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Access Denied: **Intertextual Barricades and Public Service Broadcasting in *Torchwood***

Introduction

- Aim of the paper:
 - To provide a case study that examines how the BBC balanced its public service obligations with the commercially-oriented expectations of a 'spin-off' when developing the format of *Torchwood's* first series.
 - Paper is therefore located in relation to the continuing focus in British Television Studies that considers how the BBC negotiates “[t]he tensions between commercial imperatives and a tradition of public service” (Johnson 2005: 130) within the TVIII era (see also Nelson 2007)
 - Examining the implementation of a specific “textual strateg[y]” (Johnson 2005: 6) – an ‘intertextual barricade’ between the diegesis of *Torchwood* and its parent series.

What is a 'Textual Strategy'?

- Johnson (2005: 7) defines a 'textual strategy' as “essentially the implementation of ...production strategies”.
- “‘Production strategies’ refer to the strategies put in place at the point of production ...These are strategies that can only be understood in relation to the context of production, and enable us to understand how that context shaped the ways these programmes look and the kinds of stories they tell” (Johnson 2005: 6-7).
- Production strategy: a decision implemented at the point of production that comes about due to the institutional and/or historical demands placed upon the creative process.

The BBC's Public Service Remit

- “In this vision of things, broadcasting acts as a form of social cement” (Petley 2006: 42).
- “To reflect and strengthen cultural identity through original programming at UK national and regional level, and through bringing audiences together for shared experiences” (Ibid: 43).
- Such a responsibility has guided the production of *Doctor Who* (BBC 2005-):
 - “the Saturday-evening schedules are ...traditionally constructed for family viewing, consisting of game shows, variety, soap operas and mainstream drama series ...which are seen to have a broad demographic appeal and can be viewed by the whole family” (Johnson 2005: 133).
 - *Doctor Who* has successfully negotiated this terrain (see Butler 2007: 9; Hills 2010: 202-27).

The BBC's Public Service Remit

- The BBC defines 'child' audiences as "an institutional category" (Messenger Davies and Machin 2000: 174).
- "In protecting children ..., as well as having regulations for positive educational provision, traditional children's programming in the UK has sometimes been accused of being 'paternalist'" (Messenger Davies 2001: 30).
- "CBBC should provide a stimulating, creative and enjoyable environment that is also safe and trusted" (CBBC Channel Service Licence 2009: 1).

Expectations of a 'Spin-Off'

- Grant and Wood (2004: 71) – process of 'cloning' "occupies growing screen time on television":
 - "every clone absorbs money and screen time that might otherwise bring audiences a new voice or different perspective on the world" (Ibid: 72).
- 'Cloning' recalls Altman's (1999: 38) conceptualisation of the 'Producer's Game':
 - a new text that is born directly out of a predecessor is "meant to serve the function of creating synergy by locating a successful device and carrying it to another" (Ibid: 44).

Torchwood as 'Spin-Off'

- Synergy in *Torchwood*:
 - Lead character – John Barrowman as Captain Jack Harkness
 - Setting – draws from continuity established in 'The Unquiet Dead' (2005) and 'Boom Town' (2005)



The Problem of *Torchwood*

- Divergent pressures on the production of the series:
 - Commercial perspective: status as a ‘spin-off’ from *Doctor Who* means that, logically, child audiences would be one of the demographics interested in the series.
 - *Torchwood’s* intended “‘dark, wild and sexy” (Davies in BBC Press Office 2005: online) tone would compromise PSB responsibilities towards ‘child’ audiences.

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- Numerous 'production strategies' readable from the institutional handling of the programme:
 - Choice of channel – BBC Three a 'youth'-oriented narrowcast channel
 - Scheduling – post-watershed Sunday evenings
 - Script of 'Everything Changes' (2006) – swearing; point of view; ambiguous representation of Captain Jack's character.

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- ‘Intertextual Barricade’ erected between *Torchwood* and its parent series.
- Most evident in ‘Cyberwoman’ (2006):
 - Perryman (2008: 36) – episode originally intended to feature a Dalek but idea was changed so as to discourage ‘child’ audiences from watching.
 - Argues this decision was misguided due to the appeal of the Cybermen with children.

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- Overlooks how representation of the 'Cyberwoman' was filtered through *Torchwood's* intertextual barricade:
 - Costume design connotes 'cult' sensibility
 - More liminal representation of monstrosity
 - 'Child'-friendly aspects of the Cybermen removed.



In Conclusion

- Although the BBC draws upon production techniques associated with 'commercialisation', such as producing a 'spin-off' like *Torchwood*, these practices have to be balanced with its ongoing public service remit.
- In the case of *Torchwood's* first series this resulted in an institutional barricade being constructed:
 - Attracting 'child' audiences to the series would leave the BBC open to accusations of irresponsibility as a result of its institutional definition of this audience group.

Further Questions or Discussion

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