Tales of the Classroom: On Making Media in School

Sara Bragg, The Open University

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Abstract

This paper considers practical production or media-making within schools, which is both a long established aspect of Media Education and one that presents significant dilemmas and difficulties. The paper suggests that some familiar pedagogical approaches to practical work embed 'stories' about the media, audiences and teachers that are particularly gratifying for educators; nonetheless, they also understand and value knowledge, agency and language in ways that may be ultimately unhelpful to teaching and learning. Schematically distinguishing between 'modernist' and 'postmodern' conceptualisations, the paper argues that practices permeated by the former tend to exaggerate the power of the media and the role of the teacher's knowledge whilst undervaluing classroom relationships; that they inform hostile responses to student productions based on unfamiliar popular cultural forms and risk penalising students who struggle with traditional academic formats, whatever their creative talents. Postmodern perspectives, by contrast, offer renewed insights into the processes involved in making media and how students can engage critically with their own knowledge and the meanings they create, whilst they entail at most adjustments to current practice rather than radically different approaches. The paper also argues for 'reading through' cultural theory in conducting and analysing educational research, both to do justice to the complexity of classroom cultures and pedagogies and to contribute to theoretical developments.

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> 'Last call' advertising -- 'this extraordinary offer good for ten days only'; 'the chance of a lifetime. . . .' Find, **or make up**, examples of this type.
>
> (Leavis and Thompson 1933)

As the early example above indicates, the pedagogical device of practical work or 'making' media has figured consistently in the development of school Media Education – although perceptions of its rationale and appropriate form have of course varied, over time and from teachers to students (the mimicry that Leavis and Thompson encourage may well have offered students other pleasures besides mockery). In the 1960s and 70s, for instance, declaring production to be a basic 'right' to which media audiences were 'entitled' seemed a radical position to take, democratising in its desire to make technology available and equally of its time in assuming that 'producing' was the only alternative to 'passive' indoctrination. Its contemporary remoteness is cast into particularly sharp relief when today we are cautioned against viewing all young people as digital natives effortlessly negotiating participatory cultures, although it is still perhaps audible in the rhetoric of 'having/finding a voice'. Yet, another early argument for school Media Studies, that it would better meet the needs and interests of urban or working-class youth, continues to provide a 'politicised' justification for practical work – namely, that by recognising and accrediting literacies beyond the print-based and expertise related to cultural forms typically undervalued by the school, it enables 'non-traditional' students to access valuable qualifications and the improved life chances associated with them. Its logic may be as valid as ever, although its hope of delivering equity may be shrinking proportionately with the role of the practical in formal assessment.

Vocational rationales – the idea that making media develops industry-related skills – are typically viewed askance by school teachers, if not by students: this may reflect a principled emphasis on the primarily critical aims of education, the receding prospects of media employment and sometimes the fear that many students' technical competence already outstrips that of their teachers. However, if responsibility for job-specific training has been (re)assigned elsewhere, the arrival of 'key skills' allows practical work to be reclaimed for developing such generic competences as working with others, negotiation, communication and research. Meanwhile, long-standing humanistic concerns for fulfilment through artistic expression may persist in those definitions of media literacy that describe production as 'creating' and even without this potential romanticism, its promise of student satisfaction and motivation has made it a significant recruiting device - whose curriculum role is highlighted if not overstated by promotional literature – in a competitive post-compulsory educational marketplace.

Current consensus, even amongst such multiple perspectives, holds that students learn primarily *from* rather than *about* media production – a position sustained by progressivist discourses of 'learning through doing' – in that the experience of making media helps students reflect on and grasp the key ideas of a course (however these are defined), more deeply than through the study of existing texts alone (see Buckingham 2003).

When teachers approach production-oriented work, they may have a range of conscious intentions of the kinds sketched out above, each of which may need to be realised in a different way. They must also grapple with some recurrent dilemmas that a rationale alone cannot fully resolve: for instance, about the role of the teacher and formal learning in media production, the kind of brief students should be given, about what constitutes evidence of learning, what to evaluate (product or process or both) and what criteria to use in doing so. Equally, however, the relatively well-established nature of Media Studies has made available different repertoires of practice on which they may draw. As I hope to demonstrate in this article, these repertoires embed aims, values and conceptualisations that may not be apparent to teachers or even align with views they consciously hold, and their appeal may derive from something else entirely, but identifying any of this may be easier in retrospect than in advance.

The arguments I pursue here are significantly informed by a specific action research project – one of two into the teaching of popular film genre at Media Studies A-level (Bragg 2000). The research involved working with a teacher over two academic years to adapt an initial scheme of work in line with what was then current thinking. I was a classroom observer of both the 'before' and 'after' courses (more active involvement might have made it harder to acknowledge the shortcomings of approaches I once saw as magic solutions to initial problems), and my data also included interviews, student-produced texts and general school ethnography.

I refer to this experience and other familiar approaches and issues in media production to trace elements of practice to the different 'stories' they tell about media, audiences and teachers, and how they conceptualise ways of knowing, agency and language. I frame these as 'modernist' or 'postmodern', with a wholly appropriate embarrassment about establishing such a dichotomy and its injustice to the concepts designated by the terms; nonetheless I hope it functions as a heuristic, enabling reflection on practice and on the pedagogical adjustments or emphases I advocate.

I also illustrate and advance in this paper a broader argument about methodology, analysis and also the status of educational research. School Media Studies teachers are not only the humble drones who simplify and channel to students the theory developed in more advantageous working conditions by university-level academics – although in effect this was how I saw my role when I myself taught the subject, pre-occupied as I was by questions of 'which theories' would prove most enlightening. Research where I instead observed what (more competent) teachers were doing helped me appreciate how much more their job involved, the range of skills and relationships they developed in the often intensely intimate and pressured environment of the school, but for a long time I could

not see how to make these 'other' elements central rather than peripheral to my study. This conceptual leap was eventually enabled by the cultural theory I already found inspiring, which – when read without an obsessive eye for turning it into 'a handout' – helped me analyse my data outside the sometimes restrictive frameworks of educational Sociology and Anthropology. It gave me the terms to interpret anew what might be at stake in particular classroom moments, to relish rather than be frustrated at how concepts and pedagogies can be seized on unpredictably, subverted, invested with new meanings to meet the interests, needs or desires of both teachers and students (Bragg 2001, 2002, 2006, 2007). Classrooms are fascinating sites of culture in action, although current educational orthodoxies have little interest in them as such. Reading 'through', learning *from* rather than *about* theories of postmodernism and popular culture (Ellsworth 1997: 116) may help evolve more nuanced analyses that not only respect the complexity of pedagogical processes but speak back to theory and contribute to its refinement and insight.

The 'modernist' framing of media production work 1: Beastly media

In the first stage of my action research project, the term's-length course I observed began with general definitions of genre and its function for industry and audiences, then explored the particular conventions of the study genre through exercises such as analysing film extracts, alongside introducing theoretical perspectives (which the teacher, Kate, described to me as 'giving students the tools they need'). Students' own production task was set towards the end of the course and required them to develop ideas for a genre film, then to create its opening sequence (using a series of still images edited onto video with a soundtrack) and a video cover.

Here, the metaphor of 'tools' envisages theory or concepts as universally applicable, and media texts as an assemblage of elements whose meaning is inherent rather than context-dependent but which can only be dismantled by those with access to their hidden codes. In turn this positions students/media audiences as uncritical consumers with little to contribute to textual analysis before they are equipped to do the job. The very course structure suggests that the explicit knowledge provided by teachers is essential in enabling students to act effectively (to make media) and that practical work is a form of applied analysis in which student-producers re-assemble textual elements, demonstrating mastery in the meanings they can now communicate. This is onerous for teachers since enlightening students is primarily their responsibility; Kate's anxiety about whether she was 'giving' her students 'enough theory' seemed to prevent her recognising how much else she offered them.

Few teachers would wholeheartedly endorse such perspectives on the media and the role of production when stated as boldly as this. Yet, structuring courses in this way is

hardly unfamiliar and metaphors of 'conceptual tools' very common. So, we may need to be more vigilant in identifying inconsistencies between espoused and enacted beliefs or perhaps there is something in the story being told here that makes its grasp hard to loosen. It depicts the media as both mysterious and malign: it evokes those familiar popular discourses about the 'manipulation', 'assault' or 'bombardment' of the media 'monster', an overwhelming and alien power that preys above all on children, its 'innocent' victims. The hero here – something of a *deus ex machina* – is the older, wiser, expert, who rides to the rescue in the final frames brandishing the weapons of reason and knowledge. These will not only destroy the media threat, but once passed on will shield victims throughout their happy-ever-after lives… Even if it reads like an old-fashioned fairy tale, and has some psychic costs for teachers, this 'defensive' version of Media Education has remarkable currency: we can discern it, for instance, in the idea of education as an 'alternative to censorship' that can deliver self-regulating audiences, or in recent proposals that magazines and advertisements be made to 'tell the truth' about their use of air-brushing, as if rational awareness of the trickery involved in the images of perfection surrounding us can somehow limit the damage they are considered to wreak. A recent report on Gender and Sexualisation (Papadopoulos, 2010) that endorsed such a ban also suggested that teachers could provide 'cognitive filters' for young people to process gender stereotypes: a proposal whose main virtue is perhaps that of generating an alternative to the tired metaphor of 'inoculation', that of media literacy as a kind of high-factor sun cream.

Media Studies specialists should not believe they are beyond such fancies, either. Nava, analysing media undergraduates' attraction to 'conspiracy' theories of media influence, suggests that domestic technologies such as television can become 'transitional objects', generating in childhood a profound attachment and dependence that 'adult' selves are compelled loudly to repudiate (Nava 1997). Morgan's interviews with Media teachers revealed similar investments, which he relates to the history of the school's and English teaching's pastoral function (Morgan 1997, Hunter 1994). And for many years, the introduction to an A-level Media Studies syllabus reprinted lines from the 1982 UNESCO Declaration on Media Education, misquoting its description of the media as 'omnipresent' as, instead, '*omnipotent*' – both the 'mistake' and its invisibility revealing something significant about the collective, social unconscious of the discipline.

Of course, many contemporary Media Studies courses would claim that they are both more sophisticated and more welcoming to the media. They are more likely to emphasise pleasure, enjoyment and appreciation, to see the media as resources for making sense of the world and building identities than as a source of domination. They characterise audiences as having already developed strategies for handling media 'saturation' in their

lives that can result in cynical detachment as well as finely honed literacy skills. As such they address students as knowledgeable rather than ignorant and ask how their expertise can be put to work in the classroom; they often celebrate young people's abilities in decoding or creating media, sometimes in unflattering contrast to teachers' ineptitude. In my own research, the teacher was consciously committed to this view of her students, and thus readily agreed to my proposal that we change the course by setting the production task earlier, and using students' work-in-progress for discussion and learning. If this proved problematic still, it was in part because of inattention to other key questions about agency and cultural value, as I discuss below.

'Modernist' framing 2: Beastly audiences

Nowadays, perhaps, it is easy to mock earlier practical assignments requiring 'code-breaking' or 'alternative' representations that 'resist the dominant discourse', for their unselfconscious insistence that students manifest newly politicised identities and perceptions, and their modernist preference for locating agency in the consciously oppositional. Yet radical and feminist pedagogies continue to make large claims about the empowering effects of replacing 'stereotypes' with alternative and 'positive' images, often – despite disclaimers – by a logic of simple role reversal. Even those who encourage students to produce 'local', 'community' or 'relevant' news for their peers seem to yearn to hear a 'purer' voice, less contaminated by the mainstream media.

   To some extent, school Media Education has gone beyond polarities of 'alternative' and 'mainstream': students are commonly asked to construct texts within popular genres, precisely so that they can draw on their implicit knowledge. Nonetheless, modernist concerns reverberate when – as still happens – students are asked whether they have 'followed' or 'challenged' conventions (a question whose very formulation suggests the superiority of the latter) and even more in responses to particular interests thereby revealed.

   In my research, Kate chose horror as the genre example, precisely in order to draw on students' knowledge and to respect and value the culture of her mainly white, working-class students to whom she was intensely loyal. As she told me, there would always be some fans in any class: one lad, she recalled, edited together extracts of his favourite films to show the class, which was 'lovely of him', but 'I had to switch it off in the end, it was just too much'. Such 'excess' indicates the difficulty of dealing with relatively alien cultural forms, and raises some key questions about emotions and education – whether we can learn where we feel and care, where we are committed and involved rather than detached and critical, whether immersion in a culture can be a route to understanding it. During my research, I too was initially shocked by some grotesquely bloody scenarios, but with

the time to investigate the sub-genres of horror that were students' points of reference, I realised that I had overreacted to unfamiliar aesthetics and conventions. It is unfeasible, however, to expect teachers to defer judgement until they have investigated every cultural novelty they encounter: they have to react on the spot.

Educators writing about the dilemmas of popular culture in the classroom usually reserve the right of veto, on the basis of their obligations to others within and beyond the classroom. Examples of material liable to censorship include 'cruelty and hurtful stereotypes', 'violence, racism and other objectionable subject matter' (Grace and Tobin 1998: 49, 56), 'problematic' and 'undeniably offensive' stereotypes (Buckingham 1998: 75). Yet there are problematic – modernist – conceptual and 'political' issues here, especially when the same writers single out parody for praise, as revealing an originating humour or mastery or 'knowing distance', creating desirable effects (such as laughter), and providing 'a space for critique and change' thanks to the radical potential of its 'essential ambiguity' (Grace and Tobin 1998: 49). Describing parody as ambiguous suggests that in other cases meaning can be objectively determined. Differentiating between students' more or less benign purposes (knowingness, humour or cruelty) assumes both that intentions exist outside the workings of (media) language and that others can identify them correctly. Forbidding some representations as 'hurtful' or 'offensive' is arguably violent itself, yet it is presented as a moral counter to the eruption of an uninvited presence into the otherwise collective and relatively innocent scene of the classroom and it reinforces the subordinate and victim status of those for whom one acts, as if they cannot respond themselves. And since in practice such censorship – and the audience mistrust it reveals – is most likely to apply to the forms furthest from (middle-class) moral-aesthetic understandings and cultural values that dominate in schools, its impact will be unequal and may alienate the very social groups that (some versions of) Media Studies set out to welcome into the classroom.

Kate adopted a rather different approach to problematic material by mobilising instead the concept of audience. Responding to a student scenario involving the rape and ritual disembowelling of a female victim, for instance, she avoided overt value judgement to ask innocently what women audiences might make of it. But this strategy failed to identify the influences on the piece and stereotyped women as innately anti-violence, both of which would make it all the more difficult to understand the substantial female readership of the Dean Koontz novels of which the scene proved to be a fairly creditable rendering. And in context, a young, attractive female teacher suggesting to a teenage boy that women would not appreciate what he did might have been experienced as crushing and demotivating for quite other reasons.

'Modernist' framing 3: Master-makers

Students' evaluation or commentary on their media production and process is considered crucial to help them reflect critically and demonstrate evidence of learning, even as the results are frequently acknowledged to be problematic and unsatisfactory. Sometimes the inadequacies are attributed to students: teachers complain that students fail to make connections between the production and course content, that they write descriptively rather than analytically, or that discussions of their texts reflect obdurate wish-fulfilment rather than cool appraisal. Others have identified flaws in the task itself; requiring essays, for instance, may help academically confident students compensate for weak products but unfairly penalise those who struggle with such formats, whatever their creative talents – an issue partly addressed by diversifying the range of media (video, audio) and writing genres (blogs, commentaries) that can be submitted for assessment. In my own research, I was struck by how constrained students seemed to be, not just by specific academic conventions but by their perception of what was allowed by the (modernist) institution of education in general, which prevented them giving meaningful accounts of their learning. Asked to give accounts of their 'planning' (a criterion fortunately much less prominent now), they offered post-hoc rationalisations involving barely credible claims ('complete lies' as one student joked) about their prior awareness of aims, intentions, meanings and audience reactions, hoping this matched the academic ideal of a masterful creator-ego consciously manipulating the world to execute a grand plan. They were cautious and reluctant if asked how their film ideas related to existing texts, as if any similarities would constitute 'copying' (that well-known classroom crime), signify 'influence' and the 'old' rather than 'originality' and the 'new'. No matter that these hierarchies of value have been deconstructed or that the teacher never mentioned them; their power has accumulated across decades, regions, subjects and school sectors, in the stock phrases of 'critical autonomy', 'thinking for your self', being 'original' and so on. And perhaps for some students their metaphorical resonances (contrasting the phallic – individual, apart, above, masculine – and its shameful, dependent, feminine, indistinct opposite) reinforced the attractiveness of one term above the other.

In the second stage of my action research, restructuring the course so that practical work began earlier implied a different function for written analysis. According to this model, informal learning is expressed in media-making and then analysed in the light of formal learning on the course – a process described, in a classic formulation, as one in which students are 'inevitably forced to make their implicit knowledge explicit, to make it systematic and thence to question it' (Buckingham, Grahame and Sefton-Green 1995: 143). Whilst this approach has significant advantages, its epistemological model remains overly

rationalistic. The structure of the sentence ('thence') assumes that only once knowledge is made explicit can it be questioned and that 'truly' critical understanding resides in that which we consciously represent. Abstract, conceptual modes of thinking are superior to affective and concrete ones and indeed must supplant them (by 'force' if necessary).

Everyday accomplices and accomplishments: Rethinking production through the 'postmodern'

Above, I suggested that the story narrated by the theory-first approach to practical production most resembles the classic (modernist) horror genre. In the 1990s, feminist and other critics argued that contemporary horror films manifested 'postmodern' crises of authority and representation (Clover 1992, Pinedo 1996). For instance, the expert has been supplanted by the young, everyday victim-hero who rescues himself, or more particularly, herself. Her weapons are less likely than before to be specialised, instead consisting of whatever comes to hand in the – often domestic rather than exotic – circumstances in which she finds herself: a knitting needle, a coat hanger. Her most significant tools, however, are the knowledge, vision and power she already possesses. She fights the monster by being close rather than distanced, by thinking and seeing as he does, and when she locates reserves of violence within herself in order to oppose him, she learns in the process that they are not so different. Audiences may take up different roles as they listen; they may play along with victims but also with monsters, may enter the story wholeheartedly, but also remain detached. Or, they might be seeking to engage with each other not the story itself: participating in the ritual of media consumption draws us closer, reminds us that we are not atomised, unique individuals, but like each other, not too strange to one another. And audience familiarity with the monster itself – the media, the genre – makes it manageable, helps decide whether or not to venture into its lair and signposts one's way around it once inside. The format of this tale is that of the shaggy dog story; we can be sure that the battle is not over yet, that the monster will rise again, and again, for as long as the franchise can make a profit.

For my purposes here, these analyses matter less for how correctly they identify genre trends than for what they suggest about knowledge and agency. In 'contemporary' versions of media production, we might say, students are the 'final girl': 'victim' insofar as they cannot escape media saturation, but 'hero' because they are not incapacitated by it, have less need of expertise than was once thought: their agency comes from working within, not from outside, acting on 'feelings' rather than what they consciously know. They produce their texts much as the final girl fashions her mundane weaponry: by drawing on associated media forms such as computer games or music, combining a range of elements

into something different, using material around them to develop and assimilate ideas, arranging and re-arranging them, often in a playful, exploratory way. They do not execute a master plan but proceed ad hoc, disjointedly: they must improvise (can we make this garden look like a jungle?), are limited by circumstances (the battery on the camera runs down, editing time is short), have to work with what is possible rather than what they want (no car chases) and rely on others (to turn up, to act, to comment), in ways that both help and hinder them.

It seems then that students do not need teachers to provide them with a systematic framework (or 'cognitive map') to get started, nor do they follow rules or apply a language the teacher supplies; they operate instead through an everyday poetics of association, relation, comparison and substitution, where what they have already to hand serves them well enough as something to think with. All this, however, simultaneously challenges the scholastic ideal of rational, distanced knowledge by being fundamentally dependent – on other people, things, on the 'other' of one's unconscious.

Shotter's description of a 'knowing of the third kind' is helpful here; it refers to knowledge derived from one's circumstances, which is neither abstract (knowing that or knowing why) nor technical (knowing how); it is practical in that it enables us to act 'appropriately', but is a background knowledge that one thinks *out of* in order to act *into* a situation; and it is conceptual to the extent that it involves 'grasping how to do things in a socially intelligible way that makes sense to certain others' (1993: 134). On this account, being able to generate intelligible and appropriate media products is in itself evidence of implicit understanding. Evaluating them, however, is difficult precisely because such knowledge is not systematic but socially embedded – it is the result of joint action, of responses to and by others around us – and although our understanding shapes what we do, it does so in ways that at the time may feel simply instinctive. Taylor, similarly arguing that our implicit understanding goes 'well beyond what we manage to frame representations of', vividly describes representations as 'islands in the sea of our unformulated practical grasp on the world' rather than the 'primary locus of our understanding', and thus as radically inadequate for explaining what we do (Taylor 1999: 34).

However, Shotter proposes that such knowledge can be *investigated* to develop partial and provisional interpretations that make actions 'visibly rational' for intellectual purposes – for instance, through 'critical descriptions', which explore, in an intelligible way, how we do something in practice (1993: 82). Accordingly teachers might ask students to discuss in detail how their own texts relate to existing media genres and forms with which they are familiar, how they have selected, combined and shaped material to their own interests. Provided students are reassured that such 'bricolage' is creatively legitimate, they can be

surprisingly eloquent on such matters. And what they reveal may in turn help teachers appreciate their students' personal media passions and consider how they might build on them pedagogically: learning in the classroom should not be only one-way.

Secondly, students can discuss how they worked in practice, their tactics for overcoming the frustrating limits of technology and circumstance, how others both constrained and enabled them – perhaps in class presentations during the production process, to share ideas and generate solutions and further questions. These are likely to be written up as descriptive accounts, which many students find more accessible, but these should not be seen as inherently inferior to 'analytic' academic forms (particularly by a discipline so committed to exploring the significance of popular narrative genres). They should be valued in their own right and assessed against relevant criteria (such as, how clearly they outline the dimensions of problems and the transferability of solutions).

Finally, postmodern perspectives on language and subjectivity also offer a response to educational anxieties about the dangers of free expression in the classroom. Butler (1997), discussing US debates about 'hate' speech, notes the combination of linguistic and physical vocabularies in which words and representations are said to 'wound', to violate and to act and the politics of assuming that language is felicitous (able alone to initiate consequences and have effects), which tends to strengthen demands for legislative interventions by the state [in our context, the teacher] to regulate it, rather than enabling resistance by those whom it addresses. She suggests that the debates displace fears about the inherent 'injury' all language inflicts because our subjectivity is constituted in and through it: 'There is no way to protect against that primary vulnerability and susceptibility to the call of recognition that solicits existence, to that primary dependency on a language we never made in order to acquire a tentative ontological status' (Butler 1997: 26). The offence committed by all language is that it disallows our (modernist) fantasies of 'radical autonomy' and self-creation.

Media production work, we might say, is like speaking; it relies on a language filled with meanings that we borrow and cannot control, it is always derivative, but also its effects are never certain. Teachers cannot assess it on the basis of its supposed intention, nor forbid it outright, because we cannot distinguish in advance between invidious and desirable uses of language. However, this does not mean that students have no agency or that their texts should never be challenged, nor does it dismiss teachers' concerns about social justice and enhancing students' reflective capacities; being constituted in language is not the same as being determined by it. Language, Butler argues, may 'sustain as well as threaten', not in its content, but through the address that brings us into being and thereby enables both speaking (agency) and answering back (resistance). Our responsibility lies

in our 'repetition' rather than 'origination' of language, for what meanings we sustain or challenge when we use it (1997: 27). But this is more a question of context (time, place and audience) than intention. If some speech acts can be unhappy or infelicitous, then none are necessarily efficacious as hate speech theory supposes. Derrida's work on the inevitable iterability of language suggests that each new utterance performs a 'break' with context that makes meaning contestable rather than simply reproducing it (Butler 1997: 147). All representations have faultlines and aporia that can be exploited to return meaning to speakers in a different form.

Although this may sound abstract, it can be achieved through an already established practice where students conduct 'reception' studies into responses to their work. This can be done online although local audiences may be more motivated to respond and more aware of cultural reference points. However, evaluation, saying how 'good' texts are according to ill-defined criteria, is at most gratifying, at worst makes students defensive, and overall is rarely illuminating. Audiences should instead be asked for description: 'What is going on here, and how do you know?' In my own research this proved most illuminating for students as they realised how widely interpretations could vary, identified differences between what they thought they had said and what others did, and came to appreciate their impact on others. Such processes may help students relate to their knowledge from the perspective of others and become 'accountable' for their representations in retrospect.

Teachers may in some respects (judging what a text means or what is appropriate, for example) have less to offer than students' peers, since they do not necessarily inhabit the same cultural world. However, their pedagogical address is crucial, as it constitutes students in particular ways that may motivate (or inhibit) reflection. And if teachers eschew value-judgement in favour of describing work using their specialised media vocabulary, they may return students' implicit knowledge to them in a form in which they can take pride and for which they can be accredited.

Ending, without conclusions

In exploring why and how to engage in media-making in schools, this paper has uncovered a familiar debate between popular culture as an antagonist to be fought and excluded or as an accomplice to be welcomed, and has generated further questions about how to evolve a pedagogy that allows pleasure, interestedness and excess into the classroom, that is sensitive to context and to difference, that values both teachers' work and students' existing knowledge. The answers do not lie in media production *per se*; but, when revisited through postmodern perspectives, particular practices can indeed help show how learning

and understanding can come from intense involvement with media, from our belonging in the world, rather than from critical distance. It can create in classrooms realms of the 'imagination' that function to make identities contestable and new ways of being possible, that loosen the conventional patterning of educational power relations, even if they will never free them altogether. One of its biggest challenges and rewards may be in rejecting 'critical autonomy' as an achievable or even desirable goal for education. There is not – and cannot be – an 'I', a conscious, controlling, rational ego at the centre of our learning. Instead, we *lack*, are unfinished and incomplete, because we do not exist before language, before the 'call of the other' that brings us into being, and because we can neither learn nor know what we know without the presence of others. At times our dependence and lack of autonomy can be frustrating and limiting, at others it can seem terrifying. But it can also be creative because it carries us forward into a future, to seeking new relations to what is left unsaid, if we care enough to search for them. It thus allows something 'more' into the classroom, or, more accurately, allows us to acknowledge the something more that is already there: human kinship and social relationships.

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