

[Matthew A. Sheldon](#)

Molly McCourt

Final Paper

Essay Three: Criterionforum.org

[Criterionforum.org](#) is an extraordinary film blog that I frequently return to every other week or so for updates. It is an online blog for film buffs which specifically centers on movies that are distributed by Janus films. These films are part of a collection known as the *Criterion Collection*, which is an American video-distribution company that sells ‘important classic and contemporary films’ to film buffs and aficionados. They are credited with introducing and also beautifully restoring various classic films, now considered masterpieces of world cinema. Besides *Janus* and *Criterion’s* own official websites which are used to help promote their company and merchandise, there are also various fan-base sites where movie buffs are able to voice and debate their opinions on various of the titles within the Criterion collection. I want to use the topics that were discussed by Rushkoff, Sunstein, Murray, Marshall, Jenkins and Caircross which explored the different elements of Digital Media and incorporate them to the Criterionforum.org blog.

Criterionforum.org is one of their more popular fan-base blogs, and I have been a part of that blog for about three years now. Being a avid Criterion film collection, and owning over 300 Criterion movies, I use this blog as a helpful and entertaining tool to educate myself on any of the latest news that is occurring with the company. There are numerous threads that engage fan discussions on upcoming DVD/blu ray Criterion releases or let others aware of any upcoming

Criterion sales or offers that might be approaching. My favorite is the rumor thread in which fans discuss what upcoming releases they believe Criterion will soon be releasing through clues that were hinted in previous newsletters or interviews. There are also threads where fans discuss various director's auteur, theories and meanings behind specific Criterion movies, in-depth DVD/blu ray reviews and ongoing threads on whether or not a movie deserves or doesn't deserve to be regarded in the collection. Some fans even design and promote their own personal top 10 Criterion lists and at the end of every year Criterionforum hosts a contest of the top 10 Criterion releases of that year; with fans of course adding their own comments and critiques.

In Douglas Rushkoff's article *Renaissance Now! Media Ecology and the New Global Narrative* he discusses the various empowering capabilities which involve through the new age of Digital Media. The internet allows people to have their own control and power to reconstruct a narrative and he calls this renaissance moment 'The Rebirth.' This rebirth Rushkoff describes is "The stories, models and languages that we have been using to understand our reality are suddenly up for grabs" (22 Rushkoff). I see many threads in the forum board Index of Criterionforum.org that follow what Rushkoff is describing. Many of the fans who follow the blogs are constantly making their own threads which discuss and argue what they believe should or shouldn't be in the Criterion collection. Some of these threads even step outside of the Criterion Collection with engaging discussions on current cinema and movies news in general. Like Rushkoff describes, they move from 'game to a fabricated meta-game' which is done by having a collaboration of online people work together using the tools of networking, social media and interconnectivity to build a larger film fan community for their narrative.

In Cass Sunstein's of article *Many Working Minds* she focuses on three mechanisms for online information: wiki's, open source and blogs. The third option: Blogs she describes are

when audiences gain a certain online following and interaction with that audience. In criterionforum.org it would obviously be the interaction with the loyal Criterion fans. The criterion forum helps bring these film aficionado's together so they all can offer a better marketplace for new rich ideas, which can also be equally as helpful for the company themselves. "Blogs typically begin as an individual project that gains an audience gradually and permit some level of interaction with those readers/users, often in the form of threaded comments" (Sunstein 185). There have been many moments in which fan's insistence with a certain film title being released into the Criterion Collection was made into reality when Criterion officially announced they would actually release it. When some of the fan's wishes ultimately get fulfilled this gives Criterion fans a sense of camaraderie with the company, as if they are a part of the distribution team and what they suggest or state really has some say for the company.

Janet Murray's article *From Game-Story to Cyberdrama* focuses more how one can be more interactive through technology and social media, and how one can now manipulate story elements to restructure a specific narrative that they see fit. Murray calls this a 'new medium,' where we are able to alter, manipulate and change story or storytelling like components. "It allows us to manipulate its objects...and it can create a world that we can navigate and even inhabit as well as observe" (Murray 8). These spatial components can frequently overlap and also share two structures which Murray describes as 'Contest' (structure of human experience) and 'Puzzle' (challenging to the mind). In the Criterionforum the website promotes numerous yearly contest where fans can interactively design a custom fan-made cover art for either a particular favorite Criterion title or one that they simply wish would one day make it into the collection. The site also releases a monthly Criterion newsletter to subscribers and on the bottom

right of each newsletter is a cryptic puzzle or clue to an upcoming Criterion release. These exciting head scratchers are fun for Criterion fans to ponder over and discuss in several of their chat blogs.

David Marshall explores intertextual commodity in his article *The New Intertextual Commodity*. He describes Intertextuality as “how any particular text implies or calls forth other texts” (Marshall 70). A single text can be understood as intertextual when it’s implied or it is referred to things outside itself like a book, website, show or magazine. Marshall believes that intertextual commodity reduces the differences between the texts and users, and that interactive players can transform the text making it go beyond what the novel or TV show can do. This form of play is attached to a commodity and can be bought and sold whether its advertisements, commercials and product placements. Within the 4 patterns of intertextual commodity that Marshall describes, the one the criterionforum.org seems to fall under is the ‘interactive game of the cult film’. Criterionforum.org, Janus, and the Criterion Collection advertise purely for their cult-fan base and less for commercial financial reasons. Long-time Criterion collectors have stood by the company throughout the years of various technological changes like the Laserdisc, DVD and blu ray; and come to trust the Criterion banner as a symbol of quality and excellence. And yet Criterion does attach themselves on other forms of commodities besides movies, as they also have a gift store located at their website which sells several products like sweatshirts, hats, coffee mugs and various posters of their highly regarded cover artwork.

In Henry Jenkins article *Convergence? I Diverge* he argues that ‘media convergence’ is an ongoing process that is continuously spreading to other mediums and there will never be one instrument controlling all forms of media. “We are entering an era where media will be everywhere, and we will use all kinds of media in relation to one another” (Jenkins 93).

Criterionforum.org uses several aspects of media convergence like offering DVD/blu ray reviews on all newly criterion releases. Many potential buyers can log on to their site and check out the reviews of the product, along with a highly visual rating system, before making the decision in purchasing the product. On its blog it has several links to *Amazon*, *Netflix*, *Facebook* and several other DVD media websites which instantly link the customer to the destination of the product. The *Criterionforum Facebook* page has currently 33 members and if fans purchase several of Criterion's items on Amazon by going through their website or blog, they are able to get a percentage of the commission. This new media convergence is creating a much broader range of social, political and economical advantages to many customers and businesses, as several different online companies like Amazon, Criterion and Facebook all seem to be working together to help advertise, promote and sell products to consumers from all around the world.

Frances Caircross's article *Trendpotter's Guide to New Communications* gives several helpful tips to online developing businesses like Amazon, Netflix and Facebook and how they will be beneficial, assessable and highly successful for its customers all throughout the world in the future. For the criterionforum.org blog it seems that numbers 1: Distance, 2: Location, 12: Global Reach and 15: Service Providers, all are exceptional points that help a small blog like criterionforum.org prevail. Numbers 26 and 30 especially stand out for me, because a blog which helps promote various international movies spoken in various different languages, from various parts of the world will probably bring together all different kinds of people. An online blog like criterionforum.org can also help bring these people from all different locations, languages and cultures together, in an online worldly blog where they can unite and share the one universal thing they know they all have a passion for: International cinema.

Bibliography

Cairncross, Frances. "*The Trendspotter's Guide to New Communications.*" United Kingdom: Wadsworth Press, 2005. Print.

Jenkins, Henry. "Convergence? I Diverge." *Technology Review*. June. 2001: 93. Print.

Marshall, David P. "*The New Intertextual Commodity.*" BFI: The New Media Book, 2002. Print.

Murray, Janet. "*From Game Story to Cyberdrama.*" London England: MIT Press, 2004. Print.

Rushkoff, Douglas. "*Renaissance Now! Media Ecology and the New Global Narrative.*" United Kingdom: Wadsworth Press, 2005. Print.

Sunstein, Cass R. "*Many Working Minds: Wikis, Open Source Software, and Blogs.*" Oxford: University Press, 2006. Print.