

CULTURE, ART, TECHNOLOGY: TOWARDS A POETICS OF MEDIA EDUCATION

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In a computer game studio, it would be impossible to disentangle the skills and cultural references of the world of art and design from those of media production. Concept art for game design looks like painting, but is directed towards the construction of media narratives and the pleasures of the gaming market. The 3-D animation can be as beautiful as anything the world of art-house animated film offers; but again is inclined towards a different economy of consumption and regime of taste. A critical understanding of genre, narrative, ludic structure and the political economy of game development and publication is integrated with an artistic commitment to aesthetic form and effect. A game studio serves here as an example; though any other example from the sphere of media production would provide a similar combination of what we in the world of education often refer to as 'literacies'.

In schools, these skills, understandings, representations, designs, expressive productions, are oddly separated between the different pedagogic traditions of media and art education. I want to consider the relationship between these two within a model of media literacy which is currently popular in Europe, and has influenced discussions of media literacy in the European Media Literacy Charter movement and in the EC's media literacy expert group, informing policy in the European Parliament.

I refer to the so-called "3-Cs" model, which proposes that media literacy is *cultural*, *critical* and *creative*. While at one level, this is a model for the realm of popular and policy debate, its imprecision throws up a number of ambiguities which lie at the heart of media work – and art work – in schools. It is these ambiguities which I will explore, in the belief that, rather than representing hopeless contradictions in these two fields of education, they represent productive questions to be considered and negotiated by theorists and practitioners in the coming years. I will return, in the conclusion, to a more developed, theorised version of the '3-Cs' model, to help summarise the arguments I will propose in this article.

CULTURE: spanning the spectrum

It is possible to say, in a rather reductive way, that art education and media education have traditionally represented opposing ends of the spectrum of cultural value. While art education has espoused the realm of high art, whether in its historical attention to the established canons of Renaissance and Romantic art or in its embrace of high modernism, media education has championed the domain of popular culture, from the culture of the comicstrip to more recent media forms such as computer games and reality television. In this respect, art education has belonged with arts education more generally, which has conventionally seen its mission as acquainting children with the traditions of Western arts,

especially in music, theatre, dance and literature. Media education, a more recent arrival, emerged (in the UK) from literary studies characterised by a suspicion of the media in the work of FR Leavis, whose critical reading of media texts was intended to expose to school students their supposedly debased cultural nature (Leavis and Thompson 1933). This cultural protectionism gave way, as Buckingham argues (Buckingham 2003), to forms of ideological protectionism, in which children were encouraged to 'see through' the ideological structures of media texts. More recently, media education has moved to a more positive attitude to the popular arts, informed by research in British Cultural Studies. Here, young people's immersion in popular culture was viewed as a symbolic disruption of conventional values by the energetic styles of youth sub-culture (Hebdige 1971); or as creative work characterised by a 'grounded aesthetic' (Willis 1990). Countering too celebratory an approach, however, Buckingham argues that the intervention of media education, while recognising the creative vitality of this immersion in popular culture, can help students to develop the critical understandings they need to make sense of their world, and the function of the media within it (Buckingham and Sefton-Green 1994; Buckingham 2003). An important part of this move towards a more positive engagement with the media culture of young people has been an increasing emphasis on the creative production of media texts by students, a theme I will develop further below.

While art education has traditionally occupied a quite different orientation towards popular culture, as I have suggested, its recent history has some parallels with media education. For one thing, the creative production of works of art by children is arguably a more substantial part of its mission than the acquisition of canonical knowledge. Furthermore, this creative practice is supported by rationales which range from beliefs in the merits of naive art, post-Romantic notions of the inspired value of child art, and attention to the craft skills of art that echoes the studios of professional art, to postmodernist rationales based in a more relativistic approach to contemporary visual culture. We can see, then, a disciplinary shift in art education towards a curriculum for 'visual culture', involving a move away from the institutions of fine art towards a more inclusive engagement with practices of visual representation (Duncum 2001). This shift has been seen as a move away from conceptions of art education as elite, isolated from the culture of young people, and situated firmly within the project of modernity, towards a postmodern diversity of practices (Addison and Burgess 2003). In this new dispensation, the old oppositions between word and image, artistic medium and technology, the sense of sight and the other senses addressed by contemporary multimodal texts are profoundly questioned. In respect of the relation between art and media education, this new diversity can also be seen as a productive rupture of disciplinary boundaries. New forms of collaboration with other education practices occupied with visual culture become not only possible, but desirable.

Meanwhile, there has been a shift in media education in the UK, from its traditional roots in literacy and English towards Arts education. There are many possible causes of this gradual and partial shift; but I will focus on three.

The first was the proliferation of examination courses in the 1980s created by teachers themselves, rather than by government or examination boards. These 'Mode 3' courses could be devised and set up by consortia of schools, and accredited by exam boards. The school in which I taught during the eighties and nineties adopted such a course: a Mode 3 GCSE (then the new comprehensive examination at 16 for all students) in Expressive Arts. This course included options in Art, Music, Drama, Dance and Media Studies. Students took a 'major' and 'minor' course in two art forms, and their final examined practical production had to combine these two forms. As a result, we saw many imaginative pieces by students which combined media art forms (film, animation, documentary, and so on) with art (in the form of drawn animation, storyboards, set designs, posters), music (non-diegetic music accompanying film sequences, for example), drama (enacting film narratives) or even dance, in impressionistic film-poems.

The second trend which made a move towards the arts more possible, in the UK as well as globally, was of course the advent of affordable digital authoring tools, especially for digital video. While many schools with media education programmes had taken production work seriously before (using analogue mixing-desks and cameras), it is true to say that media education had been more occupied with analysis and critique before this time. From the early nineties, however, schools gradually acquired digital editing softwares, and the emphasis shifted slowly from critique to production. In my own work, particular features of this trend have been the making of computer animated films with primary school children (Burn and Parker 2001; Burn and Parker 2003); the production of short films with teenagers (Burn and Reed 1999; Burn 2003); and the authoring of computer games with teenagers (Buckingham and Burn 2007; Burn 2007).

The third development, particular to about 50 schools in England at the time of writing, was the government's introduction in 1997 of a specialism in Media Arts as part of the national specialist schools programme, which provided extra funding for schools to adopt a specialism in some area of the curriculum. In some respects, the *Media Arts* designation was clearly intended to signal an economic interest in preparing students for future work in the media industries, seen by New Labour in particular as a key element in the UK economy (Buckingham and Jones, 2001). The rationale for the Media Arts schools belongs to a rhetorical strand running through the era of New Labour which defines creativity as a regenerative force, producing values of community and inclusiveness, collaborative, problem-solving approaches in the workplace, and a workforce trained for the creative industries – in particular the 'new media' industries of the knowledge economy (Seltzer and Bentley, 1999).

Although this policy critique is in many ways justifiable, my own experience as a practitioner and curriculum leader within the first of these schools (Parkside Community College in Cambridge) was rather different. My colleagues and I found that the Media Arts identity allowed a wider set of social and artistic purposes, including dissent, critique, subversion

and an attention to the expressive needs of teenagers, purposes which exceeded, even ran counter to, the more narrowly pro-social rhetoric of the New Labour policy formulation. We saw this as a chance for creative media production across the whole curriculum, and an opportunity for students to use industry-standard equipment for the first time. We were able to break out of the constrictions of simulated media production work, to exhibit students' work on local community television and in Cambridge's arts cinema. Nevertheless, it is true to say that the work of these schools still faces many uncertainties debates in the face of contemporary debates about media literacy and new media; and my own research centre is currently working with two such schools to explore the future of their work (Burn, Buckingham et al. 2010). Whatever the case, however, the history of these schools can be seen as part of a partial movement of media education towards arts education.

These histories of art and media education suggest a particular question for our contemporary cultural moment. However much art and media education may have moved closer together, the question of a struggle between elite art forms and the popular arts remains a problem faced in both domains. For media education, the question is how to move beyond a privileging of popular culture to something more inclusive, more able to cross cultural boundaries. This problem is exacerbated in the European context by the longstanding alliance between film education and media education. To risk being a little reductive, the former tradition has been largely concerned to introduce children to the culture of national film heritages; while the latter has promoted popular cinema, valorising the tastes of students conceived as popular audiences.

A couple of examples may help to ground the issue. They come from an animation project which I helped set up in the late 90's, in collaboration with the Cambridge Film Consortium and the British Film Institute. In this project, children in a cluster of primary schools in Cambridge made animated films with their teachers and with a visiting animator and composer. The films were screened as part of the Cambridge international film festival. While the educators in the project paid attention to popular animation, they also sought to acquaint the children with examples of European art-house animation, with the aim of widening their cultural references and stylistic repertoire. A recurring pattern in the children's work, however, was a stylistic echo of the popular animations of American film and television with which they were most familiar, and which remained a source of pleasure to them.

So, for example, one class made an animation adapted from an African folktale about the trickster spider character, Anansi. The child who had the responsibility of designing Anansi drew a spider with large bulbous eyes, and coloured him red and blue (figure 1). These choices did not immediately strike the team of educators as significant; only further analysis revealed the provenance of these choices, in the comically bulging eyes of *The Simpsons*, and in the red-and-blue costume of Spiderman, the Warner film version of which had been released earlier that year (Burn and Parker 2003).

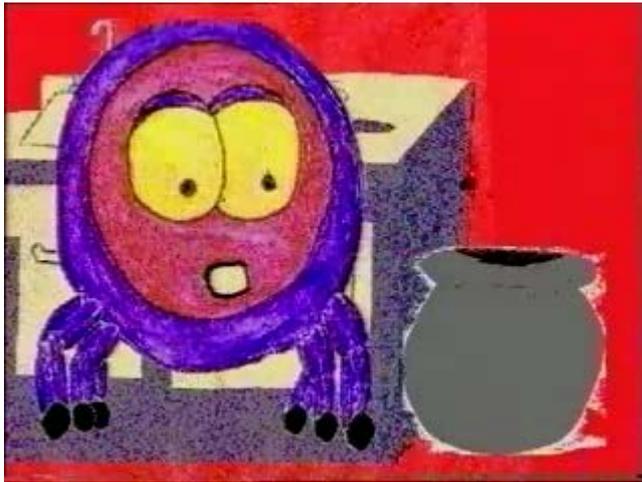


FIGURE 1

Primary school student's design for Anansi the spider, for the animation Anansi and the Firefly.

Other examples were designs for Red Riding Hood, clearly influenced by contemporary pop princesses such as Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera (Figure 2); and designs for fantasy sci fi characters, a fighter pilot and his heroic girlfriend (Figures 3 & 4), again clearly influenced by children's media text prototypes, such as, in this case, the puppets from Gerry Anderson's *Thunderbirds* series, and, again, blonde pop princesses (Burn and Durran 2007).



FIGURE 2

Caption: Primary school students' designs for characters in animations, showing stylistic references to popular film and television animation

The tension between the popular aesthetic of these images and the aesthetic of European art animation brought to the project by the art and film educators is apparent not only in the images, but also in the production media chosen by one of the professional animators

in the project. She encouraged the children to employ the material media characteristic of child art: pencil crayons, felt-pens, and collage in a variety of media, from found objects to coloured tissue paper. While these materials may seem incidental, my interpretation follows the social semiotic argument of Kress and van Leeuwen (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996; Kress and van Leeuwen 2000), who propose that the material media contribute to the meanings made by texts in ways which have gone unrecognised in linguistics and semiotics. In this case, the use of the familiar tools and textures of children's artwork produces an aesthetic at odds with the flat cel-animation of commercial cinema, and closer to the mixed-media animation of the European art-house tradition.

What are we to make of this cultural dissonance? A traditional media studies response would castigate the invasion of art-house values, and privilege the popular references; a traditional art education response might do the opposite, celebrating the creative textures and deploring the debased influence of commercial cinema. While in practice sensitive teachers would always avoid such an absurd dilemma, and although these traditional subject positions are changing, as outlined above, the question of how to theorise this cultural opposition remains. My suggestion is to return to the definitions of culture offered by the influential cultural theorist Raymond Williams, whose work triggered the birth of Cultural Studies in the UK. Williams proposed three 'levels' of culture: the 'selective tradition'; the 'documentary tradition'; and the 'lived culture' (Williams 1961). It was the third level, the proposal of a 'common culture' grounded in the everyday cultural practices of working-class people, which inspired Cultural Studies' subsequent attention to the politics of the popular, the structures of youth cultures, and the importance of audiences in the determination of meaning and value. The emphasis on lived culture remains a strength of media education, and no-one would dispute its importance. Nevertheless, Cultural Studies (and media education) have largely ignored William's other two cultural levels. What would it mean to resurrect them, and consider their possible place in media education? Perhaps the first thing to say is that an attention to the 'selective tradition' need *not* represent a return to the narrow focus on heritage art and film. Rather, the 'selective tradition' implies a critical focus on the mechanisms by which certain texts or objects are privileged, curated, exhibited, conserved, sedimented into lasting traditions. This kind of critical attention to the social processes which determine (and contest) cultural value are surely the kind of processes which we would expect our students to learn to understand, and indeed to participate in.

Cultural value is a difficult area for media educators (indeed, for all arts educators). The resistance of media teachers to the traditional values of elite culture is admirable, and the championing of popular culture in a curriculum which has little room for such material must be sustained. But it is absurd to be boxed into a position which is unable to recognise the intrinsic value of texts beyond the popular domain; or to consider the tastes and judgments which recognise (perhaps even construct) such value. Furthermore, it is clear that the texts of popular culture frequently undergo a revaluation by successive generations: yesterday's

trash B-movie becomes today's cult classic; the arcade games of the 1970s are curated for exhibition in elite galleries; the pulp comicstrips of the twentieth century acquire both economic and cultural value as the collectors' items of today.

For the teaching of animation, then, the trick would seem to be to value the influences both of popular animation, of Disney, Pixar and Matt Groening; and *also* the European art animation tradition represented by figures such as Jan Svankmajer. This kind of strategy allows students to explore an aesthetic continuum, a range of tastes and styles; to dig deeper into the forms and figures which they have known well through their childhood, but also to discover new images, textures, narratives, new representational resources.

Williams' second category, the documentary tradition, suggests how culture at one level is a residue of a society which no longer exists; his examples are the art, literature and architecture of the ancient world. In art education, I imagine the equivalent process would be art history; though it may be that art history as it is experienced in schools has a formalist emphasis rather than the socio-historical emphasis Williams had in mind. In media education, there is very little history, but rather a persistent focus on the new, which the advent of digital media and, recently, the participatory internet, has intensified into an obsessive neophilia. Williams' concern for cultural history reminds us that a proper interest in the contemporary moment can be balanced with an interest in the archaeologies of media texts, institutions and audiences. In one school where I am currently conducting research, for example, media teachers are helping students to explore the history of the camera from the camera obscura to the production of personal image-banks typical of modern digital cameras and mobile phones.

So we can see that, in both art and media classrooms, cultural dispositions and cultural capital are both imported into school from children's prior experience, and either legitimised or sidelined by the experience of arts education. The ideal might be that such education builds on these experiences, both valuing them and extending them into new areas. It is clear also that this is by no means an unconscious or purely instinctive process, as romantic notions of art education might suggest. Rather, it is a critical process, in which students become aware of cultural provenances, of the collision and negotiation of cultural tastes typical of human society, and of the aesthetic properties of material media. The critical aspect of this process is the subject of the next section.

CRITICALITY: Rhetoric versus Poetics

Media education has always been a form of critical practice, as in the forms of 'critical literacy' propounded today, which encourage students to question 'who constructs the texts whose representations are dominant in a particular culture at a particular time; how readers come to be complicit with the persuasive ideologies of texts; whose interests would be served by such representations and such readings ...' (Morgan 1997).

This is a strength of media education, and the shifts in ways of thinking about art education discussed above suggest that this kind of critical edge is one towards which art educators are moving. It can be seen as a rhetorical tradition, beginning with Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, and developing into the rhetorical studies of the modern day, which critically analyse political messages and the persuasive techniques they employ. For Aristotle, the art of rhetoric fell into three categories: *ethos* (the ethical context, emphasising the intentions of the speaker); *logos* (the substance of the spoken text); and *pathos* (the emotional engagement of the audience). I mention these ancient categories because they are still with us. The production regime in which a media text is generated, the structures of the text itself, and the reception regime in which audiences engage with the text – these three categories are fundamental to contemporary conceptions of the cultural exchange of meanings in Cultural Studies (du Gay, Hall et al. 1997). They are also fundamental to the conceptual framework employed by media educators: the bedrock of the critical understanding students are expected to acquire.

There is a history of unease among media educators, however, about what happens when this critical approach becomes isolated from the pleasures of engaging with the media or the creative enjoyment of media production. At the level of public examinations in the UK (at GCSE and A Level), conceptual and critical understanding is often assessed through written essays which analyse media texts or evaluate the students' own production work. It is all too easy for such work to become a decontextualised, dutiful rehearsal of what the student imagines the teacher or examiner wants to hear (Buckingham, Sefton-Green & Fraser, 2000). Part of the solution to this problem has often been seen as a closer integration between creative work and critical understanding. In the following example, for instance, 12-year-old students making a video game are asked to imagine themselves as games journalists writing a review of their own game:

Saturday 25th March, 2006.

Kids Make Their Own Game!

Students in Year 8 at Parkside Community College in Cambridge have formed a games company named PIG productions, in order to create a spectacular adventure game with an impeccable plot.

PIG is an acronym for Parkside Interactive Games, and PIG's first game is currently in the making, by the name of Jimmy De Mora and the Dying World.

Using Mission-Maker and just under 30 creative minds, students work in one of the English rooms at their school to design and make the game. . . .

The game is scheduled for release at all good game stores from May 2006, as

the final touches are currently being made to the game. Lucky people who have had the opportunity to preview the game have never given it less than 4 stars, mainly for the plot.

The game follows secret agent Jimmy De Mora, who is living in a world that is deteriorating thanks to global warming, and is suddenly faced with the kidnapping of his daughter and sister. He has to rescue many prisoners, including much of his family, and seek a holy artefact for renewable energy. Some say the game is a cry for attention to the melting polar ice-caps, some say it's an exaggerated joke. Whatever is said, we can't wait to see how the final release is seen by the gaming world!

While this is a relatively light-hearted example, the students have been encouraged to consider various aspects of the games industry (studio production; game magazines; games retail outlets); game audiences; and the political message of the game itself, as well as the possibility of different audience interpretations. This has been accomplished in the form of a written role-play, integrated into a suite of activities around the game production (writing walk-throughs; designing posters and game-box covers; designing and producing the game itself with an authoring software package), rather than an abstract activity divorced from the creative context.

In some ways, this kind of activity resembles the 'crit' of Art education – the tradition of oral critique in which students and teachers critically appraise students' work. The main difference is the focus in media education on the rhetorical function of the text, the intentions of its producers, and the interpretative work of its audiences. The emphasis on media texts in particular has always been a characteristic of media education. In some ways, this is descended from the close critical analysis advocated by earlier proponents of media education; and it is typically conducted as a form of semiotic exegesis, employing a range of approaches usually derived from the structuralist semiotics and narratology of the 1970s.

Where media education has emphasised this rhetorical approach, education in the Arts (including literature) has tended to focus much more on a tradition descended from another of Aristotle's works: the *Poetics*. That is to say, the Arts have spent more time on developing an attention to aesthetic form, whether in visual design, dance, drama or music. Art educators inherit an extensive vocabulary for the description of aesthetic features of painting, drawing and sculpture: the vocabulary of line, colour, composition, and a consensus about the signifying possibilities of these forms, including the evocation of emotion they can accomplish.

This vocabulary is much less well-developed in media education. Broadly speaking, students are encouraged to critically interrogate the political or ideological properties of the text (including the texts they make themselves) than its aesthetic properties. For those who teach English and Media in UK schools, then (a very common combination), the two curricula and their respective pedagogic traditions almost oblige a reverential appreciation of literary texts, but a critical suspicion of media texts.

To be a little simplistic for the sake of the argument, it seems to me that if art education can learn from the rhetorical approach of media education, then media educators can learn from the poetics of the arts, to develop a 'poetics' of the media. Such a move would recognise that, in fact, careful attention to the aesthetic properties of texts is of importance to students when they make their own media.

The following example will serve to develop a little further what I mean by a poetics of the media, and the aesthetic aspect of media texts. The activity can be seen as a form of 'reverse-engineering': using an authoring technology to literally undo the fabric and structure of a filmic text to see how it is made. In this case, Adobe Premiere is used to disassemble fragments of Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*, to explore how particular aesthetic effects are achieved. Furthermore, students are encouraged to creatively remake sections of the film, experimenting with different shot sequences and soundtracks. Before they begin the work, they work with the teacher to consider the function of different filmic structures: figure 5 shows an exploration of different camera angles and shots, for example.

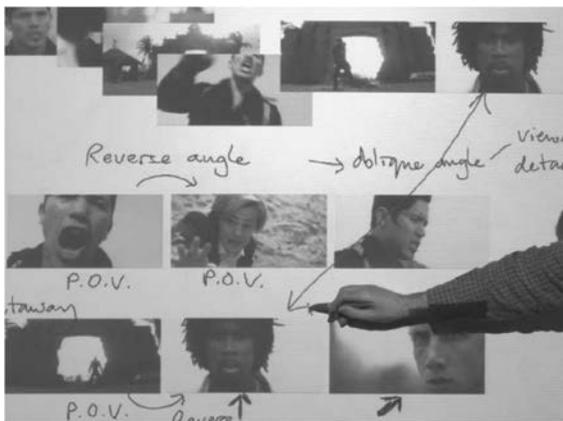


FIGURE 5

Caption: *Whiteboard notations of different shot types, preparing students to create new film sequences using material from Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* (thanks to James Durran for this).*

While on the one hand, this kind of activity forms part of the conceptual framework of media education (understanding the 'language' of media texts), it is also a consideration of the aesthetic properties of the text. Aesthetic judgment, in the sense developed by Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1985), is an expression of socially determined cultural taste, and this

politics of culture is central to the work of media educators, who must conduct the negotiation of taste and judgment in their classrooms, encouraging students to reflect consciously on how such tastes are formed – a delicate and difficult business, as anyone who has worked with students to make music videos based on their own musical preferences will know. In the case of this filmic re-making, however, the focus is more closely on how particular aesthetic choices can be made using the materials of the text, and what the effects of these will be. The focus is much closer to Aristotle’s original notion of *aisthesis* as sense-perception. One student remarks, for instance, how he has learned:

. . . the use of being able to cut from shot to shot, instead of being, like, in a theatre and watching the whole thing on one screen constantly . . . how you can create emotions using particular techniques.

Another has learned to recognise the function of montage – how the deliberate conjunction of disparate images produces new meanings:

When you did it yourself, you could see so many things that you could do with it, that you wouldn’t have thought of doing . . . if you’d seen a picture of a clock, you wouldn’t have put it maybe with, like, the police car, but when you can see it, and you can dissolve it into each other . . . and you can see it and how it changes it, how it makes it more interesting or do different things. . . .

And yet another has discovered the elastic temporality of film:

I don’t think I shall be able to go to the cinema, or watch another movie, without thinking about all the different shots and sounds in a small scene again . . . I found the idea that you could make a shot with the camera much longer or shorter, or faster or slower . . . fascinating and clever. I thought the shot was however long you filmed it with the camera for.

As well as the affective charge of these techniques, the peculiar affordances of film itself are recognised by the students; this one, for example, considers the mysterious narrative function of the camera as an eye, a proxy for a witness in the narrative, or for the spectator:

Also, at that point when the camera tracks up, it is the first time there has been any significant movement in it. the camera has stayed still to reflect the movement of the most important character in the sequence: like Mercutio, the camera has witnessed everything, but has done nothing about it . . . The final shot is of a new character to the sequence: Samson. The camera is placed at an oblique angle to him. He is not an important character, he is at the side of the action. His emotion, his expression of fear and anxiety, needs to be acknowledged—not felt—by the audience. He simply watches—he does not act.

This kind of critical work, a fluid mix of technical production, aesthetic choices and critical reflection, is close to the kind of work student might undertake in painting pictures, choreographing dance, directing drama, writing poetry. It is situated in a 'media arts' model of media education; it exemplifies the kind of thing I am thinking of as a 'poetics' of media education. However, it would be a mistake to think that a poetics of this kind can float free from the political considerations of a rhetorics: the two need to inform each other, as I will emphasise again below.

If this section of different kinds of criticality has argued that to be most effective, critical understanding needs to be integrated with creative production, it has also used the word 'creative' rather loosely. It is time to turn to the nature of creativity in media education: what exactly do we mean by it? How does it function as an aspect of media literacy? How might it represent common ground between media and art education?

CREATIVITY: cultural resources, semiotic tools

Creativity in education is a highly-contested idea. It appears in a bewildering variety of forms: post-Romantic notions of artistic genius (Scruton 1987), psychological analyses of the cognitive mechanisms of creative thought (Boden 1990), cultural conceptions of 'grounded aesthetic work' (Willis 1990), or policy ideas of the collaborative problem-solving skills necessary for new kinds of workforce (Leadbeater 2000).

My own preferred approach to creativity 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: Vygotsky's well-known example is a child using a broomstick as an imaginary horse. These symbolic understandings become internalised and develop into the mental processes which generate creative work. True creativity for Vygotsky only develops, however, when the imaginative transformations of play are connected with thinking in concepts: in other words, with rational intellectual processes. Two examples will help to see how this model of creativity works in media education.

The first is a comicstrip superhero designed by a 12-year-old girl (Figure 6). It comes from a series of lessons in which students critically explore the idea of superheroes: what social and cultural meanings they carry; how the 'grammar' of their design works; what kinds of narrative surround them. Having learned to analyse commercial comics, the students are then asked to design their own superhero comic front cover. This character, Tigerwoman, has been chosen by its author to shift the gendered balance of the traditional superhero pantheon, producing a representation of powerful femininity. In this respect, it adopts traditional motifs of superhero iconography: the costumes, masks, urban scenarios, subordinate police forces, moonlit landscapes typical of the visual narratives of DC and Marvel comics, and of the animated and live action film and television spinoff franchises. In Vygotsky's terms, then, this girl has playfully adopted a range of cultural resources, and

worked with what Vygotsky calls ‘semiotic tools’ to transform them into something new, something she has imagined. ‘Semiotic tools’ would here include not only the physical materials (paper, felt-tip pens), but also the visual lexis and grammar she has deployed. At the same time, rational processes of representation can be seen: the gendered representation referred to above; and a causal narrative thread running through the visual composition. In these respects, this can be seen as a creative piece of work in Vygotsky’s terms, a piece of work involving imaginative transformation and critical thought.



FIGURE 6

Caption: A 12-year-old girl’s superhero design

However, it can also be seen in terms of the cultural aspect of media literacy. The drawing makes considered, critical, pleasurable use of the resources of popular culture, partly in the service of an egalitarian message. Furthermore, the cultural work of the image can be related to the girl’s own social identity. What it means to be female, to be a girl moving into womanhood, is a concrete, personal affair as well as a generalized political statement. The signifiers of femininity most salient to ‘tween’ girls are produced by this girl as attributes of her imaginary characters: painted nails, exposed midriffs, eye makeup, figure-hugging costumes. While she has not, in fact, experimented with these aspects of tweenhood, she cannot but be aware of other girls in her class who have. The possible routes through girlhood here are laden with moral and sexual ambivalence, opening up different routes to adulthood, but also to risk and name-calling.

A different kind of creative production is shown in Figure 7: a screengrab from a computer game made by 13-year-old students. Their task was to devise a game based on Shakespeare's last play, *The Tempest*. From a cultural point of view, it juxtaposes the most popular of contemporary art-forms and the most elevated of literary-dramatic texts. It can be seen as a practical example, perhaps, of an exploration both of Williams' 'lived culture' (the students' familiarity with games) and 'selective tradition', the successive, aggregated cultural commentaries and practices which have promoted Shakespeare's work to the status it currently enjoys.



FIGURE 7

Caption: *Screengrab from Year 8 computer game adapted from The Tempest*

The two students who have designed this level have worked with the resources made available by the game-authoring software, *Missionmaker*. They have selected landscapes, objects and characters from libraries within the program, and manipulated them to produce the desired narrative. Such work inevitably raises the old question of 'originality' in the creativity debate, in which original work is generally favoured over derivative work. These categories, however, are less clear than they seem. The moment of modernism famously questioned the need to create images out of nothing, in the collages of Braque, or the bicycle saddle bull's head of Picasso, playing with the juxtaposition of found everyday objects and new meanings. Creativity since then has always been able to mean the re-assignment of significance to signifiers rather than the creation of meaning from nothing. In the example of these students' computer game, while the asset libraries of the program are

a convenient way of avoiding the problem of students needing to learn 3-D animation before being able to make anything, something of the same logic applies. These generic characters and landscapes are transformed by the way the students program them. The programming involves creating rules - central to the composition and play of videogames (Salen and Zimmerman 2004) - specifying particular events. These rules construct an adventure puzzle sequence in which the player, as Ferdinand, the king's son, must overcome a series of challenges based on events in the play, to find his love Miranda, and confront the (assumed) anger of her father, Prospero. This screen grab shows the final stage of the game, when the three meet.

While this game design involves a creative transformation of the digital assets of the software, the creation of new rules, and the recording and deployment of spoken dialogue, it also, of course, involves a transformation of Shakespeare's original text. The dramatic sequences are converted into the challenge-and-reward structures and win-lose states of the adventure genre of computer games; while the characters become the first-person avatar and non-player characters of this game genre. Shakespeare purists might express horror at the apparent violence done to this most cherished piece of literary heritage (though any contemporary actor or director might recognise the need to create the plays anew for a different cultural moment). More pertinently, it can be argued that this 'ludic' approach to the play recognises its similarities to a game: its magical island, the challenges, tests, punishments and rewards Prospero devises; even Prospero's final surrender to the control of the audience, who must decide whether he will finally return to Milan or not.

These two examples, then, demonstrate how creative production never arises mysteriously from nowhere; how it flourishes on a rich diet of cultural resources; how it enables an exploration of artistic form and content on the one hand, and also expresses individual and collective tastes, identities, social trajectories. They demonstrate how a 'poetic' attention to artistic form, design, style, effect can also carry – indeed, must also carry - rational designs of narrative, representation, political challenge.

CONCLUSION: towards a poetics of media education

The 3-Cs model of media literacy, then, suggests the need for media educators to interweave the cultural dispositions of their students with an expanding exploration of new cultural territory, in the context of playful, imaginative, creative production work. The balance is important, and is laid out in the 'cultural-semiotic' model of media literacy I developed some years ago with James Durran (Burn and Durran, 2007), whose classroom work is represented in some of the examples used in this chapter. This model (Figure 8) connects Williams' three levels of culture, shown on the left), the popular 3-Cs structure (here conceived of as the social functions of media literacy) shown in the centre; and the semiotic work of media discourses, design, production and interpretation, derived from the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (2000), shown on the right.

It proposes, then, that media educators move beyond a preoccupation with the contemporary moment of lived culture, though always returning to this moment as the space where meaning is made in the social realm for our students: where values are chosen, identities forged, pleasures enjoyed, representations understood. But at the same time, the contemporary moment is enriched by an interrogation of the past: of the cultures of parents and grandparents, of media texts re-valued through retro-culture, of the archaeology of media, the history of cinema, the origins of the camera, the birth and adolescence of video-games.

The model proposes, as I have argued above, that the critical aspect of media literacy consists partly of the rhetorical analysis of media texts, institutions and audiences. On the one hand, this implies a critical distance from the lived culture; for students to explore the lived pleasures of popular culture, but at the same time stand outside it, historicize it, imagine it from other points of view, move beyond their own cultural values to explore those of other groups, other times, other generations. On the other hand, it implies at critical understandings of the mechanics of rhetoric: of the grammatical devices of persuasion and argument, the syntax of ideology. In this respect, it connects with the semiotic model on the right of the diagram. It proposes that, in order to achieve this critique, students need to understand the semiotic modes chosen in the process of design, the technologies of inscription deployed in the material construction of media texts, and the modes and media of distribution which bring these texts to their audiences.

At the same time, the model requires the poetics of the media I have explored in this article. This stance of appreciation aims to help students to connect the aesthetic forms of the media, on the one hand, with their social meanings (the rhetorics); and on the other hand with their technologies of representation (the semiotics). It asks students to consider how the grammars of visual design, the moving image, computer game design, create these social meanings and the affective charge which invariably accompanies them. It asks them to analyse how these meanings and emotions are bound up in particular stylistic markers; and how these relate to their own aesthetic preferences and cultural values, as well as those of others.

Finally, the creative function of media literacy represents how the creative act connects also in two dimensions. It is indissolubly linked with the critical function (indeed, the production of new media texts can be the best way for students to grasp the rhetorics and poetics of the media); it is the means for the expression of aesthetic taste and for the self-representations through which social roles and identity are explored.

In the horizontal dimension, it represents the students' entry into the world of cultural production: a dialogic relation to the archaeology of past media texts, an interrogation of the selective tradition, an intervention in lived culture. Meanwhile, in relation to the semiotic dimension, creative production operates as an apprenticeship in the practical

semiotics of the media: it enacts the critical understanding of textual structure and design, and the social interest invested in these structures.

MEDIA LITERACY: A CULTURAL-SEMIOTIC MODEL		
CULTURAL CONTEXTS	SOCIAL FUNCTIONS	SEMIOTIC PROCESSES
LIVED	CULTURAL	DISCOURSE
SELECTIVE	CREATIVE	DESIGN/PRODUCTION
RECORDED	CRITICAL (rhetorical and poetic)	DISTRIBUTION INTERPRETATION

Figure 8: a cultural-semiotic model of media literacy

Elsewhere, I have investigated the semiotic aspects of this model more closely (Burn 2009), and how meaning is created across and between different semiotic modes (Kress and van Leeuwen 2000). This article has, however, emphasised the cultural aspects, and especially the poetics of the media. There have been extensive debates in the field of media education about critical literacies, popular culture, and creativity. But the poetics of media texts – their aesthetic function – has been much less frequently addressed. However, poetics alone simply disappears into empty style, or is recruited for more sinister purposes, as Walter Benjamin famously observed (Benjamin 1938/1968). Of course any poetics of the media needs to be the obverse of the coin of rhetoric: politics and poetics together provide the space in which students can learn, not only to enjoy and create beautifully-crafted artworks, but to understand how they represent the social realities of their world. This conjunction of rhetorics and poetics, of critical suspicion and critical appreciation, seems to me the ideal balance both for media and art education, two domains drawing ever closer in schools as they are in the wider world.

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