

# Cultural Daily

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## The City's Free, But Watching It Will Cost You

Adam Leipzig · Thursday, August 5th, 2010

The most illegally-downloaded movie for the past two weeks was not *Inception*, nor was it an early copy of *The Expendables*. Instead, it was *Sex and the City 2*, according to [TorrentFreak](#). Which leads to some puzzling questions. Are BitTorrent users still geeky young men, just poorly-informed geeky young men, men who see *Sex* in a title and download it before they realize that the average age of the *City* women is 47? Or has the demographic of BitTorrent's hackers and outlaw-downloaders become older and more female? And if women over 35 are grabbing illegal downloads of Carrie Preston's adventures, would they want the world to know?

Like anything involving sex, it teases the connection between guilty and pleasure.

One notable scene in *Sex and the City 2* has Samantha in the Dubai souk. Samantha's designer bag comes open and spills a ton of condoms on the ground; she makes a speech about being a sexually liberated woman and mocks traditional Muslim female garb. The scene caused a stir, and was denounced as anti-Arab.

When the movie was in theatres, I emailed a friend of mine who works in the United Arab Emirates to ask what the reaction was there, but my friend never emailed me back. Maybe the email was blocked because it had the word *Sex* in the title. That's certainly a possibility. The UAE government blocks some internet traffic, and this week the UAE announced it would stop BlackBerry email service in October because the government can't read the emails sent or received. Yet while the UAE is at a crossroads between tradition and the contemporary world, their BlackBerry directive received special media attention because Westerners view it as an authoritarian, Closed Society.

I predict BlackBerry/RIM will accommodate, and will give the UAE government some access. After all, here in the US, our emails are open to government eyes too. We may live in an Open Society, where websites aren't blocked and we can look anywhere and download anything, an Open Society means that what we do is public and transparent. Our email and text messages are stored by the companies that carry them. Every website we visit is stored by our Internet providers. (Yes, friends, every porn site you've ever been to.) Every movie we download, illegally or not, is tracked. All of this information can be accessed with a court order, and under the Patriot Act court orders may be secret. We cannot really know what our government authorities are looking at.

In a world where everything is freely accessible, what we do and who we do it with, what we watch and listen to and what we say, can all be public. We don't have the private secrecy of intellectual exploration. You may not think this matters, but I assure you that in Closed Societies,

the privacy to investigate ideas and explore content on one's own is prized beyond compare.

BitTorrent, the site from which *Sex and the City 2* is being downloaded, has been around since 2004, and was a harbinger of the future, a future when all content would reside somewhere and be easy to get. That time is now, and that somewhere is called the Cloud. Of course, content owners don't want consumers pulling files down for free. And so with some [fanfare](#) most of the movie studios have announced a partnership to form Ultraviolet, an industry standard for Cloud downloads. You can think of Ultraviolet as a locker with a key. You'll have a locker in the Cloud, and you'll pay to put content in it – content like music and movies. Then you can use your Ultraviolet Key from any device, from your TV or laptop or iPod or phone, and download the content you've paid for.

Ultraviolet will be good for the entertainment industry, and easy downloading will probably be its driving economic engine for the next seven years. By agreeing on Ultraviolet, the studios avoid the consumer confusion that would have been caused by different standards, as happened in the HD-DVD v. Blu-ray battles. And Cloud computing has immense, and positive, implications for all sectors of our economy and business, as Cisco described in a recent, smart [white paper](#).

Many of the people who use BitTorrent use freely distributed, sophisticated techniques to conceal their identities, and some of them are [pretty effective](#). But as we float in the Cloud using Ultraviolet Keys, there's no protection for our privacy of curiosity and thought. Not even all the condoms in Samantha's designer bag could do that.

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