Methodological Statement

Having decided to focus our research on Letterboxd: a social media platform built around its users' shared interest in film, Alex began by employing **Machine Learning** (ML): for hypothesis testing. He found a large dataset of Letterboxd Movie Ratings and began exploring the data within a Python environment. The result was two hypotheses. He falsified one and visualised the evidence supporting the other. The hypotheses were:

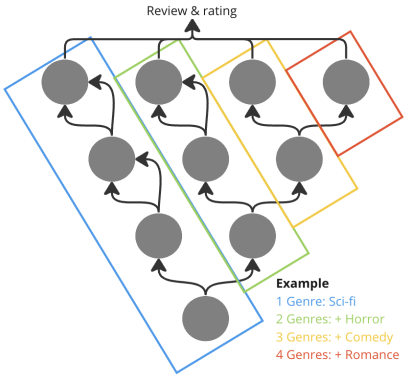
1. The earlier a film was released the more predictable users' opinions of it would be, thanks to greater consensus, within the community, on *classics*. (Falsified in *Playground.ipynb*)
2. The fewer genres a film is classified as having, the more predictable users' opinions of it would be, thanks to greater consensus, within the community, on simple narratives. (Visualised in *Playground.ipynb*)

Alongside Alex's ML, Oscar carried out **Netnographic** research, as a method for both sense making and world-building. The Netnography was partially informed by the findings from the ML and a previous journalistic "Netnographic exploration" of Letterboxd. The key findings from this were: nearly done

1. Letterboxd is the virtual format of media discourse and is steadily growing in prevalence and influence becoming the norm, making media analysis more accessible.
2. It carries clear hallmarks of modern social media which include "Big Data"/Tracking and analytics, "Open" public discourse and data recording i.e. some kind of journal/diary/form of expression.
3. It is unique as a platform in that it is people/users first, it uses open source data, has a small team and does not push for growth and the creators care about and use the product.
4. Informality, genuinity, short form and humour are rewarded on the platform there is long form informal analysis but it is in the minority.
5. There are multiple ways to gain notoriety, use of the platform is similarly weighted to engagement.

Following this initial research we needed to hone in on a narrative. We discovered that, of all the films examined via ML, there was the least consensus on Cinderella (2015). Through Netnography we found that the discourse surrounding this film was about whether the classic or the new version was better. Thus it seemed to be an appropriate template for our narrative. It also provided us with additional themes to explore within our retelling.

It was our intention to follow the ML and netnography with science-fiction, our output being a Choose Your Own Adventure (CYOA) sci-fi. A style of sci-fi which would greatly reduce the reader's perspective distance: a hypothesised further dimension of psychological distance that "account[s] for the influence of the [reader's] commitment" (Fiedler, 2007). In doing so we would be relying on three of the key methods taught during the course. However while ML and Netnography were our primary methods we used other methods to supplement our process. This was a natural occurrence that helped us build coherence rather than a deliberate choice, we used **cartography** to visualise and map out the narrative structure, the structure we chose was decided on to ensure feasibility whilst conveying themes. **Semiotics** allowed us to encode the themes we had found within research into our narrative in the content, purposefully conveying ideas so as not to be derivative.



(Final Map)

As a result of this sense-making process we were able to bring together the qualitative findings of netnography and the quantitative findings of ML into a single product: a CYOA sci-fi set in a fictionalised version of the world uncovered by Oscar's netnography and designed to test Alex's second hypothesis, we decided to have each path be a caricature of the genres it represents, leaning into the somewhat-gimmicky nature of CYOA books. Readers would navigate the story, choosing whether to increase its complexity, or seal their more simplistic fate (e.g. a reader who chooses to stick with pure sci-fi at the first fork is then restricted to the left-most ending). Finally there is a participatory section where readers can rate the strand to generate data by which Alex's second hypothesis can be tested. While a somewhat messy process, we hope you enjoy the end result as much as we did making it.

Bibliography

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The garden of forking paths

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