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Smash and Bash Cricket? Affective Technological Innovations in the Big Bash

With an explicit focus on the Australia's KFC T20 Big Bash League, my article explores how cricket is packaged as an affective televisual spectacle. The Big Bash's technological innovations and refinements blur the lines of information, entertainment and commodification, while allowing a traditional broadcast media form to be re-presented in non-traditional ways. That is, cameras and other technologies operate in fluid and highly-mobile ways, encroach upon or are embedded within the field of play, and more frequently are placed on players and officials during live sporting contests. In turn, these contrasting technologies and multiple perspectives simultaneously provide affective layers for viewer engagement, merging analytical tools for sporting knowledge, sites for commodification and through mediated athletic replication. These technologies and techniques arguably afford an affective televisual "smash and bash" spectacle for both ephemeral and invested viewers.

Sport as Media? Television, Technological Innovation and the Mediatisation of Sport

Brett Hutchins and David Rowe (2012) have observed a substantial shift in traditional broadcast models of scarcity to forms of digital plenitude, with contemporary sport mediation being radically transformed by these associated accelerated practices. Indeed, a myriad of sophisticated digital tools, techniques and devices are capturing, supplementing, shaping and disseminating sports content. As such, Hutchins and Rowe (2012: 10) assert that the sport and media binary should be re-thought as 'sport *as* media' given the intensification of these technologies, their enhanced interactive capacities and their increased hybridity, fluidity and materiality. Moreover, continual remediation cyclically impinges upon constructions of the spectacle, "real" sporting practices and advancements to technology, while increased global and commercial pressures further complicate the entangled web of sport mediatisation

(Horne, 2006; Hutchins and Rowe, 2013; Rowe, 2011). In this vein, the KFC T20 Big Bash League (BBL) provides content, "apps" and platforms that can be streamed, shared, debated and downloaded across numerous digital devices. In turn, audiences are afforded further opportunities to interact, engage with, invest in or indeed play with the minutiae of this specific sport. Nevertheless, such affordances are often underpinned by the commercial imperatives of the sponsors and franchises, while tending to re-orientate audiences back to, rather than replace, the BBL television coverage.

Commonplace across contemporary sport, digital technologies primarily complement, supplement and reproduce aspects of television coverage as "second screens" for use in unison with live TV sport (Galily, 2014; Hutchins and Rowe, 2012, 2013). Poignantly, Garry Whannel's (1992: 3) assertion that 'for most of us, for most of the time, sport is television sport' still holds true nearly 25 years later. Despite wholesale technological advancements, televisual coverage has remained the primary "screen" for sport audiences. Broadcasting rights are hotly contested as the prime revenue stream for networks and sporting organisations, while contemporary live televised sport retains the lucrative ability to attract global audiences, entice sponsors and to sell such audiences to advertisers (Boyle, 2014; Wenner, 2014; Whannel, 2014). Bearing this in mind, the transformation and re-presentation of sport as televisual spectacle becomes crucial (Kellner, 2003, 2010; Whannel, 1992).

Television Technologies, Spectacle and Affect

Methodologically, a socio-cultural interest in the materialisation and salience of affect underpinning the BBL's television technologies shapes this project. Drawing upon affect theory, I argue that affective technological relationships can potentially be forged with the televisual innovations, specifically as viewers marvel at the technologies and perspectives being afforded for them. Theoretically, on the one hand, affect is conceived as a broader attachment to objects, places and things, with affect shaping an individual's investment

towards and in such things; specifically the levels of invigoration, intensities and energies that are "felt" and enacted (Grossberg, 1992; Sturm, 2011). On the other hand, recent works have suggested that affect articulates the sensations, movements and assemblages that intensify, circulate around and move through such objects, places, spaces and practices (Clough and Haley, 2007; Gregg and Seigworth, 2010). That is, affect itself is not owned by, nor the property of, an individual, but materialises in things, nestling itself within objects wherein affective assemblages manifest and materialise (Fleming and Sturm, 2011; Massumi, 2002). Moreover, affect is dispersed across diverse sites in diverse ways. The collective BBL audience itself arguably encompasses differing levels of knowledge, engagement and invigoration - an assemblage of viewers and fans that range from the ephemeral, the discerning, to the more circumspect cricket "purists". Hence, the BBL games, players and technological innovations trigger an assemblage of individuated and collective pleasure points, experiences and attachments that materialise and matter in different ways.

However, rather than mapping types of audience consumption per se, my primarily focus is on articulating the conditions that permit the materialisation and mobilisation of affect via the BBL's technological innovations. Arguably these innovations constitute Douglas Kellner's (2010: 77) 'interactive spectacle', providing viewers with pseudo-player perspectives and explorations of the cricketing terrain via frantic, entertainment-orientated representations. Affect materialises through these technologies and perspectives while mobilising diverse affective engagements. As Barrie Axford and Richard Huggins (2011: 1332) suggest, T20's varying technologies 'make for hyper-reflexive viewing, with members of the audience acting as consumer and producer, critic, fan and pseudo player'. Indeed, for local and international audiences potentially less invested in the locale or the specifics of the competition, "hyper-reflexive" affective audience attention can still be piqued by the visual

rendering of a player performing live via helmet-cam or through fascination with the soaring perspectives of spider-cam.

More broadly, this reflects the global transformation of T20 cricket via its remediation as a mass television sport that emphasises attracting, entertaining and retaining audiences through slick productions, technological innovations and commercial imperatives. Aesthetically, sport as spectacle embellishes spectacular, seductive and sensationalised representations (Kellner, 2003, 2010). Commonplace in other sports, the allure and mobilisation of affect is a crucial contemporary strategy (Kennedy et al, 2006; Thorpe and Rinehart, 2010). Hence, in a similar vein to Formula One's projection of a "glamorous and high-tech global spectacle of speed" (Sturm, 2014), the televised BBL relies upon a series of "dazzling" perspectives and "seductive" images to convert perceivably "smash and bash" cricket into a potentially enthralling spectacle. Steeped in innovation, the BBL's televisual technologies imbed affective traces to make the event accessible, while fluidly exploring its spaces, intensifying its interactive dynamics and engorging a heightened sense of action for populist audiences. To better understand these techniques, our attention first turns to cricket's longer history of televisual innovation and the creation of T20.

Early Innovations to Televised Cricket

Australian media mogul Kerry Packer was a key figure in the *World Series Cricket* (r)evolution that transformed how cricket was to be represented via television in the 1970s. Although a condensed one-day cricket format predated *World Series Cricket*, Packer's concept was developed to gain television rights after initially being rebuffed by the Australian Cricket Board. Specifically, Axford and Huggins (2011: 1331) suggest Packer offered a 'more technically adroit, heavily marketed and more audience-centred style of representation' premised upon challenging the perceived "boring" nature of test cricket. Packer's restylisation of cricket and packaging of sport as spectacle was reliant on numerous

technological innovations. More camera placements and angles were deployed, notably cameras mounted at both ends of the pitch, from high vantage points (cranes, lighting towers), side-on to assist with run-outs, as well as the creation of stump-cam (placing a camera within the middle wicket) for this on-field spatial perspective.

Moreover, Whannel (1992) observes that faster cuts, a more active commentary, regular slow motion and action replays, and superimposed captions were pivotal to Packer's coverage. Dubbed "pyjama cricket", teams wore bright coloured uniforms and played under lights with a white ball in what were framed as exciting and entertaining matches. As a result, the perceived essence or depth of test cricket had, Ian Harriss (1990: 117) suggests, 'given way to the glittering surface and spectacle of the highly commercialised commodity that is One-Day Cricket'. Such a "glittering surface" would consolidate one day internationals (ODI's) capacity for attracting television audiences and revenue streams until the 2000s, when the newest re-branding and re-mediatisation of cricket emerged.

The Birth and Growth of T20 Cricket

Despite reducing cricket from five days to one, the once championed accelerated action of ODIs perceivably waned with its seven hour duration a constraint for sustaining the invested interest of advertisers, audiences and producers alike. Professional leagues experimented with alternatives to ODIs. In New Zealand, for example, Action Cricket was played in 1992-3, a 20-over format allowing for two games within the same day, while former captain Martin Crowe developed "Cricket Max" (1996-2003) as a modified three hour format. Similarly, in Australia "Super Eights" toyed with utilising only eight players per team in 1996 and 1997. A merged hybrid "Cricket Super Max Eights" sought to legitimise the formats but met with limited success.

Further afield, English county cricket introduced T20 matches in 2003 to counter the dwindling commercial and spectator interest in domestic matches and specifically to attract

females and children (Rumford, 2013). While polarising cricket administrators, aficionados and audiences alike, English domestic T20s immediately attracted large attendance numbers. The English experiment was quickly seized upon elsewhere. The first men's International T20 matches took place in 2005 (the first women's T20 international had already occurred in 2004), with New Zealand playing Australia in Auckland in front of approximately 30,000 spectators (English, 2011: 1372). Nevertheless, it can be asserted that the carnivalesque retro-theme seemed more pertinent than the sporting contest, with both teams donning replica skin-tight 1980s uniforms and the New Zealand players embracing towel hats, "handlebar" moustaches and "afro" hairstyles. Thus, nostalgically-tinged and gimmick-like, the first international was represented as light hearted entertainment, with both captains describing T20 as "hit and giggle" that would have a limited future (Ramsey, 2014).

Despite continued reverberations of being merely entertainment, novelty and less prestigious or important, the format has been taken up across the cricket playing nations. Colin Agur (2013: 542) observes,

> Initially conceived as a mid-season diversion to attract fans to county matches, Twenty20 quickly grew into an essential money-maker and stadium-filler for domestic leagues in the world's cricketing countries.

World T20 tournaments emerged for countries in 2007, for clubs with the Champions League T20 in 2009, while most T20 domestic formats have regional or franchise teams that include international players. Indeed, T20s are perceived as ideal for networks and advertisers due to the comparative ease of scheduling a frenetic three hour contest that attracts a broader audience than strictly just interested or knowledgeable cricket fans.

Most pertinent in terms of prestige, commerce and media attention has been the Indian Premier League (IPL) since 2008. Despite banning Pakistani players, the IPL attracts the top global players through its hype, spectacle and unprecedented lavish salaries that dwarf

nationally-derived contracts. Indeed, it has been suggested that the IPL and subsequent T20 formats have created the "cricketing mercenary" (Stoddart, 2011) or "portfolio player" (Rumford, 2011b), an individual who traverses the globe playing for different franchises and who often needs to choose between country and franchise. Moreover, the IPL has solidified T20's status and specifically the post-western or Indianisation of cricket due to India's economic, media and political clout in shaping cricket globally (Agur, 2013; Gupta, 2011; Rumford, 2011a, 2013).

As spectacle, the IPL provides spectacular excesses through the (over)use of musical interludes, trumpet blares, celebrity appearances, corporate branding and, most notably, boundary hits or wickets being accompanied by screened slogans, music, dancing girls and bursts of contained flammable gas. While musical interludes were already commonplace within ODIs and the inaugural World T20 had exacerbated many of the aforementioned techniques, the IPL has embellished and seemingly entrenched these displays. Indeed, by-and-large, the IPL has become the stylistic, commercial and high profile template that the majority of T20 competitions look to emulate around the world.

Australian T20 Cricket and the KFC Big Bash

Peter English (2011) observes that Cricket Australia (CA) were slow to embrace the possibilities and potential of T20. However, its instant uptake by fans in 2005 forced CA's hand, including the first domestic "exhibition" game selling out in Perth for the first time in 20 years with a crowd over 20,000 (English, 2011: 1371). Commercially orientated and geared towards a younger, potentially diverse audience, the KFC Twenty20 Big Bash emerged in 2006 as part of the existing six state-based team series. The Big Bash was notable for its focus on entertainment over serious cricket, in part a reflection of CA's uncertainty surrounding the new venture and its immediate future. Richard Hinds (2011: 22) surmises,

Australia treated Twenty20 with barely disguised disdain, putting nicknames on shirts, microphones on anything with a heartbeat, allowing 'guest' celebrities to bat for state teams and generally making jolly old slapstick of what was becoming, elsewhere, a significant game.

Alternatively, while perceivably a disrespectful approach, such an orientation also furnished the degrees of technological innovation now permitted in contemporary Australian T20 matches. Seemingly 'more a marketing tool in some states than a serious competition' (English, 2011: 1372) this has, nevertheless, allowed broadcasters Fox Sports, Channel 10 and the Nine Network (for Australian international coverage) to treat T20 as an experimental playground for trialling their technological innovations.

Despite the gimmicks and potentially light-hearted approach, the format has continued to attract significant interest. For example, matches in 2009/2010 saw an increase in crowd numbers by 80%, while allegedly 316,000 watched the final live on pay television (English, 2011: 1373). Significant changes were made in 2011, whereby the rebranded KFC T20 Big Bash League (BBL) created eight new city-based franchises, including two teams in both Melbourne and Sydney. Attempts were also made to attract more high profile players, however scheduling has remained problematic for Australian and international representatives outside of primarily "retired" players, such as Jacques Kallis, Kevin Pietersen, Andrew Flintoff and Brett Lee in 2014/2015. Although the BBL has not replicated the global or financial clout of the IPL, nor found a space to accommodate Australia's top players, the ratings continue to be impressive. Jesse Hogan (2014) indicated average attendance figures of approximately 19,500 in 2013/2014, while Ryan Buckland (2015) reports a 20% attendance increase in 2014/2015, with television figures averaging around 920,000 across the past two seasons. An increasingly significant sport-media event in Australia, the innovative technologies that construct the BBL as an affective televisual spectacle are now considered.

Technologies and Innovations in Contemporary Televised Cricket

As noted earlier, the Packer revolution experimented with and pioneered many of the existing structures for representing cricket. Contemporary coverage incorporates an increasing array of technologies that contemporaneously seek to potentially place the viewer closer to the action, embellish the screened spectacle and, more broadly, work to enhance, entertain and ideally retain viewer attention. Thus, technologies seemingly capture almost every aspect of the on-field action aided by replays, various camera and microphone placements, diverse camera angles and shot types, and computer-based animations to cater for viewer observation, appreciation and scrutiny (Axford and Huggins, 2011; Galily, 2014; Whannel, 1992, 2014). Indeed, such is the spectrum of innovation that traditional side-line framing is being accelerated by technologies that often fluidly encroach onto, are placed within, float above or are mapped over/replace the existing field of play.

Rob Steen's (2011) discussion of the decision review system (DRS) highlights how many of the newer innovations essentially remediate previously existing technologies. Introduced in tests from 2009, DRS allows teams to review umpire decisions based on televisual innovations, with devices such as slow motion replays, super slow-motion replays, ultra-motion replays, stump microphone sound, ball tracking technology and hot spot at the official's disposal (Steen, 2011). Many of the aforementioned techniques accelerate preceding technologies via the incorporation of high definition and 3-D technologies. Hence, slow motion replays can be provided in high definition (Hi-Motion) to increasingly reveal the minutiae of cricket and to enhance the details of a specific moment, particularly for scrutiny and analysis. The BBL is reliant upon such techniques; being filmed in high definition while drawing upon on-screen graphics and multiple replays, cameras and microphone set ups. However, DRS and its associated virtual technologies, such as hot spot or ball-tracking, are currently not used in the BBL or any T20 format primarily due to time and cost constraints.

Framing Technological Affect

Pervading the mediatisation of the BBL is an accelerated culture of intensified spectacle that toys with traditional framing, perspectives and notions of space to affectively engage its television audience. Affect materialises through and is mobilised by the deployment of innovative televisual technologies that aesthetically transform cricket coverage. This aesthetic shift is threefold: firstly, developing televisual tools to analyse and dissect cricket; secondly, enabling the televisual replication of athletic experiences and performances; and thirdly, providing a stylistic orientation that navigates and explores the cricketing terrain. Collectively, such techniques can amplify the detail available for systematic analysis, for fluidly roaming through space and potentially furnish vicarious, visually rendered experiences. The BBL's innovative televisual technologies seemingly offer the simultaneous construction of analytical viewership from all-seeing perspectives (the *idealised omniscient viewer*) as well as potential forms of visual athletic replication through close proximity framing (the *idealised participant*). Indeed, with technologies to the fore, the affective BBL spectacle offers its own mediatisation and innovations as part of the lure.

In many ways, the BBL has benefited from adopting, adapting and embracing the emerging technologies and transformations already taking place across global televised cricket. Therefore, the BBL is notable for its pervasive use of multi-cameras, fluid framing and for its high-intensity presentation style that relies upon rapid cuts, exuberant and hyperbolic commentators and constant technology-infused innovations. An omniscient rendering of cricket (on-field and off) draws upon 30-40 cameras and microphones while utilising perspectives that simultaneously can be at a distance and operate in close proximity. Hence cameras may be elevated on stadia and cranes, placed around the ground and located in the stumps themselves. In turn, regular camera transitions, alterations to the focal length or forms of juxtaposition often enhance this framing, such as the common Australian cricket

technique that provides a player in close-up while the camera slowly zooms out to reveal its location on an elevated lighting tower.

Moreover, cameras continually roam and explore cricket's terrain as a fluid and intensified visual navigation of the cricket-scape. Steadicam operators (cameras worn on a harness) are increasingly replacing fixed side-line cameras, and have been deployed on Segways since 2011. The Steadicam/Segway operator roams the boundaries and frequently enters the field of play during breaks, wickets falling, or at the commencement of play. Segway's permit the operator to both cover distance quickly while fluidly circumnavigating the field, pitch and/or players via close proximity. This has been complemented by Spider-Cam which offers free-floating aerial perspectives from a lightweight camera suspended on wires. First used in the IPL in 2010 to float above players and track the bowlers in synchronisation, it has been deployed in Australian cricket tests since 2012. The BBL's aerial footage from Spider-Cam sours high above the pitch, descends to player and/or ground level and fluidly floats across the cricket terrain. Such televisual innovations are part of BBL's technological affect, merging intermittent framing and self-referential techniques to provide the fascination, exhilaration and allure that demarcate these fluid and/or free-floating technologies from traditional forms of framing.

Innovation and Affective Engagement in the Big Bash

According to Kellner (2003, 2010) spectacles, images and commodities are fundamental aspects of our contemporary mediatised and consumerist culture, with elite sport a prime commodity-spectacle due to its often global, mediated and commercial orientations (Horne, 2006; Rowe, 2011; Whannel, 2014). Hence, the embellishment of sport via spectacular, seductive and sensationalised representations are commonplace, as are the excessive commercialised displays. This is evident within the BBL which, arguably, is more orientated

towards producing spectacular surfaces and packaging sport as entertainment than strictly a sporting contest. Discussing the IPL, Axford and Huggins (2011: 1332) suggest that,

> Twenty20 cricket is, first and foremost, a marketing strategy and its business model invests everything on the ability of fast cricket, played by teams of professional cosmopolitans, to attract and hold new audiences and increase advertising revenue.

Such sentiments seem equally apt for the BBL, with its emphasis on fast-paced, high action "smash and bash" cricket complemented by lavish displays of technology, commerce and sporting identities to attract and retain the BBL viewing audience. Of course, the commodity-spectacle and commercially-laden landscape is both overt and expected. Branded billboards and logos saturate the players, field and surroundings; product placement is referenced by framing techniques and imbedded within technologies, while sponsor-intensive relationships name the competition, coverage and peddle merchandise to the assumed fans.

Moreover, as 'a hyper-compressed and ephemeral spectacle' (Axford and Huggins, 2011:1336), T20 relies upon continually modifying its innovations and formulating affective techniques to attract broader populist audiences. In terms of innovation, 2012 was arguably a break-through year with the BBL employing the camera-drone, aptly branded the FoxKopter by Fox Sports, which provided free-floating aerial perspectives for the game. Additionally, primarily designed for spectator and broadcaster interest, the Flashing Wicket System (or Zings Stumps) was a world-first invention, wherein the stumps and bails illuminate flashing LED red lights when the bails are dislodged. Through the use of multi-camera and microphone placements, replay technologies and the other tools on offer, viewers are permitted the role of an *idealised omniscient observer* who has privileged access to all facets of the BBL. In turn, this can permit viewer engagement via an analytical capacity; both knowledgeable and lay audiences using the innovations as analytical tools to better dissect the game and its officiating. Although not utilised in T20s, arguably the DRS virtual tools

extend such capacities and position viewers as "perfect umpires". Nevertheless, the BBL's omniscient aesthetic framing furnishes forms of analytical knowledge inherent to the *idealised omniscient observer.*

Conversely, the high-paced, entertainment-laden and all-seeing orientation of the BBL can also transport viewers closer to the athletic realm and experience. In 2012, the BBL adopted Player-Cams that mount cameras in the helmet for batsmen or wicketkeepers and in the umpires' caps (replacing the more restrictive Third-Eye glasses worn by umpires in 2011). The BBL has also utilised player-microphones since its inception. Contextually, a longer history of framing pseudo-participatory perspectives via athletic point-of-view (POV) representations underscores Australian broadcasting. For example, Channel Seven created "Race-cam" for in-car footage from Bathurst in 1979 and were cutting to live (and expletive-laden) in-car commentary from drivers like Dick Johnson in the 1980s, while the Allan Border Tribute match in 1993 featured bulky helmet-mounted cameras and microphones on the participating sport celebrities. Players have also worn microphones in T20 internationals televised by the Nine Network since 2006.

In each BBL match, a handful of players wear microphones (sometimes accompanied by helmet-cam) and provide real-time comments during the game. So, by-and-large, the bowler or batsman reveals his intentions to the television audience before the next delivery is bowled, provides a self-commentary on the play, or frivolously engages in banter with the commentators as was commonplace with Englishmen Kevin Pietersen and Andrew Flintoff in 2014/15. Flintoff also offered a comical moment of singing while fielding for the televised audience. Player-mics can offer positive and negative appraisals. For example, Shane Warne's comments in 2011 provided great insights into his tactical ability to predict a batsman's weakness, on one occasion analysing before clean bowling Brendon McCullum.

On the flipside, in 2012 the microphones failed to edit Warne's continual sledging that saw an enraged Marlon Samuels throw his bat and angrily confront Warne.

By facilitating close audio and visual proximity to the event and/or athletes, a shared perspective of either athletic movement and/or athletes' viewpoints, and by having cameras entering the playing arena and navigating diverse spaces, the BBL's technologies seemingly furnish an *idealised participant* representation for its television audience. Within helmet-cam for example, viewers are restricted to an illusory pseudo-player or umpire perspective and share, in a visual, temporal and spatial sense, the player's body, experience and viewpoint. That is, viewers are permitted a visceral, spatial and technologically-embodied POV spectacle of cricket for the duration of the shot. Moreover, aurally viewers are transported into the cricketing realm as privileged recipients of the on-field soundscape, including hearing player perspectives in real time. Finally, by floating only metres above the players, Spider-Cam offers new spatial viewing dynamics for the televised audience which increasingly allows cameras and, by implication, viewers, to enter the field of play and navigate the spaces and competitors of live sport in a fluid and free-floating manner. Nevertheless, while potentially entwining audience, technology and athlete, such techniques remain essentially an *idealised* perspective afforded only by the sophisticated mediatised, commercialised and technological BBL spectacle.

Concluding Remarks

Overall, the effect of the transformations taking place in the BBL (and global cricket more broadly) is an affective one. While the new franchises attempt to manufacture such affective attachments, it is the televised BBL spectacle that is predominantly generating and piquing this interest. Specifically, it can be argued that the emerging televisual technologies emphasise enhanced entertainment, invigoration and involvement for the contemporary BBL audience. While cricket purists or connoisseurs most likely rebuke and reject T20 as

perceivably the latest insignificant populist incursion, it is the seductive technological spectacle that attracts a new, younger and growing audience. Screening BBL matches live, free-to-air and in prime time since 2013 has also been a contributing factor. However, the technological innovations further enable such affective attachments by constructing degrees of sensory invigoration and vicarious involvement to further entice casual, ephemeral and unknowledgeable lay audiences. The BBL's high action, fluid and close proximity framing renders and mobilises an affective spectacle of "smash and bash" cricket. Simultaneously these perspectives can afford another affective layering for the invested fan seeking further immersion in and engagement with cricket, as well as the fusing of analytical analysis with athletic replication. The BBL self-referentially acknowledges its own mediatisation while utilising these technological innovations to affectively foreground and intensify its "smash and bash" spectacle.

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