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CHAPTER 1

MAKING NEW MEDIA: CULTURE, SEMIOTICS, DIGITAL LIT/ORACY

And hath he skill to make so excellent? (Edmund Spenser, The Shepherd's Calendar)

This book is about two things: Making and New Media. To 'make', in Middle English and Middle Scots, was a synonym for writing poetry, itself a derivation of the Greek verb *poieo*, 'to make'. This etymology is significant for the collection of essays in this book. For one thing, it suggests the making of expressive or artistic pieces of work; and all of the practice described here is about learners and teachers making media which can be loosely described in this way. It is about the relationship between media production and the arts in education, as well as about kinds of literacy. It is also about creativity, and what we might mean by that word, as teachers and researchers. For another thing, it suggests expressivity as practical, material construction, which will also be a theme of this book.

Making is primarily about *representation*: the combination of ideas that represent the world in some way and the material substances – of language, image, music, dramatic gesture – which make it possible. For Aristotle, who used the word *mimesis*, or imitation, this was cultural both in the sense that it was an imitation of nature made by human art, and in the sense that it took place within the 'cultural' space of poetry. But it was also cultural in a material sense, in its use of the physical instruments of language and music to create specific aesthetic effects. However, to see representation only as imitation is to depoliticize it. Aristotle's conception of how language might intervene in, indeed perform, the work of politics belongs not to his *Poetics*, but to his *Rhetoric*. For modern theorists of literacy, representation and rhetoric belong together. Bill Green argued as long ago as 1995 that English teachers needed to seek a critical-postmodernist pedagogy 'within which notions of popular culture, textuality, rhetoric and the politics and pleasures of representation become the primary focus of attention in both 'creative' and 'critical' terms.' (Green, 1995: 400).

Re-reading these words now, I am struck by their ambitious synthesis of ideas. As well as the notion of rhetoric, which runs more strongly through the Australian history of literacy studies than the British one, this vision of a future pedagogy includes elements of current models of media literacy, the critical and the creative, to which I will return. It also embraces the idea of textuality, which implies both objects of study in the media and English curricula, and the textual structures which we have become used to thinking of in terms of different modes and media (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2000), and in relation to multiple forms of literacy (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). It also situates these practices firmly in a political context; but at the same time invokes the elusive idea of pleasure, to which, again, I will return.

Green's yoking together of the concepts of rhetoric, textuality and popular culture is reminiscent of a proposal made by Kress & van Leeuwen (1992) in a paper critiquing the work of the later Barthes. In it, they make the claim that social semiotics is 'the theoretical, analytical and descriptive branch of cultural studies'.

For those who, like me, are schooled in the tradition of British Cultural Studies, this claim indicates a desire to operate with the theories of culture emanating originally from the work of pioneers such as Raymond Williams (1961), the subsequent work of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, and the more recent developments in this tradition which seek to interpret the phenomena of popular culture, and especially diverse, fragmented, fluid patterns of youth culture. Kress and van Leeuwen's proposal relates this tradition to a theory of signification rooted in the cultural and social function of the text, derived from sociolinguistics, and Halliday in particular (1985). As a necessary corollary of this, it connects texts with the social interests of their related signmakers: those who make them, and those who use, read, view or play them. In the context of education, it offers a theory of signification ready for synthesis with the work of scholars of children's media cultures, such as Buckingham, who provides influential research in how children engage with media texts (e. g. 1996), as well as proposals for how the pedagogies of media education might be influenced by Cultural Studies (2003).

Cultural Studies: back to broader definitions of culture

This has always seemed to me a potentially valuable connection to make. Cultural Studies has been an immensely invigorating development in media research, radically shifting the emphasis from textual structures to lived cultures, from ideal spectators to real audiences, from abstract textual politics to situated cultural politics. However, in developing its methodological apparatus from forms of ethnographic investigation, discourse analysis, and social theory, it gradually became apparent that it never really developed a new way to think about signification and text. When the scholars of Cultural Studies reached for techniques of textual analysis, they reached back in time, or borrowed, as Hebdige and Fiske did from French semiotics in their respective analyses of punk and Madonna (Hebdige, 1979; Fiske, 1989).

So the combination with a new semiotics proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen, which offered to recover some of the clarity of structuralist semiotics, while sustaining the benefits of a post-structuralist emphasis on the fluidity and contingency of meaning, looked appealing, to say the least.

However, to date there has been little in the way of worked-through practical realisations of this promising combination of theoretical and methodological approaches. Green's argument is the best, most inclusive, most imaginative one I know for why the connection urgently needs to be made. His reference to popular culture, and to the pleasures and politics of representation, strongly suggests Cultural Studies scholarship which has productively informed both the sociology of education, extending our understanding of youth subculture (Willis, 1977; 1990); and the development of models of media

education in the UK which attended more positively and specifically to the popular cultural experience students bring into school (Buckingham and Sefton-Green, 1994; Marsh and Millard, 2000).

Popular culture is a recurrent theme of the essays in this book, written for journals over the last decade, and charting practices, theories and methodologies in my work as a school teacher and then as an academic researcher in the general field of literacy, and the more specific field of media education. Popular culture is frequently referred to, and the media educator's mantra that media studies and media education are one of the few areas of the curriculum that take popular culture seriously is often acknowledged. One of the probable benefits of postmodernist theory, however, is the hypothesis of a collapse of the formerly well-policed boundary between popular and elite cultures, suggesting that those media texts which exist in borderline spaces may be the most productive ones to use with young people, to unsettle and explore questions of taste and cultural value. Chapter 2 provides an example, discussing 13-year-olds' work on Neil Jordan's film *The Company of Wolves*, in one sense a self-consciously art-house fantasy, in another a skilled deployer of the visual tropes of popular werewolf movies. Similarly, Chapter 3 explores teenage reverse-engineering of *Psycho*: low-budget popular horror, later elevated to auteurist masterpiece. Other chapters explore how children's animations infuse traditional folktales with the imagery of popular TV cartoons (chapter 4); how children's computer game designs can make popular sci-fi texts but also remediate epic classical narratives (chapter 7); how machinima can locate itself in different aesthetic traditions, from First Person Shooters to European arthouse animation (chapter 8).

The postmodernist explanation is perhaps too glib, however. Another way to think about different kinds of culture, more closely related to the history of Cultural Studies, and to the interdisciplinary landscape of media and literacy teachers, is to return to one of the founding texts of British Cultural Studies, Raymond Williams' *The Long Revolution* (1961). For Cultural Studies at its inception, this was perhaps the most influential manifesto of the importance and value of popular culture, rooted in Williams' level of 'lived culture', corresponding to his 'social definition' of culture, 'in which culture is a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour.' (1961: 41).

Media educators influenced by Cultural Studies have been at pains to point out the dangers of homogenising this 'common culture', the need to recognize the proliferation of tastes displayed by young people; while the sociology of youth culture has increasingly recognized the fragmentation of young people's and children's cultural affiliations into myriad forms and lifestyles, shaping and shaped by forces both global and local (for example, Bennett, 2000; McRobbie, 1991; Willett, 2006).

However, what the field of Cultural Studies has always been reluctant to do is to return to Williams' triple definition of culture, and the three corresponding levels of culture he identified. Along with the social definition, he identified an 'ideal' definition; and a 'documentary' definition. These correspond to the levels of culture he described as 'the selective tradition', and the 'documentary record'.

These— understandably overlooked by Cultural Studies in its traditional concerns with the contemporary moment and the emancipatory politics of class-based accounts of culture – seem to me to be worth returning to.

The value of Williams' idea of the selective tradition may now be threefold. Firstly, it offers a way out of the binary opposition of *élite*-popular by proposing a historical process of cultural distinction. To be sure, this process may still reaffirm the dominant tastes and values of an *élite* class, but if the postmodernist hypothesis has any value, something more diverse, if not an actual inversion of the old hierarchies, may be the consequence. Secondly, the selective tradition provides for the possibility of today's item of popular culture becoming tomorrow's item of undisputed cultural value. This kind of pattern is common in the history of popular media – yesterday's comic-strip culture becomes the stuff of today's collectors' fairs; the computer games of thirty years ago become curated in *élite* cultural institutions¹; 50s 'B' movies are affectionately and reverently showcased by the British Film Institute. Thirdly, the selective tradition itself as a process suggests the contestation and negotiation of cultural value, which is surely exactly the kind of process we want students to uncover, critically observe, and learn how to participate in.

As for Williams' idea of culture as a documentary record, this again offers a historicized view of culture which is of value to our students of literature and media. One argument here is to do with critical distance. All media teachers know the difficulties of making music videos with students – how absorbed they become in the delighted affirmation of their own musical tastes, how blind to the possible merits of other people's. One way out of this is to somehow negotiate a truce, a listening space for the discussion of different genres and styles. Another, proposed by the influential English media teacher Pete Fraser and his colleague, Barney Oram (2003), is to give students old singles from the 60s and 70s, creating instant critical distance. A further move would be the study of the cultural moment represented by this 'old' music: a study, in other words, of its documentary cultural significance. Although Williams' notion of the cultural record was illustrated by vast historical distance (the documentary evidence of classical civilization), we may consider much shorter time frames. Popular cultural forms mutate dramatically over a few decades—but the lifestyles and tastes they record still live in the memories of the parents and grandparents whom our students can profitably interview.

The return to Williams' tripartite model, then, seems to offer several clear benefits for teachers of literacy and media. Chiefly, it offers a historical perspective which gives us much-needed relief in several tricky areas. Rather than simply relativising cultural value, or reducing it purely to contemporary tastes, it offers a way to consider how cultural value accretes over time, making visible the operations of social power at work in this process. Rather than endlessly celebrating or bemoaning the present moment, the historical view, whether long or short, gives us and our students critical purchase and inter-generational understanding. Rather than lampooning *élite* culture at one moment, and lurching into a postmodern clinch with it the next, we can see how the *élite* and

popular ends of the spectrum develop together, feed from each other, caricature each other, morph into each other. Most importantly, we can actually address the question of cultural value, a problematic issue for media educators. In so doing, we can rethink the aesthetic dimension of media texts, to which I will return below.

Multimodality and Cultural Studies: complementary frameworks?

The value of a social semiotic, and more specifically multimodal, approach to literacy is well known. This approach has underpinned a good deal of work in the Anglophone world over the last decade and more, exploring how communicative and representational work by children and young people needs to be conceived of in relation to the social motivations of such work, and across the range of semiotic modes in which it might be expressed.

However, if Cultural Studies has lacked a theory of signification, it might be said that social semiotics has never managed to reach out to Cultural Studies as its ideal disciplinary partner in the way Kress and van Leeuwen proposed in 1992. The emphasis on common culture, on the social determinants of cultural taste proposed by Bourdieu, on the politics of popular culture, on the subcultural affiliations within which identity is forged and subjectivity constructed—these have not been strong themes in recent work on multimodality. Simply put, the emphasis in social semiotics and multimodality theory has remained textual: its account of meaning-making, while properly attentive to the motivation of the sign-maker, seeks its evidence exclusively in the texts made by such social agents. By contrast, Cultural Studies has famously ignored text: from its early reactions against the textual fixation of Screen theory to its more recent sociologically-framed attention to taste, lifestyle, community and identity, it has sought its evidence in interview, ethnographic study and situated observation.

These are not simply arcane methodological points. The methodology and the theory are intertwined. One approach constructs the world as text, albeit shaped by the motivations of social agents; the other as (what used to be known as) audience, while the texts they engage with are backgrounded and reified. Two important examples illustrate, for me, why these two approaches need each other.

From Cultural Studies, comes the well-known model of the ‘Circuit of Culture’. This model, deriving from a proposal by Stuart Hall in an effort to break out of the sterile opposition of structure and agency, and further developed in a study of the Sony Walkman (du Gay et al., 1997), proposes that representation and communication move round cyclically between different nodes in the life of a media artifact: *representation, identity, production, consumption* and *regulation*. These nodes foreground, on the one hand, the political economy of the media and its regimes of industrial production and policy-governed regulation; and on the other, the social contexts of audiences, caught between interpretation and consumption, between receiving media texts made for them and producing their own meanings. Questions of textuality are relatively weakly represented: representation is shown in its political rather than textual sense; textual making is represented as production, emphasizing the political economy of the media

rather than its semiotic function; audiences are termed consumers, again underlining economic rather than interpretive function.

My example from multimodality theory is the influential schema of semiotic strata proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2000). The strata are:

Discourse (defined as knowledge of some aspect of reality)

Design (defined as choice of semiotic mode)

Production (defined as choice of medium)

Distribution (in which modes and media are further modified by what may be new media of distribution—for instance, a music video modified by the broadcasting apparatus of television)

Though Kress and van Leeuwen do not propose it, it seems reasonable to me to add the further layer of **interpretation**, the subject of an ensuing chapter in their book (and of chapter 6 in this book). Since for them interpretation is also a form of semiotic production, it seems to follow logically from distribution.

Given this, it can be argued that Kress and van Leeuwen's strata closely match du Gay et al.'s circuit of culture. Both propose a kind of movement, not exactly chronological (Kress and van Leeuwen resist this idea), but at least incorporating sequences of design and production, distribution and reception, a cyclical exchange of meanings between those who make texts and those who read them. The differences are that the multimodal model is closely related to a semiotic theory which tracks into the detail of textual structure at the most minute level of sign production (but is not structurally associated with a theory of culture), while the Cultural Studies model is closely related to a theory of the cultural politics of production and consumption (but not structurally related to any theory of signification).

This is a simplification of both positions, of course—but I simplify in order to argue that both models are incomplete, and the media and literacy educator would best be served by a combination of the two.

The remainder of this chapter will reflect on the ideas of literacy most relevant to the studies represented in this book and to contemporary literacy and media educators. The key words in the discussion are all, again, derived from Bill Green's vision of a future pedagogy.

Criticality and Rhetoric

As well as the reference to rhetoric, Green's condensed manifesto included the word 'critical', which signals an element in the tripartite model of literacy he and others have espoused: *operational, cultural and critical* (for example, Bigum et al., 1998; Lankshear, Snyder, and Green, 2000). The term also signals more broadly the well-developed notion of critical literacy (for example, Morgan, 1997).

The notion of criticality has its own more specific history in the context of media education. Both in the UK, and more broadly internationally, there is a good consensus

around a general conceptual framework (Buckingham and Domaille, 2003), which, although it displays local variations across countries, exam syllabuses, media education theorists and advocates, always includes conceptions of production (or media institutions), text, and audience. Media teachers always have their own grounded understanding of the opportunities of this framework: it develops a critical understanding of the political economy of how the media is produced, of the ‘languages’ of media texts, and of the regime of reception and interpretation, and its attendant tastes and pleasures. They also have a grounded understanding of its problems: it is notoriously difficult to get at the industry; textual analysis can be abstract and demotivating for students; and ‘real’ audiences are as hard to identify and reach as the industry.

I want to make two points about this conceptual framework. The first is to emphasise how this conceptual framework is, of course, another version of the Cultural Studies ‘circuit of culture’. This relationship is obvious, well known, and the result of these two models developing together over time, over the history of Cultural Studies and its wrestle with problems of structure and agency on the one hand, and the history of media education and its attempts to shift the emphasis from text to context on the other.

In this sense, then, what we mean by ‘critical’ in media education is irreducibly cultural. However, if my analogy between the circuit of culture and Kress and van Leeuwen’s semiotic strata holds good, then the conceptual framework is, by the same token, irreducibly semiotic. What consequences might this hold? Its implications for the future would be a broader idea of the semiotic. Traditionally, semiotics is only explored in media education in relation to the middle bit of the tripartite model—text, and the ‘languages’ of the media. This tradition of textual analysis is problematic. It can be seen as remote and abstract, as rooted in scraps of 70s semiotic and narratological theory², as divorced from practical production work. Kress and van Leeuwen’s model would suggest something more sustained, flexible and pervasive. A social semiotic perspective here would require attention to the discursive context and origins of the media text or phenomenon: who made it? What was their motive? What hierarchies of power shaped its generic and stylistic characteristics? And to its design: what modes are employed and to what end? How can we, for instance, move beyond the grammar of filming and editing to look at the meanings of dramatic movement, speech, music, set design? And to its production: how is meaning changed by the use of digital editing technologies; or game engines; or hypertext? And to its distribution – how is meaning changed by the frame of a TV schedule? By the projection technology of a multiplex cinema? By the online persistence of an immersive virtual world? And to its interpretation: how are the semiotic resources provided by media texts understood, employed in the service of identity and social action, and reshaped into new texts by players, readers, spectators?

If what we mean by ‘critical’ in media education is, then, a desire for students to learn both about the cultural and the semiotic properties of the media, it is worth remarking that the conceptual framework also recalls another of Bill Green’s terms, noted earlier: the idea of rhetoric. For Aristotle, who was as fond of tripartite structures as contemporary media theorists, this meant three things: *ethos*, *logos* and *pathos*. The first term refers to

the ethical aspect of the message, the emphasis being on the credibility of the speaker. The second refers to the logical consistency of the message, the emphasis being on the text. The third refers to the emotional appeal to the listeners, the emphasis being on the audience. Clearly, the triumvirate of institution, text, audience is not an invention of today's media curriculum. The important thing about Aristotle's theory, however, and the modern rhetorical studies which are descended from it, is their emphasis on politics and argument. This model of communication seeks to explain how texts persuade, are never neutral, always have an angle (Andrews, 1994). However, the emphasis here is not a narrow, suspicious attitude to the media. Indeed, this route would simply lead us back to a Leavisian distrust of the commercial motives of the media (Leavis and Thompson, 1933), or the renowned pessimism of Theodor Adorno about the ideological function of popular culture (Adorno, 1941). Such forms of mistrust are enshrined in successive versions of media in the English curriculum in the UK. While these have softened and become more positive in recent years, the general tendency has been for media texts to be treated as factual and untruthful, requiring a reading mode of suspicion, as distinct from literary texts which are treated as fictional and truthful, requiring a reading mode of appreciation.

The rhetorical approach is more even-handed. It allows us to recognize duplicity, exploitation, and misrepresentation, to be sure (both in media and literary texts) but also the stylistic properties of a text or an oral performance: how an idea is conveyed with passion and conviction, how an audience believes in a representation with its head and its heart. In respect of the credibility of the text and the judgment made of this by the audience, this is the process known in social semiotic theory as modality: how a text makes a truth claim, and what a reader makes of this. The rhetorical model also invokes the immediacy, performance and context of speech, and a theme of this book (most explicit in chapters 7 and 8) is that orality and oracy may often be better metaphors for the communicative processes of new media than literacy, with its associations of the fixity, abstraction and temporal deferral of print.

If the rhetorical model is also semiotic in this respect, it is in others, too, which should prevent it from being reduced to a notion of 'critical' which is about context but not about how meaning is made in these contexts. It may be about how Harry Potter has become a commercial brand, a trademarked possession of Time-Warner; or about how extreme Potter fans attend costumed conventions or make fan websites: an exploration of these phenomena is certainly part of what it might mean for children to become critical. But the rhetorical model requires attention to how these meanings are made: the semiotic work of the trademark sign in Harry Potter™; or of the design and production of a Hogwarts gown worn by a fan, and purchased from an online merchandise company.

Criticality, Aesthetics and Pleasure

If criticality is about rhetoric, it is also about the aesthetic dimension of literacy. Attention to the material details of Potter fandom—to the cold shock of the Warner trademark logo or to the warm colours and woollen texture of a Hogwarts scarf—is a

consideration of the aesthetic properties of these items as much as their rhetorical claims; indeed, the two cannot be separated. Aesthetics has a problematic history in media education, either reduced to a simple attention to style divorced from meaning (e. g., the visual style of Ridley Scott); or neglected altogether as a category belonging to élite art forms and their study. A productive way to approach its future may be to consider what it means from the viewpoint of Bourdieu's critique of Kant (1984). As is well known, Bourdieu argues that Kant's version of aesthetic judgment, while claiming to be absolute, is in fact a class-based judgment, designed to repudiate the immediacy of popular aesthetic values, to instantiate instead a mode of aesthetic appreciation characterized by chilly distance, and to exclude those who belong to subordinate social classes from this set of rarefied tastes. Bourdieu seeks to invert Kant's aesthetic values, championing the visceral intimacy of popular cultural taste, demonizing the bourgeois remoteness of Kant's 'pure gaze'.

Bourdieu's critique has been profoundly influential in Cultural Studies: its influence can be seen in the extreme partisan rejection of the élite cultures of concert-hall and theatre in Willis's *Common Culture*, and his corresponding promotion of the 'grounded aesthetic' of young people's engagement with the forms of popular media (1990). This defence of the popular media arts can be followed, in the field of media education, into Buckingham and Sefton-Green's *Cultural Studies Goes to School* (1994), where to be critical means neither the haughty contempt of the Leavisian media critique, nor the ascetic denial of popular pleasures produced by the Marxist ideology critique. It means instead a difficult balance between critical distance and cultural affiliation.

I call this a difficult balance for good reasons. In popular terms, it means a balance between objective and subjective critical engagement. In this book, the need for such a balance is indicated in chapter 6, which explores how a group of 13-year-olds engage with the book, film and computer game of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. On the one hand, the students are seeking objective conceptualizations of these texts: how they represent particular values ("Harry has to be brave"), or particular textual structures ("end of level bosses"; "cut scenes"). On the other hand, they express engagements which are intimately related to their own developing sense of self, as in the example of the boy who dismisses Harry as a teacher's pet, indicating here and elsewhere that Harry represents a kind of boyhood from which he increasingly wants to dissociate himself.

This kind of territory, where objective structures (here introduced by media texts and by educational experiences) meet, merge, collide with subjective, embodied experience, aspiration, desire, is the territory indicated by Bourdieu in his notion of habitus. Habitus in Bourdieu's scheme is the system of dispositions in which objective structures meet subjective thoughts, actions and perceptions. It is his version of the longstanding effort in sociology and philosophy to reconcile structure and agency, an opposition considered in relation to children and the media by Buckingham and Sefton-Green in an article on Pokémon (2003). Their argument is that a mediating force in an otherwise endless speculation about the determining effects of structure or agency is pedagogy, conceived broadly here as an intervention to promote critical understanding.

If, then, we re-conceive of aesthetic engagement in Bourdieu's terms as a wholesale endorsement of the values of popular culture, we must also imagine the meeting of objective structures and subjective action which his habitus indicates, and which Buckingham and Sefton-Green seek to reconcile. In this spirit, Leander and Frank argue that a version of the aesthetic which unites it with the cognitive on the one hand, and with the sensual on the other, will serve as a corrective to multimodal approaches which have tended to 'place much more emphasis on meaning-making than on affective or aesthetic attachment' (2006: 186). This kind of approach is of considerable value, not only in thinking about how students engage with the aesthetic properties of traditional media, but how they become subjectively immersed in new, online worlds. Leander and Frank's insistence that encounters with the media should be understood as identity work explored 'through affective relations, desire, and sensory immersion' (2006: 186) is directly applicable to the kind of media-making of student avatars explored in chapter 8 of this book. It can also serve to bring closer, in the way I have proposed in the first part of this chapter, the territories of social semiotics and Cultural Studies, with the latter's emphasis on the concrete nature of lived experience, often ethnographically imagined.

What, however, of pleasure, another powerful term included in Green's argument for a future model of literacy? Pleasure is an elusive idea: although we might be forgiven for thinking it is a self-evident end of the function of the arts in society, it is a term almost wholly absent from mandatory curricula the world over. In recent debates about digital literacy, and in particular about the potential lessons computer games might hold for education, pleasure (in popular terms, fun) is often opposed to the notion of work embodied in traditional schooling. In James Paul Gee's book about videogames, literacy and learning, the pleasurable work of play is contrasted to the dreary, unpleasurable work of traditional education. Playful learning is seen as immediate, collaborative, practical, goal-oriented; traditional school work is seen as remote, divorced from meaningful purpose, fragmented, individual (Gee, 2003).

In relation to the arts, pleasure is profoundly ambiguous. Steve Connor traces two histories: one of hedonic affirmation of cultural pleasures, from Bakhtin's carnival to Barthes' *jouissance*; the other of ascetic denial of pleasure in the search for cultural value, from F.R. Leavis and I.A. Richards' refusal of the 'easy' pleasures of popular culture to Laura Mulvey's refusal of the visual pleasures of Hollywood narrative cinema. Connor concludes that there is no simple reconciliation of these opposites, no way out but for us to 'inhabit the paradox' (Connor, 1992).

This may seem like a theoretical cop-out—but I mention it because it is another effort to square the circle, like Bourdieu's habitus; and again, the tension here is between an aesthetic of detachment on the one hand and sensual proximity on the other. Furthermore, something like Connor's paradoxical solution seems to be necessary if we return to my earlier argument about the levels of culture sketched by Raymond Williams. We make some progress with Bourdieu's habitus, and Buckingham and Sefton-Green's pedagogic answer to the structure-agency problem. But if we are to attend to all Williams' levels of culture—to the selective tradition and the documentary record as well as to lived, popular culture—then we need to imagine what will happen if students encounter aesthetic

experiences outside their comfort zone. An example in this book can be found in chapter 3, where the teacher has asked her class to remake Hitchcock's *Psycho* for a millennium audience. This is a familiar experience for media and film teachers, resonant with student objections to boring old black-and-white movies. It is an encounter between a habitus accustomed to a particular aesthetic of popular cinema, in this case the more recent descendants of the slasher sub-genre such as Wes Craven's *Scream* franchise, and a text displaying a more remote aesthetic. Whether the remoteness is to do with the stylistic expression of Hitchcock as auteur, or the unfamiliar stylistic conventions of a distant historical period, or both, the teacher has to find a way through the disconnection.

In this case, the teacher breaks through by asking students to make a trailer using original footage from the film. The process of unstitching the fabric of the original movie, and re-editing it for a contemporary audience, provokes the necessary connections between this old film and their own filmic culture; between their historical moment and the earlier ones of their parents and grandparents to whom the film would have meant something different; and between the analogue era of film culture and the digital era, whose compositional procedures they employ and explicitly reflect on.

Here, arguably, habitus means the accommodation of external structures of text, history, education with the internal structures of perception, embodied creative work, and subjective experience. At the same time, the cultural aspect of media education here means a recognition of the grounded aesthetic of popular culture, and specifically, the interest for teenage girls of slasher movies. But it also means the importance of the documentary record (how is this film a material residue of an earlier cultural moment), and the selective tradition (how did it come to have the status it possesses?). And finally, pleasure here means some kind of accommodation, oscillation, between the uncomfortable remoteness of an old, tedious-looking text and the gradual recognition that it is related to the visceral pleasures of more recent slasher films and, indeed, can be subjected to an aesthetic transformation in the process of digital remaking, its visual and aural aesthetic supplemented by blood-red titles and re-edited music tracks.

Creativity

The models of criticality rehearsed above may appear to favour the 'reading' aspect of media literacy. Yet the thrust of research and practice in the fields of digital literacy, media literacy, and multiliteracies has been much more about the production of texts by young people than about their critical interpretation of them. This can be seen as a pendulum swing, in which the related school subjects of English and Media education, traditionally about the analysis and interpretation of a textual canon, discover the benefits of students making their own texts. At the same time, it can be seen as the move from a fixation with text in the media theories of the seventies to an interest in the cultural work of media audiences in the eighties and nineties.

Of course, it has never been as simple as this. English has always also been about creative writing (though more for younger students); while media education has always attempted forms of production, even in the face of a complete absence of authoring technology.

Nevertheless, the last decade or so has seen a marked shift from critique to production, enabled by the advent of widely-distributed and affordable digital authoring tools. The implications of this will be explored further in the next section. The central point, often reiterated in recent work on media education (cf. Buckingham, 2003), is that critical understanding and creative production belong together and are best developed in tandem.

In current debates about the nature of the creative act in relation to education, creativity is often a vague and confused term, variously appearing as post-Romantic conceptions of artistic genius (Scruton, 1987), psychological accounts of the cognitive mechanisms of creative thought (Boden, 1990), cultural notions of ‘grounded aesthetic work’ (Willis, 1990), policy notions of the collaborative problem-solving skills necessary for new kinds of workforce (Leadbeater, 2000). My preferred approach draws on the work of the Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky, for whom the creativity of children was closely related to play (Vygotsky, 1931/1998). In playful activity, children learn the meaning of symbolic substitution through the manipulation of physical objects: so a broomstick becomes a horse, to use Vygotsky’s example. These symbolic understandings become internalised and develop into the mental processes which generate creative work. In these processes, importantly, imaginative play becomes full creativity, for Vygotsky, only when allied with rational thought, thinking in concepts. Although this formulation is not explicitly made in many of the chapters of this book, they are all concerned, in one way or another, with the way in which creative work draws on children’s cultural resources and depends on social forms of learning; and how creativity is linked to intellectual development, rather than being something mysteriously separate from it.

In this way, then, creativity is not something distinct from critical work, but something inseparable from it, as others have pointed out (Buckingham et al, 1995; Buckingham, 2003). It does not imply some kind of easy surrender to a practical alternative to ‘theory’. Media teachers—drama teachers too—know the perils of sending students off to make something up on their own with no intervention. The pedagogy of media education consists of constructive interventions of many kinds—inserting pauses for critical reflection; making time for students to present work in draft to peers; playing with constraints to raise the technical or intellectual challenge of the task (Sharples, 1999); negotiating social roles of students working in groups (Buckingham et al., 1995).

These kinds of creativity, in the familiar context of the media classroom, seem at odds with the visions of new media literacy proposed in recent years. Henry Jenkins’ *Convergence Culture* (2006), for example, exemplifies the autonomy of young people at ease with online tools, protocols and communities, like Heather who produces her Harry Potter fansite, managing an entire online community and a panoply of media-literate practices in defiance of the oppressive moves against her by Warner corporate interests.

However, it seems to me that the real function of Jenkins’ illuminating examples is not to suggest, in an excess of cyberoptimism, that schools are redundant and kids can do it all on their own. Indeed, in his ‘white paper’ on new media literacy (2007), he proposes three challenges which suggest the opposite—that many young people do not have access, in many ways, to new media; that they may not be able to see through the opacity of new

media messages in many cases; and that they may need help in negotiating the ethical dilemmas of online experience. Rather, then, examples such as Heather and her Harry Potter site are intended to serve as wakeup calls for educators and policymakers, reminders that some young people, while they may be the exception rather than the rule, can use new media in ways which are more imaginative, ambitious, sophisticated, and more rooted in authentic social, cultural or political purpose than much of what they might encounter in formal education. At the same time, Jenkins' three challenges represent another version of the arguments rehearsed above for pedagogic intervention to develop critical understandings of the media, as well as a level playing field for all children to experience its creative possibilities.

New Media

This book is about the culture and semiotics of making media, then; but it is also about *new* media. As Neil Selwyn argued recently (2008), disavowals of technological determinism have become routine for researchers in ICT, new media and education. Like others (Jenkins, 2007; Buckingham, 2007), he argues the case for the prioritizing of cultural and social uses of the media over the nature of the technology, for close attention to how social uses shape the development of the technology, and for an understanding of the affordances and constraints of new technologies on the way they are used. Needless to say, the following discussion will adopt this approach.

New media is an expression that requires some preliminary definition. Contemporary debates about how media education and media studies might respond to the challenges and opportunities of new media are currently dominated by the forms of social networking and participatory internet culture for which Tim O-Reilly coined the expression Web 2.0. We need to address these concerns—but also identify other quite distinct developments of digital media, in particular, the sets of authoring technologies which have permitted this generation of media students to become producers of their own media texts. By far the largest impact of the digital age on media teachers, for instance, is the advent of digital video editing softwares, allowing students and teachers to become creative forces in what remains the most popular medium for study in media studies classrooms in England and Wales (Grahame and Simons, 2004). Yet the use of this medium is dramatically under-researched: a systematic review of literature on its use in media and English classrooms revealed only twelve studies internationally (Burn and Leach, 2004).

In fact, even this wave of authoring technologies is not the first arrival in the digital pantheon, but rather the breakthrough into screen media authoring. It was preceded by something we now simply take for granted: the digital authoring of print media. My own first encounter with digital production in media education was with the arrival in my school of new Acorn Archimedes machines in 1988, with their excellent desktop publisher, *Ovation!*, their answer to Adobe's *Pagemaker*. With this, my Year 9 class made newspapers with real local reportage in Cambridge, desktop-published at a time when the local paper, the *Cambridge Evening News*, was still printing with moveable

type. My point here is that three features still much discussed in the context of the latest developments of Web 2.0 were already apparent: a shift from consumption to production, a heady sense of being ahead of a lumbering traditional industry, and a new sense of the compositional fluidity of digital authoring.

Moreover, it seems to me, looking back at this moment, twenty years ago, that it contained the seeds of a new kind of language, most memorably described by Lev Manovich in *The Language of New Media* (1998). I will return below to his account of the new ways in which information is organized and cultural objects created through the algorithmic manipulation of media objects and databases.

Among digital authoring technologies, the use of digital video editing software in particular has grown, and most schools in the UK with substantial media education programmes have invested in editing suites, using either professional or semi-professional editing software. In practical terms, this has meant a significant increase in creative production work in schools. This seems obvious—yet its effects are profound. The blossoming of such work shifts the balance away from the analytical practices which dominated media education for so long, under the model of academic media studies and sociology and also under the influence of approaches to media education based in ideology theory. The shift can also be seen as a move away from the metaphor of literacy and towards the Arts area of the curriculum, where making creative products in Art or Music has tended to be less encumbered with ‘theory’. There is also a shift away from the traditional dominance of secondary education, with researched accounts of creative work with digital video in primary schools, such as John Potter’s study of 10-year-olds’ autobiographical digital video work, emphasizing themes of identity and popular media culture (Potter, 2005).

Needless to say, however, a balance needs to be maintained in the shift towards a more Arts-based model: the critical approach media education brings is an essential element and part of the rationale for production work is that critical understanding is better achieved when students have some grasp of how media texts are produced as I have argued above. Chapter 8 also explores how creative media work can represent a meeting-point of Art and Media education at a time when the former is seeking a more critical approach, the latter a more creative one.

There is considerably less evidence of the authoring of other kinds of new media, however. Radio continues to be easy to produce but restricted to a relatively small number of enthusiasts while the authoring of computer games has been almost impossible until recently because of the lack of appropriate software. My own research centre has recently spent three years developing such a product, *Missionmaker*, with Immersive Education Ltd, which has seen successful results in media education classrooms (Buckingham and Burn, 2007). Its early use with twelve-year-old students is described in chapter 7.

The digital revolution, then, is rather older than we are sometimes inclined to think, and while the current interest in social softwares and participatory web cultures offers new

possibilities and challenges, many of them continue from, grow out of, and even incorporate, older digital media. It seems important not to lose sight of these ‘older’ media in the heady excitement about Web 2.0. Broadly speaking, they tend to be questions about what digital tools can make possible, and how we distinguish these from what was possible with the tools of the pre-digital era: how we identify what is distinctly new about digital media, a central question raised by Manovich (1998). Reid et al. (2002), addressing this question in a study of digital video in schools, posed a series of affordances of digital video, derived from Moseley et al. (1999), and further developed by Burn and Durran (2007) as:

- *iteration* (the ability to endlessly revise)
- *feedback* (the realtime display of the developing work)
- *convergence* (the integration of different authoring modes, such as video and audio, in the same software)
- *exhibition* (the ability to display work in different formats, on different platforms, to different audiences).

However, such affordances are only the first step. More profoundly, Manovich asks what it means for our traditional media texts, such as photographs and film, to have become computable. This is something the community of media educators both in the UK and internationally has barely begun to address³. Manovich distinguishes between what he calls ‘the cultural layer’ and ‘the computer layer’. The cultural layer consists of all the forms in which, over the years, we as media teachers—along with teachers of language and literature—have become expert. The computer layer is the set of concepts about how the world can be represented through the numerical organization of information: a language we are still uncomfortable with. What we used to call *representation*—say of a landscape, in Photoshop—is now constructed with numerical scales and filter (determining colour, or transparency, say); what we like to think of as a character may be, in a computer game, what programmers might call an *entity module*: a bundle of media objects articulated and animated by algorithms.

The humanist sensibility in media and literary studies instinctively reacts against the idea that texts might be made from numbers or formulae. This kind of belief can be seen as the residue of an ideology of representation dominant in the modern era, and typical of, for instance, the European novel. This ideology demands a simplistic kind of naturalistic realism, a claim to psychological veracity (in character development, for instance), and a rejection of fantasy and formulaic forms of narrative. This ideology, driven in effect by one strand of the Enlightenment project (not the scientific strand, of course), seeking in fictional form an affirmation of the rational and the ideal, unitary self, propelled inexorably along the road of *Bildung*, displaces more ancient forms of storytelling. English teachers, and by the same token media teachers, inherit the residue of this ideology, and a set of beliefs that representations of the world proceed organically from their referents. What, then, are they to make of computer games which represent the world by mathematically constructed puzzles clothed in 3-D graphics? Or of characters who are programmed to behave according to fixed formulae?

Chapter 7 ends with an example of a 12-year-old boy who proposes a computer game based on Homer's *Odyssey*. He conceives of it in terms of the rules and economies he has learned about in a media course on game design. This example recalls the productive remarks made about game characters by Janet Murray: that they resemble the heroes of oral narrative and to compare them to the psychologically developed characters of modern literature or drama is to miss the point (Murray, 1998).

Her comparison implies, for me, a profound idea about historical continuity in the practices of new media. While the cultures, narratives, communities of the new media age are qualitatively different in many respects from their immediate predecessors, these differences are evolutions from older forms. To see the formulae of game-narrative as analogous to the formulae of ancient oral narrative is to make this point exactly. By extension, to see meaning-making in new media as improvisatory, communal, performative, fluid, is to make bold contrasts with the stuffy, fixed, slow, dreary world of traditional education and a curriculum dominated by the fixities of print and the values of a rigidly hierarchical society; but at the same time, it is to recall the immediacy and responsiveness of oral narrative, its persistent renewal in communal performance, and its obedience to structures of social solidarity rather than the divisions of social hierarchy.

To say all this is to echo an idea about the persistence of the values of oral societies in the age of new media: Walter Ong's 'secondary orality', which other scholars of new media have invoked:

Electronic text will . . . serve as the vehicle for displaying all of Western literature in a new light. Since much of this literature is oral in origin and nature, and self-consciously rhetorical, and since electronic text is both oral and rhetorical to a degree, "repurposing" can reveal to us aspects of our greatest works of art—literary, artistic, and musical—that we have never noticed before. (Lanham, 1993: 131)

The metaphor of secondary orality has many implications for the model of new media literacy which this chapter is seeking, and which successive chapters in this book explore, but never fully resolve. In general terms, of course, it challenges the metaphor of literacy altogether. If the semiotic and multimodal approaches explored above imply text-like objects and writing-like processes, the image of orality loosens these up, emphasizing performance, ephemerality, improvisation. These characteristics describe much better than the literacy metaphor what kind of work happens when students use digital camcorders, or when they meet as avatars in an online roleplaying game, or when they act a part in a digital film. These acts of representation and composition are much more like drama and oral narrative than they are like reading and writing. For this reason, I tentatively propose, in the title of this chapter, that the spelling of literacy as 'Lit/oracy' might serve as a useful reminder.

To proclaim the virtues of computer games and online communities, then, is certainly to draw attention to new, rapid and responsive forms of learning, making and

communicating. But it is also to recall that ancient forms of narrative, and the communities which sustained them, are legitimate antecedents of these social processes. The reasons for drawing attention to these kinds of historical continuity are threefold. Firstly, to challenge arts and literature educators to rediscover ancient, powerful narrative forms through an engagement with the new media cultures familiar to their students. Second, to help us understand that representations of the world made from numerical structures, quantified resources and formulaic patterns are not aesthetically suspect or debased but related to an older aesthetic whose formulae were creative resources for a culture of performance and improvisation. Thirdly, to challenge once again the technological determinism rife in popular, even academic, discourses of the place of new technologies in education (see Buckingham, 2007; Selwyn, 2008). Representational technologies in the digital era possess distinctive characteristics, as Manovich clarifies. But they do not represent such a rupture as we may think. Some features often claimed for digital media were also true of 'old' media, as Manovich also demonstrates. And even those that are truly distinctive, such as their numerical basis, have their analogies in older representational forms. The metre of poetry, for instance, is effectively numerical, as is its sister, musical measure. These metrical representations of basic human activities—walking, marching, dancing, breathing, time-keeping—underlie centuries of evolving cultural form. They are the informational units of cultural representation.

Moreover, in a general sense, digital media are another technology which succeeds older technologies of representation and information. Manovich tells the story of how the multimedia computer inherits the two explosions of invention in the 1830s represented by Babbage's Analytical Engine on the one hand, and Daguerre's prototype camera on the other. Today's schools have inherited these two traditions, the one of visual culture, the other of information-processing, and our teachers of media and ICT are still working out the implications of this convergence. Meanwhile, as many have pointed out, the digital revolution has many similarities to the Gutenberg revolution, as did pre-digital mass communications media (McLuhan, 1962), and we continue to deal with the interplay between opportunity and constraint, with rhetorics of wild optimism and moral panic that echo those which greeted the invention of the printing press.

Collective intelligence

Nevertheless, the general shift of interest from the affordances of digital technologies to the kinds of community, communication and production made possible by the participatory internet has produced new arguments: about what we might mean by media education (or more narrowly, media studies) and what we might mean by media literacy in this context.

In his article calling for a Media Studies 2.0, David Gauntlett argues for a move away from the fetishisation of specialist interpretive practices by the academy (Gauntlett, 2007). While he is referring here mainly to Media Studies in Higher Education, this argument does have some resonance in school media education also. For me, this debate relates to the arguments I have made above about the semiotic aspect, and more generally the critical aspect, of media literacy. The consequence of a move away from specialist

interpretative practices is that some other way of approaching texts ‘critically’ needs to be found, and it is by no means clear what this might be. The research and practice represented in this book has borrowed heavily from social semiotic and multimodality theory, which for me has the advantages of recovering some of the clarity of structuralist semiotics, while being based in a sociolinguistic tradition which incorporates a theory of social contingency.

As I have suggested above, the best model of this I can find is a blend of social semiotics and Cultural Studies. The former has a strong idea of textual structures and social meanings; the latter pays close attention to contexts, cultures, lifestyles. However, in relation to media education, the big question here is, what would a school-level version of such an approach look like; and how might any kind of sufficiently large consensus be built for it to catch on? In relation to the first point, I have, with colleagues, tried some kinds of interpretive work based on this approach with secondary pupils (see Burn and Durran, 2007). However, the whole future of how we interpret and theorise media texts with students, what level of abstraction is needed, seems to me an open question. Gauntlett disputes the need for ‘difficulty’; and if by this he means the more obscure depths of post-structuralist or postmodernist theory, then I would agree. But if we abandon close and critical reading in favour of, say, an entirely production-based approach, and do away with all the ‘difficult’ business of working out what texts mean, and how these meanings are in certain ways political, then I believe we lose something distinctive about Media Education which differentiates it from Art education on the one hand, and literature teaching on the other.

One of the more illuminating thinkers about media literacy and media education in the new media age has been Henry Jenkins, whose ‘White Paper’ on media education and new media—“Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century” (Jenkins, 2007)—frames the issue in terms of three challenges. These are his answers to why we don’t just leave kids to get on with their media cultures and uses and abandon media education as old-fashioned adult interference:

There are three core flaws with the *laissez faire* approach. The first is that it does not address the fundamental inequalities in young people’s access to new media technologies and the opportunities for participation they represent (what we call the *participation gap*). The second is that it assumes that children are actively reflecting on their media experiences and can thus articulate what they learn from their participation (what we call the *transparency problem*). The third problem with the *laissez faire* approach is that it assumes children, on their own, can develop the ethical norms needed to cope with a complex and diverse social environment online (the *ethics challenge*). Any attempt to provide meaningful media education in the age of participatory culture must begin by addressing these three core concerns.

The implications of this, then, are that media education can even out children’s and young people’s access to media texts, technologies and cultures. It can develop an ability to reflect on ethical issues, on meaning, on power (what I have discussed in this chapter

as the critical and rhetorical aspects of media education); while the semiotic emphasis I have argued for in this chapter, though not an explicit theme of Jenkins' proposals, can be aligned with the transparency gap he identifies, perhaps.

More explicit is Jenkins' account of how online communities function. His use of Pierre Levy's notion of collective intelligence (Jenkins, 2002) is used in chapter 8 of this book, which explores creative media work in machinima made by students working in the immersive online world Second Life. Jenkins is quite specific about what collective intelligence will mean: how it will bring a deterritorialization of knowledge, a horizontal network of participants held in relations of temporary affiliation, a creative process more geared towards the production of a dynamic environment than the production and regulation of texts. For the students making machinima in Second Life, much of this is already true: if they are producing short films in a conventional sense, they are also producing themselves as avatars, and the environments in which their films are made, exhibited, and reviewed. Nevertheless, while this may seem a utopian vision of a particularly futuristic version of media studies, the historical continuities again deserve attention: how student voices compete as well as collaborate; and how even the newest of new media—machinima—demands a return to the traditional craft of moving image composition.

Conclusion

A persistent theme of the chapters in this book, then, is an image of Janus, the Roman god of doors and the new year, looking backward with one face and forward with the other. Taking my cue from Raymond Williams' scrupulously historical approach to the theory and practice of culture, I hope that the various excursions in the following chapters into how school students engage with, remake and make anew images, narratives, compositions of the age of new media will locate their analyses in interrogation of contemporary practices, identification of historical precedents, and informed speculation about future possibilities.

For teachers, this ten-year history of work with digital media, though it contains inevitable uncertainties and red herrings, may hold some lessons for the future, or at least some hints about what we can do with such tools if we retain a clear sense of our cultural purpose.

For researchers, the essays represent a series of methodological debates and experiments. These are not always clear; but this introductory chapter has attempted to spell out, albeit with the benefit of hindsight, how the dominant debate is the attempt to find an accommodation between Cultural Studies and its roots in the cultural theory of Williams, and the framework provided for the analysis of signs across different modes and media represented by multimodality theory and social semiotics. There is much more to do here, but perhaps this can at least be a beginning. Like Henry Jenkins' description of Pierre Levy, I want to characterise myself, and the work in this book, in terms of critical utopianism. It has been my experience of education that the experiences of teachers and students continue to improve, and the experience of creative work with digital media has

been no exception. The properly sceptical attitude represented by David Buckingham (2007) provides the kind of cautionary notes we all need as we consider the value of new tools, new learning spaces, new communities. But the experience of teaching and research narrated in the following chapters tells, on the whole, an optimistic story of the last ten years, and suggests an optimistic future for media education, broadly conceived across literacy, literature and arts curricula. To maintain a critical utopianism means, for me, the chance to avoid the extremes of cyber-optimism and Luddite denial, as well as the possibility of a world of technological determinism in which media education and media literacy become subordinate to ICT education, while the reverse should be the case. Teachers of English and Media should resist this. At the International Federation for the Teaching of English conference in Melbourne in 2001, Allan Luke challenged delegates to consider what they professed. We should profess our expertise in culture, representation, creativity and meaning-making.