Illustrated Report

I have produced the opening three minutes of a crime drama called ‘The Unspoken’, using extensive research which has informed my decisions. My storyboard reflects BBC1 Crime Drama programmes and I have also been influenced by productions including Waking the Dead and The Body Farm. I have also researched into other channels such as ITV 1 (The Bill) in order to gain a wider understanding of generic conventions used. I chose this genre as it accounts ‘for more than 20% of television programming’ (1) and I therefore aim to attract a wide target audience. My intended demographic are male and are in the boomers age group (35 – 44). They are C1, C2 (lower middle class and working class) in the socio-economic grouping. The psychographic group include mainstreamers and the audience positioning and pleasures include egoists, and the armchair detectives - through the use of enigma codes. The audience are able to maintain a moral high ground whilst immersing into the crime world through escapism. My production would be broadcasted post water shed in order to include violence or suggestive themes (if required) and this further reinforces the age of the target audience. My research shows that my chosen target audience reflects the overall demographic for crime genre shows broadcasted on BBC1.

I have completed both primary and secondary research including writing textual analysis’ of three chosen texts: The Bill (ITV), The Body Farm (BBC1) and Waking the Dead (BBC1), creating a questionnaire designed to and answered by 15 members of my intended demographic as well as completing an analysis of the BBC1 website. 80% of candidates stated that they watched crime dramas on the BBC which reinforces my chosen broadcaster, due to the target audience. I have also completed secondary research, looking at articles on crime drama from the ‘Media Magazine’.

Tony Garnett said that in order to attract a mainstream audience ‘the first rule is that, in the end, it has to be the drama of reassurance’ (2: Garnett, 2002, Mediamag). I have therefore used Todorov’s narrative theory following a generic structure (equilibrium, disequilibrium and new equilibrium) which offers reassurance – as the crime is solved. This is illustrated within my storyboard as the equilibrium presents two girls having a good time, the disequilibrium introduces the victim and the new equilibrium presents the detectives working to solve the crime. My narrative is also influenced by Jonathan Creek’s theory of the perfect crime. I have also included generic crime drama characters (Propp’s theory) such as the hero, villain, victim and the helper (forensic scientist).

My questionnaire results also revealed that 80% of the target audience would prefer the protagonist to be male; therefore I chose a male to play my key character (Bruce).
I have also included a female partner (helper and possible love interest) who challenges the ideology of a patriarchal society and further follow BBC conventions (The Body Farm and New Tricks both present a female protagonist). 73% of candidates said they would prefer the antagonist to be a male and 80% would prefer an experienced villain. Using this data I constructed the villain ‘Trix’, an experienced male serial killer who plays ‘games’ with the detective. Trix’s character further challenges the representation of a hegemonic police force and this follows conventions, as this challenge is also presented in The Bill when gangs of teenagers undermine the police by shouting abuse. In terms of setting, within my storyboard, I have used a night club and an office in a house where the detective does his work, within a busy city location - as 87% of candidates said they would prefer a crime to take place in an urban setting. Locations within BBC1 crime dramas often appear to take place in busy cities.

My Textual Analyses’ illustrated generic conventions used in BBC British Crime Drama such as: generic camera shots including voyeuristic shots, where the audience are placed in a position of, subconsciously, looking in on a character who is preferably unaware of being watched (Mulvey’s theory). Waking the Dead illustrates many examples of the protagonist in voyeuristic shots (through venetian blinds etcetera). Points of view and low angled shots are also conventions which I have adopted within my storyboard.
My research informed me that ‘the binary opposition of crime/criminal versus law/investigator is perhaps the defining convention of crime’ (3) including: light and darkness (The Body Farm), gangs and the police force (The Bill) and the general ‘Criminal verses detective/officer’ (3). Frame 12 illustrates the binary opposition (Levi-Strauss’s theory) between light and darkness whilst playing with expectations and using film noir techniques, such as low key lighting. Frame 4 also illustrates the audience being put in a spectator position (non-restricted narrative) which is another convention commonly used.

After completing my storyboard I worked independently to produce the three minute opening sequence of my crime drama. I decided on the title ‘The Unspoken’ as it allows the audience to be positioned as arm chair detectives whilst also creating enigma codes (Barthes’ theory). From a narrative perspective, the detectives and forensic scientists must solve the crime without the victim’s account – who ultimately represents the unspoken. It is important to note that during the process of making my storyboard and filming I was required to change location and I have therefore used the same idea, but have slightly changed the narrative to suit the locations. I am still using a urban location but have also included references to abandoned sites.

My intended audience has been targeted with the use of generic conventions, enigma and action codes as well as binary oppositions. By creating a ‘safe’ product that offers a narrative of reassurance – I have ultimately targeted this production for a mainstream audience.

In terms of audience response, I conducted a survey which was given to members of both my target audience (boomers) and a younger millennial’s demographic. I asked the groups to ‘summarise the storyline’ in a maximum of two lines and found that both groups took the preferred reading of a ‘journalist’ who was murdered by a ‘serial killer’ - who kills his victims ‘in a specific order’. From my initial research, I found that realism was an important aspect for the boomer’s demographic, so it was important for me to aim for a high level of verisimilitude. My audiences’ response illustrated the idea that one of my strengths was the realism aspect. 100% of my questioned audience stated that ‘costumes and props’ were most realistic. I used iconic police tape as well as a forensic costume which enhanced the mise en scene. 90% rated the levels of verisimilitude between 8-10 (where 10 is the most realistic and 1 is the least realistic). The majority of the audience stated that the characters, locations and the storyline were also very realistic.

On the other hand, I constructed Kate’s character (female detective) with the preferred reading in mind that she would be a dominant protagonist who was represented as equal to men. A post-feminist reading would agree that – as I also often framed her centrally, sometimes at a low camera angle and gave her a stock character position – this signified her importance. However, a majority of my audience took an oppositional reading and said that in general ‘women were represented as inferior to men’. This representation offers a weakness to the production as it does not fulfil the preferred reading, may cultivate misogyny or encourage less viewers. This reading may have been caused as it
could be argued that Kate’s character fulfilled the male gaze, in terms of her dress code.

100% of the audience said that music and sound effects created suspense and drama. I used parallel non-diegetic sound tracks to enhance the suspense as well as using a point of view shot in closed form framing, within an unrestricted narrative, of the victim walking towards the witness. The use of closed form POV is also used in ‘The Bill’ and creates enigma codes for the audience, playing with expectations, as we not quite sure which characters are antagonists. I also used this technique within my crime drama because at this point in the my narrative, the use of a high camera angle and point of view shot looking at the witness, from the victim’s perspective (as well as a canted/Dutch angle) would lead the audience to believe that the witness is in fact the victim. However, by playing with expectations, the audience are kept engaged.

In terms of the uses and gratification model, the audience were provided with a privileged position whilst being offered a moral high ground as well as being able to enjoy the romance of crime from a safe distance and this offers a great sense of escapism as well as personal identity.

In Waking the Dead the opening title credits float over a liquid background which has the iconography of blood and other generic substances, often used in crime drama investigations. In ‘the Unspoken’ I have also included a blood splatter effect to anchor this idea.

‘Waking the dead’ also uses a voyeuristic approach within an establishing long shot, outside the character’s office. I have used this convention where my stock character is visible through the blinds. This connotes cell bars which allows the decoders to feel as if they are looking into the character’s personal life, without him necessary being aware of this (Mulvey’s theory). Voyeuristic shots are also seen in the Body farm where the audience watch the detective through a window.

The slow non-diegetic sound track and the use of cross fade transitions challenge the theory of desensitisation, which states that the constant media saturation of violence desensitises audiences to real suffering. By slowing the pace of the narrative and providing real, archive images of the victims when they were alive - this encourages the audience to feel sympathetic which challenges this idea. This technique is also used in Waking the Dead. Low camera angles are also used within my production and this follows crime drama conventions as the detectives are represented as powerful.
I also used low key lighting–in order to convey a sense of mystery. This follows film noir conventions but on the other hand, I would argue that my lighting was the main weakness of my production.

I asked my audience which age group they thought my crime drama was targeted for and a majority of the younger group said ‘generation y’- whilst my targeted group stated that the ‘boomer’ were the targeted audience, due to the narrative and themes used in the production. So by incorporating younger actors I have potentially attracted a wider target audience and this is a strength.

In conclusion, my research helped to inform my understanding of the genre and my production ideas. I feel my product has been effective in attracting a wide demographic and was also effective as the decoders responded with the preferred reading in mind. The main weaknesses of my production were due to lighting, focus as well as the construction of Kate’s character – as the audience took an oppositional feminist reading.

Word Count: 1863

Bibliography

1) AS Media: The Crime Drama Genre hand-out, 2011
   (interviewed by Jenny Grahame - This article first appeared in MediaMagazine 1, September 2002)
3) Johnson, Lucas, 2011, MediaMagazine
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