of his music online now but still enjoys browsing in music and DVD shops. DVD's also allowed the interviewee to extend the pleasure of the film and cinema experience. For example before he went to watch *Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* film, he went to a friends house to watch the extended versions of the first two *Lord of the Rings* films on DVD. He explained that he would only buy the DVDs of films that he liked and DVDs with extras, although he would not watch the extra features until after he had watched the film as he would feel 'kind of guilty' if he did.

HH3 was a single person living in a rented apartment. Interviewee 3 explained that all the furniture had been bought and arranged by the landlord. In order to get satellite he would have had to ask permission from the landlord – therefore, he ended up using the NTL service already provided. As in household 1, the TV and PC were in the same room, which opened onto a small

kitchen. Media consumption in this household often involved simultaneous multiple sources as he worked on the PC, monitored online forums, flicked in and out of short games online or on his mobile phone, and listened to news on the television. When something caught his attention on the news, his attention switched to the television. If the news involved something to do with a particular sports team, it often was posted as news on a particular online forum. Interestingly, the PC was turned on before the TV on entering the living room,which was partially motivated by the long time the PC took to start up..

This interviewee preferred to engage in most media activities with somebody else. He viewed playing digital games as anti-social, so if there were other people over, the television, a DVD or music on the PC were turned on. This interviewee re-watched favourite scenes from *8 Mile* on DVD or browsed the music channels on digital television after coming in from the pub or as background noise when friends were over. They also spoke about the problems using the digital TV remote control, how one couldn't undo selections once they were made, how the service did often not display the full length of programme titles, etc. For this interviewee, much of what was on digital TV was 'trash TV', often under the auspices of 'educational TV.' TV did not provide alternative perspectives and depth – he rather read books to gain more varied and in-depth knowledge about a given subject.

HH4 had four friends cohabiting in a house and offered some interesting insights into social aspects of gaming and online play in a domestic setting. In this house, they had a LAN network and each tenant had a computer in their bedrooms networked internally and externally. When there was nothing on television or they wanted some quick entertainment they would go upstairs and play a game against each other. They had a range of playing practices. Games were sometimes played alone in order to practice competence levels but short games were played as a time-filler if there was nothing on television and sometimes games were played very competitively in a structured set of games over a period of days in a league. In the second and third situation they were able to talk to each other offline while they played online against each other. A final practice was playing over the internet against people they did not know. In this context, it was important that they found a good server where they were sure people were not cheating. Playing leagues amongst themselves and playing MMORPGs, also referred to as 'heavy games', were seen as affording too much pressure, effort and time.

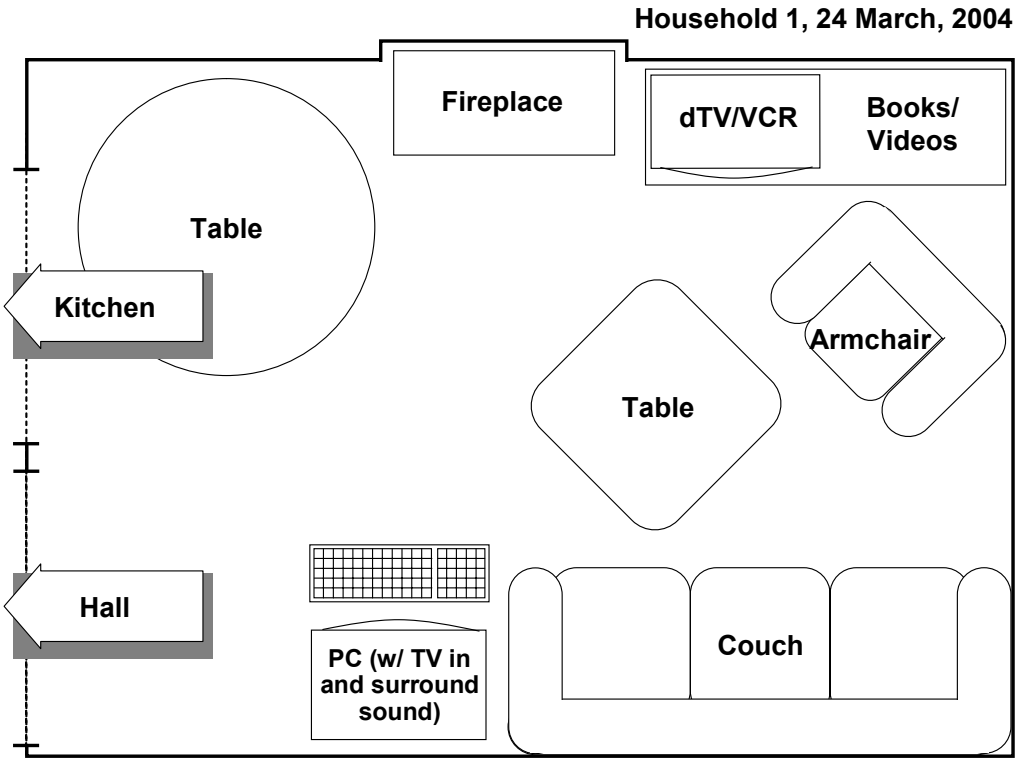
Downstairs, the house had a large television and all the consoles – although the consoles were played infrequently. They commented that there was very little on television despite all the channels. They watched the God Channel which they found 'fascinating', Formula 1 racing and comedies like *The Simpsons*. They didn't buy a lot of DVDs they said, but we observed quite a collection in the sitting room. In many cases if they liked a film they would download it over the internet and save it on their computers. They did not watch films on digital TV, as they were perceived as very old. Interestingly, they noted that when they moved into the house they did not have a television service and they got bored watching DVDs and videos, and missed the advertising and news on television.

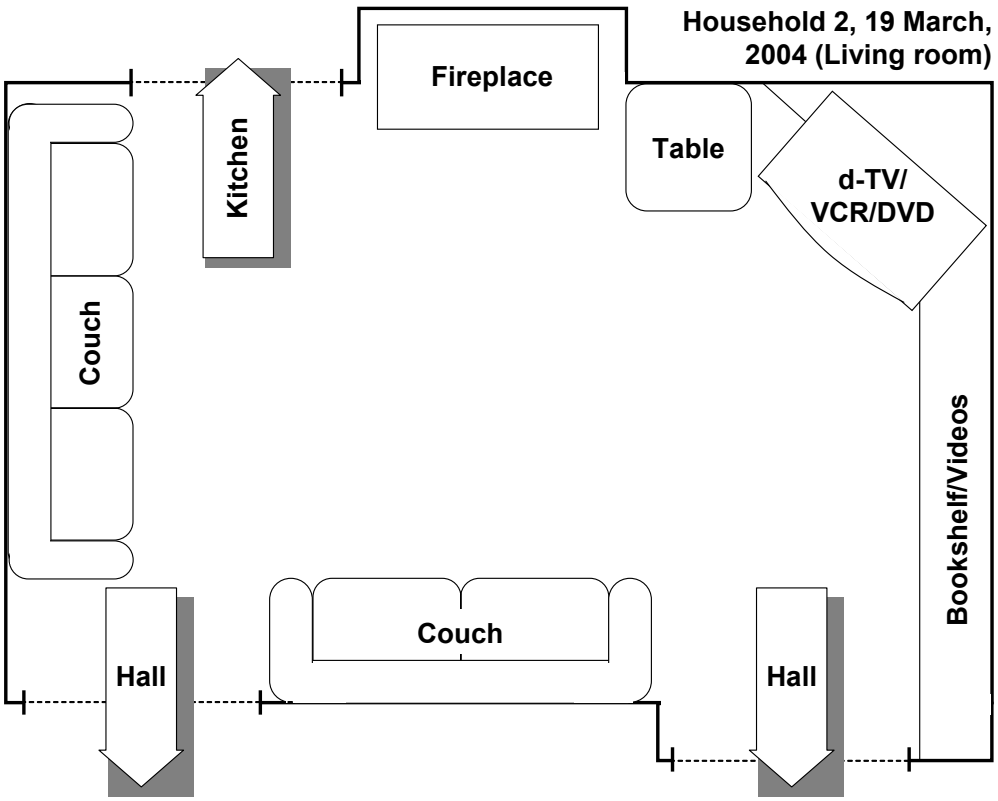
The final household was a family with four children aged between 5 and 14. They had recently acquired a PlayStation 2 but also had played PC games including *The Sims*. They used the PlayStation 2 to watch DVDs, and had standard analogue television. What was interesting in this household was the communal playing of games in the livingroom on the PS2 and the communal Friday night DVD sessions. Every Friday the mother and the children would go swimming and on the way home get a take-away and different DVD's suitable for adults and children. The children would have sweets and chocolate as a treat and the Mum and Dad a bottle of wine.
The parents in this household were concerned that games might be addictive and had resisted getting a PlayStation 2 for quite a while. However, the previous Christmas, they had relented, and the parents felt the children were quite good at regulating their play and still read a lot and went outside to play. When the family had only two children they had not had any television but the mother felt that when she wanted the children to go do something there was nothing for them

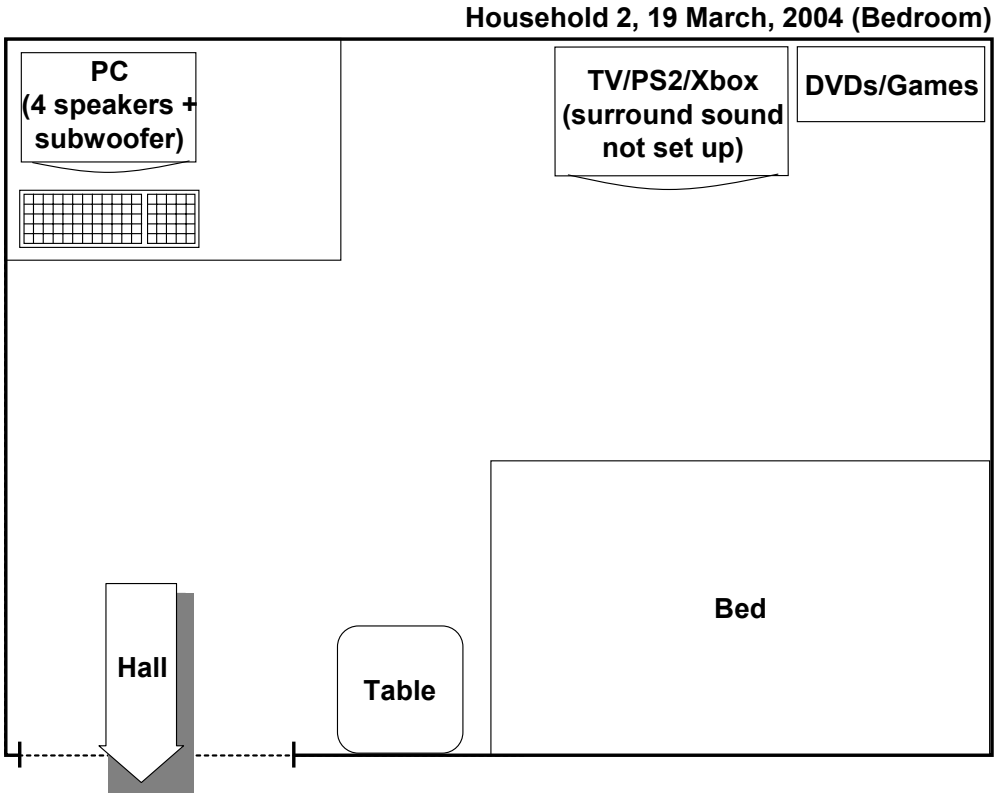
to do. There were very few children in the area to play with so they had to play together and the television provided another form of entertainment and a substitute ‘babysitter.’

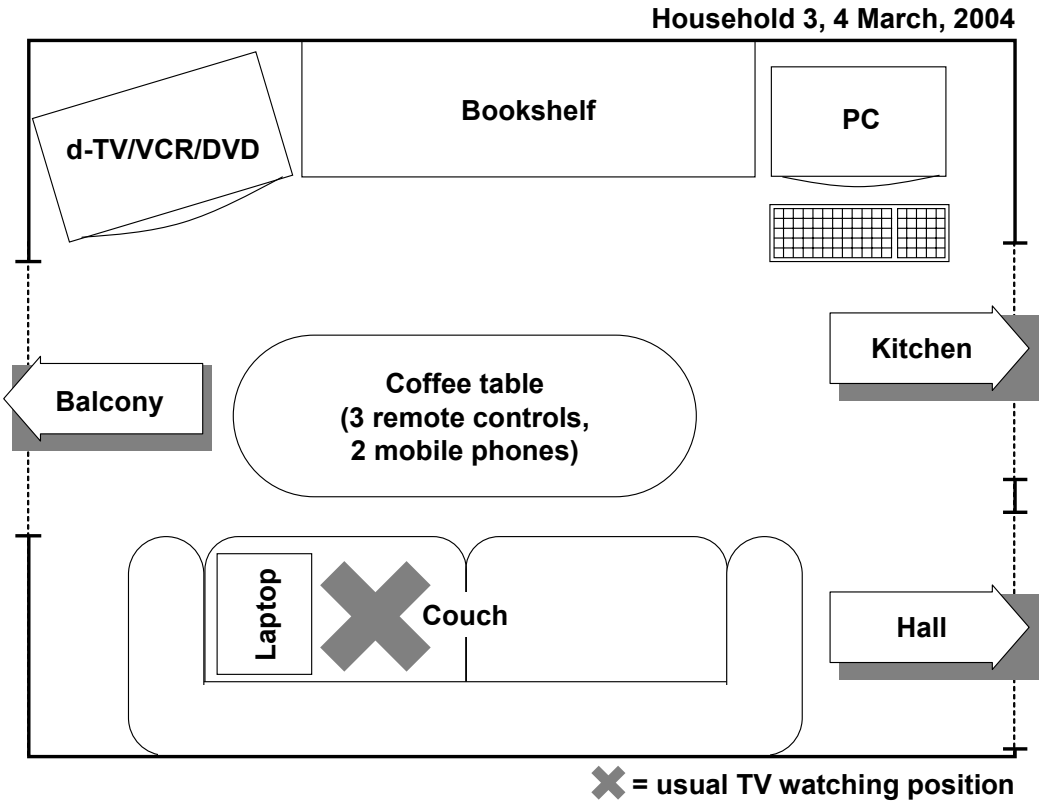
The family were going through a learning curve with the PlayStation 2 and so some of them were still more comfortable with video for watching films. For the children, friends and cousins were an important source of knowledge about games as well as platforms and they regularly went to each other’s houses to play and learn how to progress in particular games. Price was an issue for this household in relation to games as was the problem of differentiating between content aimed at children and content aimed at adults. Indeed one member of the family noted that there was also an issue finding enough appropriate DVDs for children.

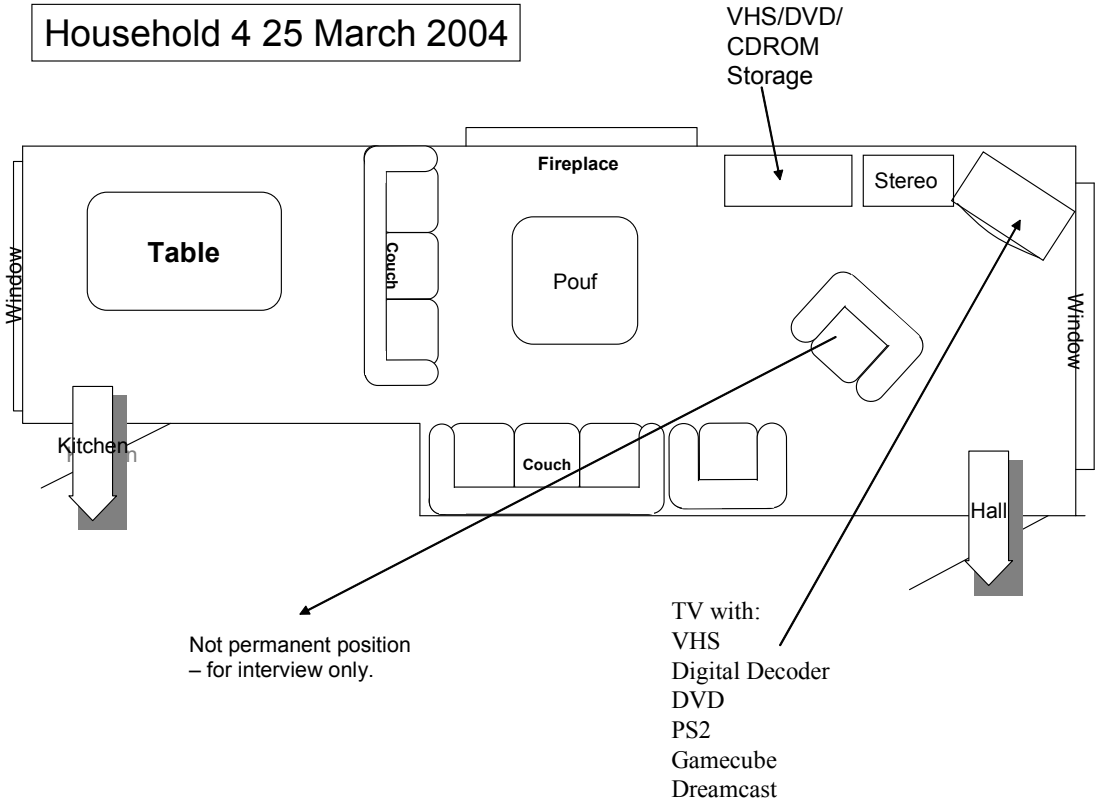
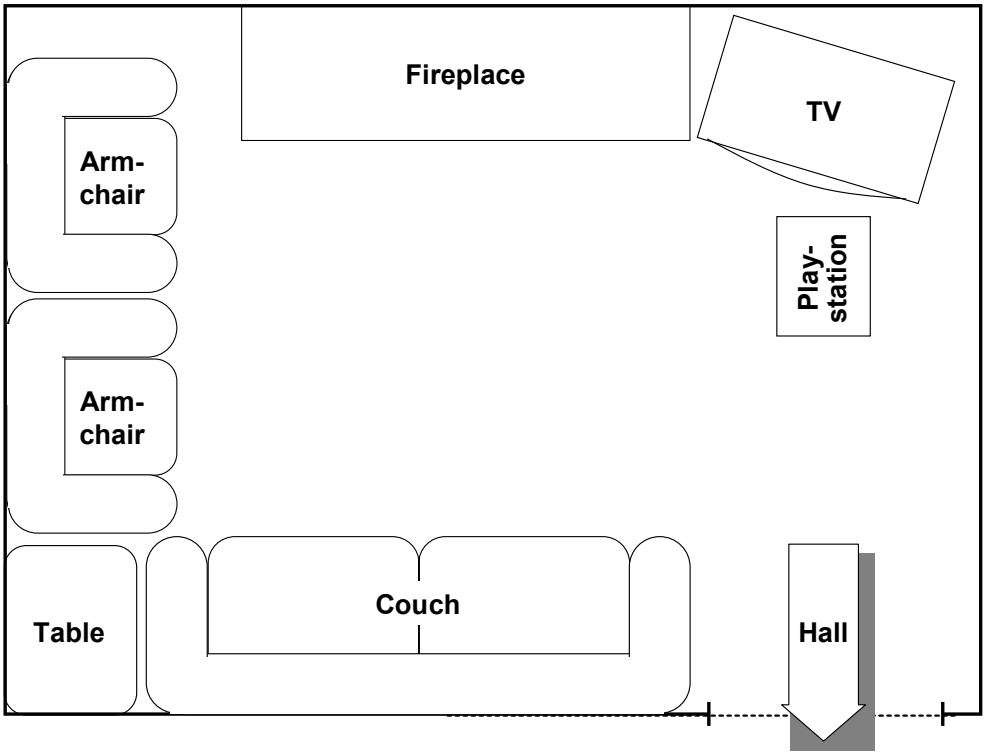
APPENDIX B – MAPS OF CONSUMPTION CONTEXTS




Household 2, 19 March, 2004 (Living room)
Fireplace
Kitchen
Table
d-TV/ VCR/DVD
Couch
Bookshelf/Videos
Hall
Couch
Hall


Household 2, 19 March, 2004 (Bedroom)
PC (4 speakers + subwoofer)
TV/PS2/Xbox (surround sound not set up)
DVDs/Games
Bed
Hall
Table


Household 3, 4 March, 2004
d-TV/VCR/DVD
Bookshelf
PC
Kitchen
Balcony
Coffee table
(3 remote controls,
2 mobile phones)
Laptop
Couch
Hall
= usual TV watching position


Household 4 25 March 2004
VHS/DVD/
CDROM
Storage
Fireplace
Stereo
Table
Couch
Pouf
Window
Window
Kitchen
Couch
Hall
Not permanent position
– for interview only.
TV with:
VHS
Digital Decoder
DVD
PS2
Gamecube
Dreamcast

Household 5, 15 March, 2004