

ZOOM READING AS A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL MEDIA LITERACY:
A QUALITATIVE MEDIA STUDY WITH YOUTH IN RURAL ONTARIO

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I develop and study an original approach to media education I call “Zoom Reading”. This approach offers a critique of, and supplement to, the current Ontario media literacy curriculum by suggesting that media should be given the same rich attention as literature. Drawing on my background in communications and cultural studies, I argue for an approach to media education that includes an attention to form and content, personal experience and social life. After conducting a qualitative study with students in rural Ontario to experiment with Zoom Reading, this project explores the ways that the (rural) location and age of the participating students informs their engagement with popular media. I also consider the unexpected relationships that emerge as Zoom Reading brings to life the pedagogical complexities of working with youth and media.

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CHAPTER ONE
ZOOM READING:
A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL APPROACH FOR MULTI-MEDIA

The research problem for my study begins with an exciting twenty-first century development for education in Ontario: multiple media are now *required* in schooling as resources for teaching and learning. Specifically in 2006, in all grades between kindergarten and grade twelve, “Media Literacy” has become a mandatory component of the English and Language Arts curricula. As an avid gamer, cinephile, television binge-watcher, amateur photographer and voracious reader throughout my life, I look to media to digest and make sense of myself and my world, my memories and my many potential futures. Ontario’s new multi-media curriculum gave me hope that students’ personal investments in media would now be embraced and validated. In this research project I set out to study Ontario’s Media Literacy curriculum and consider ways to implement this educational development.

I understand the term media to mean anything mediating communication from one person to another. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a medium – the singular noun of the plural media – as “a person or thing that acts as an intermediary” (OED, 2015). This broad conception of media goes beyond thinking strictly about mass media, as is a common inference. Here, media can include, in equal measure, printed books and digital wikis; films in cinemas and digital streaming movie clips; 8-bit console video games and virtual reality head sets. An electric light bulb may “escape attention as a communication medium just because it has no ‘content’” (McLuhan, 1964, p. 24) but also falls under the umbrella term of media. For instance, a lit bulb outside a home can indicate to others that the resident is home, even if they are not. With this definition in

mind, I approached the study of Ontario's media literacy curriculum with great enthusiasm to see what new learning media could arouse.

This current project builds on the attempt of my master's research (Tremblay, 2008) to better understand media literacy. The query at the center of that project asked in earnest, "What is media literacy?" To resolve my uncertainty, I did a discourse analysis of the grade twelve version of Ontario's media literacy curriculum and paired my analysis with a one-month ethnography in a grade twelve classroom in Toronto Ontario. Through this pairing I was granted a look at how one educator, Katherine, approached and integrated media in her classroom. As a minimally-interventionist observer in her class, I witnessed her class contrast William Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* with the cinematic adaptations by Kenneth Branagh (1996) and Michael Almereyda (2000). As an assignment, students developed multi-media presentations analyzing the images of the two films using SMARTBoard technology.

One of my key findings was a tension between print and non-print media. In an exemplary moment, Katherine highlighted how little support and training there was for English and Language Arts educators, newly required to take on multiple media in the classroom:

I think that, we as teachers, I don't think we've been taught enough how to make that integration [between literature and media]. Even as it's presented in the curriculum, I'm not sure that the relationships that I see between media texts and print texts are really clear. [...] I mean I'd never studied film. The background I have in digital technology and how digital storytelling works is only because of my own personal - I just happened to be interested in it. I just happened to be a geek. (December 20, 2007)

Katherine believed there was a struggle for literacy teachers to take on other, non-print media and cites gaps in professional development, "I don't think we've been taught

enough,” and gaps in the ways educators approach literature and media, “I’m not sure that the relationships that I see between media texts and print texts are really clear.” She also notes her personal approach to non-print media happens to be informed by being a multi-media “geek,” with a personal passion for digital storytelling. Her concerns about the curriculum led me to consider a possible tension in teaching print and non-print media.

My experience with Katherine and my master’s research transformed my original thinking about media education as a stable object as in “What is Media Literacy?” In this research project I investigate the practice of media literacy: How should educators teach media alongside traditional texts? How might our conceptual understandings of media manifest in specific curricular and pedagogic practices?

Reading and Media Literacy

To respond to my revised questions I return to the *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8: Language [Revised]* (2006) and *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 11 and 12: English [Revised]* (2007) to understand how media are conceived. The *Language* and *English* curricula are broken into four strands: Oral Communication, Reading, Writing and Media Literacy.

The Reading strand is developed so that a student “not only grasps the ideas communicated in a text but is able to apply them to new contexts” (*The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8: Language [Revised]*, 2006, p. 10). The Reading strand is delineated by its focus on “texts” organized around the printed language, and Media Literacy takes up “media texts” which involve multiple “languages”: “Whereas traditional literacy may be seen to focus primarily on the understanding of the word, media literacy

focuses on the construction of meaning through the combination of several media languages – images, sounds, graphics, and words” (p. 13). By way of example, the Reading strand offers examples of “texts” as “literary, informational, and graphic texts – for example, picture books and novels; poetry; myths, fables, and folk tales; [...] graphic novels, comic books, cartoons, and baseball cards; newspaper articles and editorials; and essays and reports” (p. 11). Positioned as opposite, Media Literacy takes up those “mass culture and popular culture ... texts such as films, songs, video games, action figures, advertisements, CD covers, clothing, billboards, television shows, magazines, newspapers, photographs, and websites” (p.13).

This division between texts and media texts in the curricula is contrary to my aforementioned definition of media. The delineation between traditional literacy and media literacy seems to hinge on the presentation of language: language through the printed word versus a combination of aural, visual, graphic and textual languages. There is, of course, overlap here; I find it curious that a newspaper can be taken up as an example of a text in Reading, and then later a media text in Media Literacy. This division between types of texts leads me to echo Katherine: “As it’s presented in the curriculum, I’m not sure that the relationships that I see between media texts and print texts are really clear.”

Unlike the cloudy definition of text versus media text, the goals of the Reading strand and Media Literacy strand are starkly different. In the Reading strand teachers are encouraged to cultivate a love of reading words:

Reading experiences that invite students to discover new worlds and new experiences and to develop their imaginative powers will go a long way towards convincing them that reading can be a rich source of pleasure and knowledge. Such experiences are likely to lead to *a love of reading, which*

is among the most valuable resources students can take with them into adult life. [emphasis added] (p. 10)

Love, or an intimate connection with something, is only stated in the curriculum twice, both times in relation to reading words. Here, literacy is connected with richness and pleasure, and is even claimed to be “among the most valuable” resources for students. It is clear that literacy’s intentions go beyond knowledge; reading word-based texts can inspire passion and imagination.

In contrast to word-based literacy, the Media Literacy strand stresses that students should practice critical thinking when reading non-word-based media texts. Here, teachers are given the task of encouraging students to critically dismantle media texts and effectively communicate using media:

Students’ repertoire of communication skills should include the ability to critically interpret the messages they receive through the various media and to use these media to communicate their own ideas effectively as well. Skills related to high-tech media such as the Internet, film, and television are particularly important because of *the power and pervasive influence these media wield in our lives and in society.* [emphasis added] (p. 13)

Here media texts are conceived of as being “high-tech,” “powerful and pervasive” whereas printed words are described as a “rich source of pleasure and knowledge.” Whereas the act of reading words is thought of as enriching for students well into their adult lives, Media Literacy is described as a way to arm students against the power media texts wield in their lives. Thus teaching media texts is devised as a means to an end: students will gain “effective” “communication skills” and learn to protect themselves. The words to describe these two processes are significant: Reading is described through the terms love, imagination, knowledge and value; Media Literacy is described

through the terms skill, effective, power, influence, wielding. The former conception evokes passion and intellectual stimulation, and the latter is utilitarian.

Another example of contrasting conceptions of words and media texts is the use of the word “beauty” in *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8: Language [Revised]* (2006). First, the term appears in relation to reading literature: “Frequent exposure to good writing will inspire students to work towards high standards in their own writing and will help them develop an appreciation for the power and *beauty of the written word*” [emphasis added] (p. 11). Here printed words are conceived of as being intrinsically beautiful and it is anticipated that students will benefit from appreciating their beauty. Next, in an exemplary prompt for Media Literacy, the concept of beauty is identified in a contrasting light. According to the prompt, in order to enact Media Literacy the educator should ask: “What *standards of beauty are projected* in movies and advertisements? How do these standards affect students?” [emphasis added] (p. 133). In this case, media actively “project” a “standard of beauty” upon students, rendering them helpless in the struggle for identifying beauty in and for themselves. Again, media texts are something acting upon students, whereas books are waiting to enrich students. In these curricular discourses, it is implied that students are not intended to take pleasure in Media Literacy, but to guard themselves. And educators are tasked with constructing a critical distance to media in the classroom.

The curriculum’s conception of media texts is problematic. If performing Media Literacy according to the curriculum, neither educator’s nor student’s pleasure for media texts should be taken into account; love can only be invested in reading words. I believe this conception has the potential to drive a wedge between educators attempting to do

Media Literacy the prescribed way and those pursuing more pleasurable engagements with media, or to create a conflict within the educator attempting to do both. If the student or educator cannot think of a media text as enriching and generating love, students may offer lip service or entirely resist offering a thoughtful reading of non-word-based media.

And this is not to say the Media Literacy curriculum has no merit. It rightly seeks to connect analysis of multi-media texts with critical thinking and critical theories about the world. In asking students to form “the ability to critically interpret [multi-media] messages” (*The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8: Language [Revised]*, 2006, p. 13), the syllabus is asking students to dig deeper and question things that might seem all too familiar. As famously stated by media theorist Marshall McLuhan, “It is critical vision alone which can mitigate the unimpeded operation of the automatic” (1951). This is to say that through critical analysis of texts one can understand and disrupt common sense ideas in and about the world. This is an integral position to take with all texts, not only multi-media texts.

As an educator who loves using multi-media in teaching, and sees all media as potential communicators of rich and complex narrative experiences, I hope for a more complex media education. Any medium can offer problematic narratives and images/imagery; there are no perfect texts to which one might restrict students. In the hope that media and word-based texts can be problematic and still valuable and meaningful for students, I seek to practice a multi-media education that keeps pleasure and critical analysis in conversation, with the potential to offer an honest dialogue

between student and teacher. At the center of this dissertation I ask, *how can a teacher practice a critical and imaginative multi-media education?*

To explore this question, in this project I have designed a media literacy approach I call Zoom Reading, which I hope allows for a balance of imaginative and critical reading practices. In the following I will outline the approach of Zoom Reading, and compare and associate it with the contemporary Media Literacy curriculum.

The Philosophical Framework of Zoom Reading

In designing Zoom Reading as a complex media approach, I began with the Reading strand from the *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8: Language [Revised]* (2006), which allows for love and imagination in reading. In that my media literacy approach does not differentiate between media and word-based texts, from herein, when I speak about an example of one particular medium (e.g. a film, a television show, a video game), I will refer to it as a “text” regardless of its differences. In referring to examples of non-word-based media as texts, I want to bring focus to the ability of multiple media to convey complex narratives as well as problematic depictions of the world. I believe a video game or music video can carry as much narrative potential as a novel or novella. I will consequently refer to using, watching or playing media in the context of a classroom as “reading”. I do not intend to gloss over the fact that reading a film, for instance, is significantly different than a book and requires considering the multi-modal dimensions of sound and image in addition to typeface. And several media theorists make strong and valid points against harbouring Media Literacy in English and Language arts curricula (recently, Cloudy, 2010). This project is not fighting for Media Literacy as its own, separate course; quite the opposite, I seek to reframe media texts

as being on par with word-based texts. Thus, I believe using the terms “text” and “reading” are befitting of my intentions for Zoom Reading: not to distinguish between approaches to word-based and non-word-based media texts is to create an equitable opportunity for pleasure and analysis in each.

In short, Zoom Reading attempts to fuse four ways of thinking about a text—regardless of the medium—into a single, multi-dimensional approach to reading. To use the Zoom Reading approach, the reader must scale between the details of the text, the way the medium allows for textual engagement, the consideration of the socio-political context—both of production and reading—and to the ways the text affects the reader.

Philosophically, my goal for Zoom Reading is to privilege neither text nor reader as being in total control of the potential meanings in the narrative. I do not want to echo the curriculum and propose that media texts “wield” power and assume students have little agency in making meaning in media texts; I also do not want to suggest that each reader is in complete control of the meaning-making process, or assume that all readings are equally excellent. My goal with Zoom Reading is to acknowledge and build on the relationship between the texts and readers. To achieve this, I draw from the literary paradigm of post-structuralism and the field of cultural studies.

A post-structurally informed reading focuses on conceptions of the reader’s relationship with a text. Specifically, with post-structural approaches to reading, there cannot be a singular truth made of, or hidden within, a text. Literary and cultural theorist Terry Eagleton (2008) writes, “We can never quite close our fists over meaning, which arises from the fact that language is a temporal process. When I read a sentence, the meaning is always somehow suspended, something deferred or still to come” (p. 111).

As a temporal process, reading relies on the reader building understanding in time: both the time it takes to read something, but also the time and place of the reading, the context. Building on structuralism's understanding that the meaning of words are relative to each other (Saussure, 1978) – that the arbitrary word “bat” refers to the flying rodent, because it is not the word “cat” – post-structuralism recognizes language and meaning as contingent on the reader's time and place. Language is a living thing: each language grows and evolves between generations and places. Thus post-structuralism turns away from attempting a science of reading that seeks a singular or finite Truth.

In developing Zoom Reading as a postmodern approach to texts, I am predominantly influenced by literary theorist and semiotician Roland Barthes. In his piece, “The Death of the Author” Barthes (1977) asserts the multiplicity inherent in a single text by acknowledging, “we know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash” (p. 146). In place of positioning an author (a God) as the source of Truth, we can now think of a text as a “tissue of quotations” (p. 146), a body of ideas sewn together like Frankenstein's monster: a pastiche built with multiple and conflicting social and cultural connotations, constructed as a palimpsest of (the author's/authors') knowledge's and influences. Once committed to creation, this postmodern text can be taken up in a plethora of ways: as an abomination or as a beloved, as a danger or as a comfort and friend. Barthes hopes we might be changed or disrupted by the very bliss of the meanings we develop.

In *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975), Roland Barthes contends that a pleasurable text “is linked to a *comfortable* practice of reading,” whereas a text offering bliss

“imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts ... unsettles the reader’s historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language” (p. 14). A text of bliss is doing important work; it is actively reconfiguring the reader’s association with herself and the world. In contrast, a pleasurable text may merely offer passive titillation. Barthes is anxious that “pleasure” can connote both experiences of reading: “I cannot cleanse the word ‘pleasure’ of meanings I occasionally do not want: I cannot avoid the fact that in French ‘pleasure’ refers both to a generality (“pleasure principle”) and to a miniaturization (“Fools are put on earth for our minor pleasures”) (p. 19–20). I do not intend to concern myself with Barthes’ anxiety over whether students find a text comfortable, pleasurable or blissfully disruptive. While I have valued the moments in my own education when my (knowledge) system has been shocked by a text of bliss, this is a difficult experience to enforce as an educator: visceral and deeply meaningful readings are contingent on our personal histories, making bliss an idiosyncratic experience. However, by allowing for the balance of critical analysis and pleasure in a multi-dimensional Zoom Reading, I hope students will have more opportunity to experience the possibility of a blissful text.

This is not to say that in a postmodern reading anything goes as long as the reader enjoys reading or finds some meaning. David Scholl and Stan Denski (1995) suggest that “a postmodernism that endlessly plays with literary texts ... erases any critical sense of history or politics” (p. 16). The goal is not absurd relativism but a move toward de-centering meaning from any singular Author-God or Truth. A post-structural reader can hypothesize multiple meanings of the text and use key passages or elements as to justify those hypotheses: “the work cannot go on to mean anything at all;

but [texts are] now less an object to which criticism must conform than a free space in which it can sport” (Eagleton, 2003, p. 119). A postmodern approach is not hoping “the text is ‘explained’—victory to the critic” (Barthes, 1975, p. 147) but rather postmodernism hinges on “diversity and difference, a politics of contestation and change” (Scholle & Denski, 1995, p. 17) so that we may also contest and be changed as readers. As such, I also draw from theorists in cultural studies for a framework for how to take up the social and political dimensions of, and depictions in, multi-media texts.

Cultural studies developed as a field of scholarship developed in the early 1960s, and is largely credited to Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson, and later Stuart Hall at the Birmingham School. Each of these thinkers approached academic life from a working class background, and Williams and Hoggart’s experiences as adult educators “confirmed their sense that the prevailing scholarly understanding of culture was far too narrow and exclusive to encompass the rich and complex fabric of their students’ lives” (O’Brien & Szeman, 2004, p. 298). As such, one of cultural studies’ primary goals is to break down the distinctions between high and low culture, or elite cultural practices and mass media/practices, while simultaneously validating and deconstructing popular media as important sources of social and political knowledge.

To be clear, I am not drawing on cultural studies as an opposite approach to texts than post-structuralism. The field of cultural studies and the literary theory of post-structuralism rose to popularity in similar decades—the 1960s to 1970s—and are in many ways intertwined. For instance one of Hoggart’s (1969) key cultural studies

contributions is *Contemporary Cultural Studies: An Approach to the Study of Literature and Society* (Bertens, 2001, p. 175), connecting the micro concerns of the text to the macro structures of culture (McDougall, 2012, p. 19). One of the Birmingham scholars whose work echoes this task and is central to my conception of Zoom Reading is Stuart Hall.

Stuart Hall's (1980) "Encoding/Decoding" is foundational to my concept of reading multi-media. In it, he attempts to move beyond linear conceptions of media "effects," where in communication is imagined as a transaction from sender to receiver (I explore this theory of communication further in Chapter Two). Instead he envisions communication as a constellation of connections, as moments—of production, distribution, and reproduction—interrelated by "the syntagmatic chain of a discourse" (p. 163).

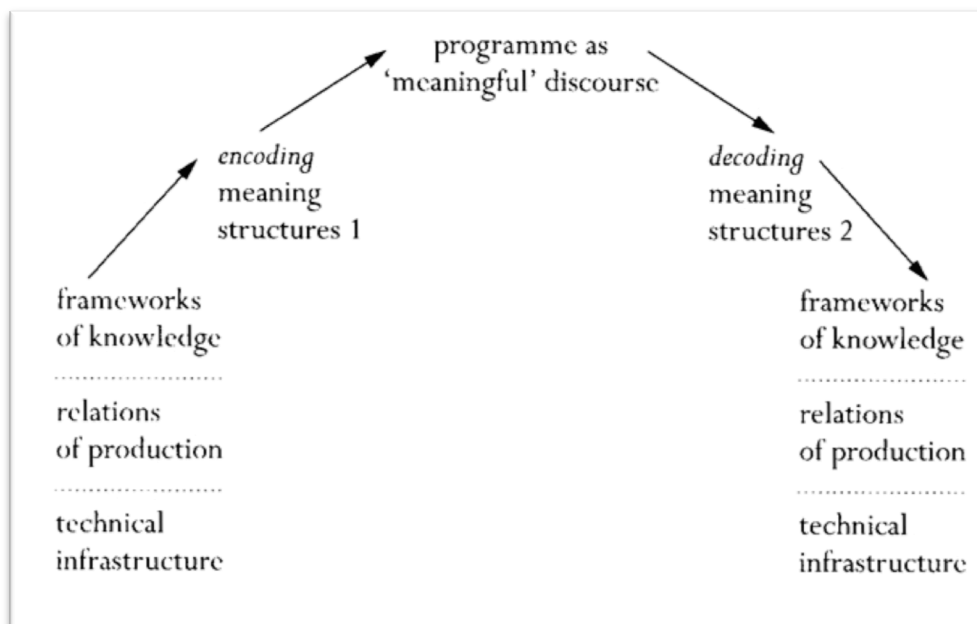


Figure 1. Diagram of Hall's "Encoding/Decoding."

Although he asserts that "no one moment can fully guarantee [the meaning made in] the next moment," he notes there are determinate, signifying moments: "In a 'determinate'

moment the structure [of production] employs a code and yields a 'message': at another determinant moment the 'message,' via its decoding, issues into the structure of social practices" (p.168). Importantly, these determining moments are rendered meaningless unless they arise from, and are intelligible to, established social discourses, economic relations, and technical infrastructure.

This theory of media writing and reading moments privileges neither producer nor audience as central in the process of meaning-making; it makes room for "degrees of 'understanding' and 'misunderstanding' in the communicative exchange" (p. 166) and seeks to position both texts and readers within a field of possible and simultaneous meanings. Hall does not define reading as the capacity to find an objective message entrusted to the text by the producer(s), echoing Barthes desire to de-center the author. Rather he sees the process of reading as putting signs "into a creative relation between themselves and with other signs: a capacity which is, by itself, the condition for a complete awareness of one's total environment" (p. 170). Ultimately, I hope to operationalize Hall's concept of encoding/decoding through Zoom Reading, by using it as a foundation for a multi-dimensional and complex approach to reading multi-media texts with students.

By partnering post-structuralism and cultural studies, specifically Barthes and Hall, at the foundation of my approach to a multi-media education, Zoom Reading attempts to balance the multi-dimensionality of both reader and text simultaneously. Or, to return to the Ontario curriculum, I am positioning Zoom Reading between the Reading and Media Literacy strands: I hope to balance the practice of reading as an enriching and imaginative journey alongside developing critical questions about the text

and ourselves. Maxine Greene sees “reflective time” about art as significant to exercising our imaginations and understanding ourselves (and our world) as projects: “participatory encounters with paintings, dances, stories and all other art forms enable us to recapture a lost spontaneity ... we are enabled to recapture the processes of our becoming” (Greene, 2000, p. 130). By reflecting on the ways our selves and our (imagined) worlds are reflected/distorted in texts, imaginative reading invigorates and reconstructs our understandings. Although I am inspired by Greene’s theory of imagination and art for a multi-media education, she made clear she does not see all media as art. She asserts that, “technological communication frequently has the effect of freezing people’s imaginative thinking ... with predigested concepts and images in fixed frameworks” (p. 124). To prove her theory of imagination in art she draws on Camus’ *The Plague* (1948), Christa Wolf’s *Accident: A Day’s News* (1989), Paul Cézanne’s paintings of Mont Sainte-Victoire and Muriel Rukeyser’s poem “Elegy in Joy” (1949). I wish to extend her theory beyond literature, painting and poetry (typically high culture texts) and I am hopeful that all media texts – even mass and popular culture texts – can be meaningful and more than just products of “consumer goods” (Greene, 2000, p. 124). Barthes’ (1970) conception of the “death of the author” becomes even more poignant in a multi-media education in that we must hold on the possibility that texts can be more than their producers’ intentions, or the context of production.

Unlike the Ontario curriculum, I do not want to discriminate between types of texts, and assume particular relationships with particular texts. To enact an approachable method for Hall’s complex theory of encoding/decoding, Zoom Reading aims to strike the balance between imagination and pleasure, and critical questions

about the contexts of reading and production. To maintain its complexity, I combine four distinct though related levels of possible meaning that, when combined, can offer a complex consideration of any text. In the following, I will outline the four dimensions of Zoom Reading in detail.

Zoom Reading: Four Dimensions of Media Analysis

The four dimensions of Zoom Reading ask the reader to zoom: 1) Close-up; 2) Medium; 3) Panoramic; and 4) Selfie. The language I use to describe these four steps of reading are drawn from the visual medium of film and photography; media that I believe the contemporary reader will be intimately familiar and even involved with, in the age of the multi-modal Smartphone. To borrow from film, the first level is the “close-up” that draws our focus to the minute details. The second level is the cinematic “medium” shot, such that the camera/reader adjusts away from the details and is framed to make “gesture and expression” (in and) of the text visible (Bordwell & Thompson, 2001, p. 219). The third level zooms out further, allowing for the broadest scope of the text: the cinematic “panoramic” shot where the camera/reader gains a bird-eye-view of the setting. The final level of Zoom Reading takes its name from contemporary photography: the “selfie”, where readers turn the camera on themselves and consider their unique reaction to the act of reading. Initially I conceived of this as “crossing the axis of action” in cinematic terms (Bordwell & Thompson, 2001, p. 220), where the camera is spun on its tripod and is turned to face the crew creating the film. However, I feel the Selfie is a more common and accessible term for contemporary youth and educators.

It is important to note that, as I've conceived of it, Zoom Reading does not incorporate a writing level or practice; using the language of visual media secures the reader as a voyeur whose central production is making *meaning*. This is not to say that Zoom Reading cannot be partnered with a multi-media writing strategy; nor is my method attempting to suggest multi-media writing skills are unimportant. There is a lot of emphasis in Media Studies on developing engaging participatory writing practices (Buckingham, 2003; Jenkins, 2009; Brauchler & Postill, 2010). Nonetheless, media reading must still happen, and I see this project speaking to how we might offer a generous and complex approach to reading multi-media. Subsequently, I will elaborate on Zoom Reading as a multi-dimensional reading practice.

1. Reading Close-up: Zooming in on Text

The first level in the Zoom Reading model is a Close-up focus. In a media study, if I am zooming into a text Close-up, I am focusing on the details of the diegetic or life-world of text: the plot, characters, imagery, representations, *mise-en-scène*, landscapes, sound design, framing and rhythms (dependent on what medium is in use). This is not a finite list of requirements to cover when Zooming in on the text, but an example of ways to pull it apart. Here, the post-structuralist reader does not need to conform to a specific way of thinking about the text, but readers can play with multiple potential meanings.

2. Medium Focus: Attending to (Multi-) Media

The second level of Zoom Reading employs a Medium focus. Drawing on the cinematic framing term of a “medium shot,” which is neither close-up nor panoramic, but

I can focus on how the medium of the text establishes the connection between the reader and text. For instance, at a medium focus I would consider the capabilities and limitations of the video game console in relation to the game I play: the ways I can or cannot alter the storyline through my play, what physical actions I need to take with my fingers to act out specific feats on screen, and the consideration of how my experience might be different using an alternate medium. It is important to consider the ways a reader interacts with the particular medium of the text in order to consider how their interaction (or lack thereof) may impact the meanings they make of the text.

3. Social Panoramic: Considering Context

The third level of Zoom is also the furthest retracting zoom. If I zoom all the way out, I can see a social panoramic shot and survey the context of the story. At this level the reader is asked to pay attention to their (social, political, geographic) context in relation to the text and/or the context of the text's production. Specifically I am asking the reader to consider and contrast when and for whom the text might have been made, and how the text suits the reader's contemporary social context. I am also curious if the reader has been to the setting of the text, and how their perception of those places differs from the described. Some of the key questions at this level are: who is the text for, and not for? What is missing to make this text more familiar to your experiences of these places, people, and stories? Akin to a cinematic long shot, a panoramic Zoom can allow me to ground the content and medium (the first two Zoom levels) of the text in a web of current and historical socio-politics, which of course will be varied and complex. Put simply, the Panoramic focuses on the time and place of the text's production and consumption.

4. Turning the Camera: A Media-Reading Selfie

The final level of Zoom Reading involves turning the focus onto the reader. Unlike the panoramic Zoom, this is not a social focus but considers the ways we as readers invest ourselves emotionally, psychically and viscerally in a text. At this level, readers are asked to reflect on their relationship to the text: how they construe the text, and how the text affects them. In practicing Zoom Reading, I am asking that readers face possible disorientation by seeing their readings as distinctly connected to their practiced and visceral associations with reading.

Zoom Reading as a Flexible Framework for Media Literacy

It is my hope that, by using the framework of Zoom Reading, an educator is encouraged, and encourages students, to read texts from multiple vantages: considering the details of the text, of the medium, of their social and political dimensions, and finally of the self. To enact Zoom Reading in a multi-media education and analyze texts at each level of Zoom, in this study I draw on further cultural and literary theorists to flesh out my questions and readings at each focus. Overall, I see it as a broad structure for reading into which any number of critical theories can fit based on the user's theoretical leanings.

For example, appropriate to a Close-up Zoom, an educator/reader can draw from a litany of reading theories: literary theory (Propp, 1968; Saussure, 1972); film studies (Belay, 1924; Zizek, 2000); videogame studies (Jensen & de Castell, 2008; Wolf & Peron, 2013), depending on the medium of the text. Each of these approaches allows the reader to dig into the details of the text, and pull apart phrases, imagery, framing, characters or scenery. Although it is important to consider that some of the theorists

listed above may have competing interests (such as the traditionalist structuralism of Propp and the post-structural and psychoanalytic play of Zizek), the fundamental goal at this level of zoom is to dig into the potential layers of meaning in the content of the text.

Some alternative reading strategies at the Medium Zoom might consider the confines or allowances inherent in the medium of the text such as: writing (Ong, 1986); histories of communication technologies (Innis, 1962); and the development of the field of Multimodality (Kress & VanLuven, 2001). Again, the appropriateness of the theory would be dependent on the medium of the text under study, but the goal is to always consider the material conditions of the medium and how the reader engages with the text to make meaning.

At the Panoramic Zoom, multiple social and political theories of media could plug into Zoom Reading easily: Marxism (Marx, 1867; Habermas, 1962); Political Economy (Smyth, 1981; Garnham & Inglis 1990; Hermann & Chomsky, 2002); and Visual Culture (Bal & Bryson, 1991; DeBora, 1967). Specifically the desire for the panoramic focus is to consider the social and political complexities of the context in which the text is produced and/or read. By considering this socio-political context, this Zoom level is integral in continuing Stuart Hall's goal for encoding/decoding: "awareness of one's total environment" (Hall, 1990, p. 170).

Finally the introspective dimension of Zoom could pair well with alternate theories that allow for considering self-reflexive analysis such as: phenomenology (Husserl, 1913, 1931; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; DeLuxe, 1989); cognitive affect theories (Belaz, 1924; Eckman, 1984; Carroll, 1999); and psychoanalysis (Mulley, 1975; Sobchack, 2004; Pitt & Brushwood Rose, 2007). Although there is a significant history of the "effects" of

media on children or media's affective damage (see next chapter), the study of our own pleasure as readers in a multi-media study can offer important insights into what makes media texts meaningful.

In my thoughts on developing Zoom Reading as a multi-dimensional approach to reading multi-media texts, I want to make clear I am not the first to attempt such an undertaking. Although media studies seem to be taking a turn to focus on students' media practices (Buckingham, 2003; Burn, 2009; Hoechsmann & Points, 2012), there are many contemporary scholars working to conceive more complex media reading practices for education. For instance, Charles R. Garoian and Yvonne M. Gaudelius' *Spectacle Pedagogy* (2008) applies the artistic practices of collage, montage, assemblage, installation and performance as concepts for reading visual culture texts. In another example, Michael Hoechsmann and Bronwen Low (2008) exercise Richard Johnson's (1986-87) "cultural studies heuristic" – a four point circuit including "1) production, 2) textual or material form, 3) reception, and 4) influence on lived culture" – something that originated in his piece "What is Cultural Studies Anyway?" (Hoechsmann & Low, 2008, p. 26). While theoretically in dialogue with these approaches, Zoom Reading aims to be more accessible and compatible for Ontario K-12 educators working with the Media Literacy curriculum, and makes important use of post-structural literary theories in keeping with Media Literacy's placement in the English and Language Arts curriculum documents. In this research, I strive to balance accessible approaches with the thoughtful complexity of the media work of Garoian, Gaudelius, Hoechsmann and Low.

Research Methodology

Whereas my Master's work studied another educator's approach to Media Literacy, in this research I wanted to challenge my own practice and examine my conception of media education. After conceiving of the Zoom Reading framework, I set out to conduct a qualitative study where I facilitated a Media Club with a group of students to evaluate Zoom Reading as a practice for multi-media reading.

The motivation for this project is distinctly personal. Having grown up in a rural, working-class community, my access to high culture was scant: I was not able to frequent museums, galleries, theatres or symphonies and, aside from participating in local sports tournaments and a solitary road-trip to Disney World with my family, I did not travel. Thus my understanding of the world was shaped in large part by voraciously reading books, devouring movies, television, video games, and—later in high school—surfing the Internet. I have never thought of media as being frivolous to my cultural landscape; media were the primary means for a broader social and cultural education outside of my social geography. In this work, I have the implicit goal of making room for myself as an imagined student, as well as an educator, by allowing multi-media to be included in a formal education. I thought it fitting to set my qualitative study in the town—and the very school—where I experienced my own education. I chose to enact Media Club with a group of over thirty student participants in the rural town of Cedarwood, located in Southern Ontario.¹

The methodological design for the Media Club study draws on qualitative research that uses book and film clubs as an informal way to conduct group interviews (Roadway, 1984; Sumara, 1996; Robertson, 1997). Media Club was held in a

¹ The town's name is changed to protect the anonymity of the participants.

secondary school and was structured both to collect students' reactions and thinking about media texts, and to serve as a forum for my own thinking about Zoom Reading as a possible media literacy approach. Conducting Media Club in a school was important for thinking about the practice of Zoom Reading, but this approach also posed some important challenges.

David Buckingham (1991) notes that, by asking children to “talk television” in an inauthentic (formal and public) educational environment, we aren't merely “observing” students' reception of media texts. Instead, he suggests that such media studies must consider “the relationship between what children bring to the context—their existing knowledge and experience of television, as is manifested in talk—and their understandings of the demands and requirements of the context itself” (p. 266-267). Following Buckingham, I anticipated the student participation in the Media Club research would be shaped in response to both the content of my questions as well as the context—a research study in their school. To develop a more relaxed rapport with the students, I designed our media study as a “club”: an informal and extracurricular organization of members with a shared interest in media. I did not aim to perform a didactic role in Media Club; I did not design media lessons to teach students anything in particular about the texts, but rather posed questions to prompt discussion with a mind to “supply a frame of reference for respondents' answers but put a minimum restraint on the answers and their expression” (Kerlinger, 1970, cited in Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 277). The Zoom Reading prompts for Media Club were designed in the field in the days before each Media Club workshop allowing me the flexibility to build on or add to previous discussions.

My attempt to practice my own hypothesis for media literacy in an informal setting was both the most challenging undertaking I have encountered and the most enormous gift. What stands in these pages is an exercise: my attempt to hypothesize a complex media literacy practice, and a venture to practice what I believe to be valuable.

Chapter Outlines

In this chapter, I situated my research question, “How can teachers practice a critical and imaginative media education?” in response to the Reading and Media Literacy curriculum in Ontario, and proposed my desire to enact a complex media literacy practice that allows for a balance between pleasure and analysis. I described my philosophical and practical design for Zoom Reading, a four-dimensional media practice that makes room to balance issues in the text with the medium, socio-political and cultural concerns, and our own personal investments with text. I also outlined my intention to walk the talk: to put Zoom Reading into practice in a qualitative study with rural youth as a way to consider what my approach may offer education.

In the next chapter I will situate my study in a century-long history of thinking about why educators should and should not take up the study of multiple media—both word-based text and multi-modal media texts—in schools. Specifically, I trace this history by reviewing teacher-researcher’s perspectives on media in varied academic journals. Beginning with publications in the 1930s and ending in present day, I trace an evolution of thinking about the relationship between media and the (developing) mind, the relationship of media with society, and the status of a new medium as being symptomatic of a contemporary moment. As such I intend to locate Zoom Reading in a rich history of debate and considerations over media education.

In Chapter Three will I detail my methodology: as an ethnographically informed qualitative research study resulting in a thematic analysis. I describe the methodological traditions I work with, the ethical responsibilities of my undertaking, as well as the particulars of the demographic I worked with. I also touch on the specifics of the town where I conduct my research, paying close attention to my relationship with it. Finally, I present the specifics of Media Club and the ways my data was recorded and analyzed.

In Chapters Four and Five, I conduct an analysis of the data I collected in Media Club and I consider the conversations and meanings that students made there. Throughout, I explore how Zoom Reading made room for these conversations with students by pairing critical analysis with a sense of intimacy with media texts.

In Chapter Four I focus on place and perceptions of rurality. In that my study is set in a rural Ontario town, I consider how their place of reading permeated students' understandings of the media texts and revealed a complex relationship with their socio-geographic identities. I work with the idea of exurban places as *heterotopias*, those simultaneously real and imagined spaces theorized by Michel Foucault (1984). As such I analyze, through students' reactions to media texts, how The Country acts as a real and envisioned place, how being "Country" might be an actual and commercialized culture, and the impossibility of drawing clean parameters for spaces in a mediated Global Village (McLuhan, 1968). I close by noting how Zoom Reading made possible these investigations into students' lived place in tandem with the politics of its representation.

In Chapter Five, I analyze an unanticipated focus of the study, age: societal perceptions of the age of the students (adolescents), students' perceptions of their own

age, and students' interest in the age (or datedness) of media texts. Beginning with the conversations students had about age and newness in relation to the media texts we viewed, I consider the implications of this frame for thinking about media literacy more broadly. Working with Hanna Arendt's text "The Crisis in Education" (1958), I argue that education's anxieties around media, youth, and youth reading media is the fact of natality. In their own ways, youth and media seem to be ushering in a new world, and I suggest education (and society in general) attempts to control youth and media through discourses of safety. However, I suggest that, by embracing youth as always/already part of a media culture, Zoom Reading allows for an important investigation into students' understandings of the world in order to create meaningful dialogue with students.

In Chapter Six I discuss what I hope for Zoom Reading pedagogically. I pull apart the specifics of my question-based pedagogy by thinking about it through the work of Plato's Socrates (Cornford, 1945), Sophie Haritounian-Gordon (2010) and Jacques Rancière (1991) to propose an evolution of the way educators have worked with questions in teaching. Ultimately I propose Rancière's approach to ignorance may be particularly important for the media educator.

In closing, I reflect on my experience learning through Media Club, and reconsider the ways I believe Zoom Reading is useful for teaching about media in a classroom. I will also note a few new questions this project has left me with.

CHAPTER TWO

A HISTORY OF THINKING ABOUT MEDIA IN EDUCATION: EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGIES, MEDIA LITERACY, MULTILITERACIES

In the following chapter I trace a genealogy of educators' voices on the topic of media. Pedagogues have worked with the concept and practice of media in education for well over a century and, by tracing a lineage of educational motivations and concerns for media, I hope for a historically informed approach to media literacy.

To locate these vantages and voices, I identified a mix of top tier and small circulation Education and English academic journals available in the annals of York University and the University of Toronto. Drawing on diverse journals, I will offer qualified, thoughtful and varied educator perspectives on media education. For instance, I balance highly esteemed journals like *The Harvard Educational Review* (1930–present) with smaller circulation journals like *Educator's Guide to Media and Methods* (1967–1969). Attending to diverse journals in order to deepen my understandings of their relationship with my conceptions about teaching media, I review a variety of teacher-researchers struggling with or advocating for contemporary media technologies in the classroom. In this chapter I seek to answer, on whose shoulders do I build Zoom Reading? Where do my preoccupations and (mis)understandings come from?

I focus this review on three key temporal moments. I begin at the turn of the twentieth century with the rise of cinema culture and the newfound debates over film as 'Educational Technology.' Then, prompted by the mid-century explosion of the television and the domestication of media culture, I trace educators' concerted efforts and anxieties in developing a formal Media Literacy project for schools. And finally, I turn to some of the current conversations where Media Literacy is established but affected by

the twenty-first century network of society and digital technologies, and scholarly conceptions of literacy splinter into a multitude of approaches.

Movie-Made Students: Early Perspectives on Film as an Educational Technology

To set the stage briefly for the early twentieth century, I begin by noting that social science was a budding discipline and youth-based studies were a new, controversial, and important venture for society. By studying youth and their relationship to media for instance, educators and society at large hoped for a better understanding of how media could change the way youth think and act, and what might be at stake for youth as/in the future of society. (See my contemporary ruminations on this in Chapter Five).

Some of these studies on youth and media included The Chicago School study (Park & Burgess, 1921), the Middletown Study (Lynd & Lynd, 1929) and the Payne Fund Study (Foreman, 1933). The latter study released a series of reports, the most popular of which was *Our Movie Made Children*, penned by novelist Henry James Foreman (1933). Foreman was tasked to produce a “popular summary” of the data from the Payne Fund Study (PFS) “aimed at middle class mothers and religious groups” (p. vii). Foreman’s reading of the PFS data reflected anxieties about youth and media culture. Foreman opens his hyperbolically titled chapter “Movie-Made Criminals”—a play on the title of the publication—with statistics detailing an increase in burglaries and hold-ups alongside statistics showing an increase of available moving pictures between 1914 and 1922. He allows this correlation to imply causation. For example, in the following excerpt Foreman attempts to link juvenile crime with cinema:

When careful investigators find that seventeen percent of a group of 139 *delinquent boys* of fifteen or younger *indicate that movies have influenced*

them to do something wrong, the evidence is significant. It may be true that some overstate and that they like to blame their crime upon external influence. But after noting the care of the investigators in getting their material, I must conclude that, as part of a large picture, their data are substantially correct. Where there is so much smoke a certain amount of fire is inevitable. [emphasis added] (Foreman 1933, pp. 196-197)

Despite the fact that 23 boys' opinions are an insufficient statistic to dismiss an entire cultural industry, and despite several of the PFS scientist's arguments that "being so anti-movie ... the manuscript [does not] interpret the position of the investigators" (Jowett et al., 1996), Foreman's populist publication brought concerns about youth and media into public conversation. According to Jowett et al. (1996) the PFS is regarded as being partly, if not largely, "responsible for the U.S. branch of a worldwide movement in the 1930s that sought to provide schoolchildren with enough understanding to discount the glamour and 'false' attractiveness of the movies" (Jowett et al., 1996). And so, with Foreman's flawed and misinterpreted review of the PFS, the North American approach to media education was born. Considering this social atmosphere, educators attempting to approach media in their teaching understandably had to tread carefully.

The Harvard Educational Review (1930) devoted its second issue to the matter of "the educational application of machines" (Wood 1931, p. 49)². From this issue, one article in particular discusses film as a favorable medium for the classroom. Educator Ben Wood (1931) argues that all products of the machine age should not be denounced as evil, rather, as with all tools, using film is a question of intentions and practice. He suggests incorporating good films can make education timely: "Our teachers are living in the days of Henry Ford and are trying to prepare their pupils for the times of the

² And while much of the early conversations are phrased in line with contemporary Educational Technology discourses, the articles are not entirely pragmatic; many of the authors lean on moral and philosophical reasoning for whether media should or should not be used in the classroom.

village blacksmith” (Wood 1931, p. 49). Indeed by 1915, the first full feature silent films were commercially available in public picture houses, and cinema only gained more popularity when ‘talkies’ arrived on the scene in 1927 (Altman 1997; Wexman 2006). In less than thirty years since its wide availability, film had become a popular medium for the masses.

Despite the cinema’s popularity, many questioned the cultural value of film. In a subsequent issue of the *Harvard Educational Review*, Franklin J. Keller (1933) asks: “What could be more cultural than having the ability to reproduce cultural artifacts ad infinitum?” Keller’s excitement for the potential of cultural democracy through the reach of mass media is reminiscent of Walter Benjamin’s *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936). Benjamin suggests media such as film and photography are freed of an original, which then allows art and culture to flourish unchained from an “aura,” or the imposed worth of singular art pieces—access to which is only afforded by economic and social elites. Through the democratization of access, Benjamin’s approach hopes to re-conceive of film as a political medium.

Keller and Benjamin agree that society can be changed through media technologies and they delight in the possibilities of the future. And yet Keller (1933) adds a conservative addendum to the idea of media as democratic: “The humblest man must have enough money to purchase [cultural arts]; and he must have enough appreciation to enjoy them. The first condition can be met only by economic readjustment; the second by education” (pg. 149). Thus, in order for popular media culture to be democratically enjoyed, Keller believes that students must be properly educated in a specific “appreciation.”

To consider how to use film well, as a medium for education, Thomas Finegan (1931) outlines clear reservations about media as entertainment and influence. He believes educational films should include “basic features only, essential to fundamental knowledge,” a positive perspective on the subject, an “ethical viewpoint” so as not to shock students’ “sensitive nervous systems,” and that they should not use sound so that students come to understanding on their own volition (p. 53). Later in the same issue of the *Harvard Educational Review*, John Haeseler (1931) agrees with Finegan on film sound, suggesting that “words properly spoken by the human voice are more forceful than the printed word” and thereby are more effective to “charm” the students into learning (p. 63). And yet, whereas Haussler sees the “charms” of film as working *for* the educator, both pedagogues give significant agency to the medium of film while imagining students as passive, hypnotized subjects.

Despite Finegan’s (1931) insistence that educational films be strictly “basic” and “ethical,” he is also very much an advocate for film in the classroom. Citing a study by Eastman Kodak, he argues that when using a visual aid, students who watched educational film averaged higher test score than students who did not (Finegan, 1931). It is notable that Finegan was simultaneously listed in the article as an educator and employee of Eastman Kodak, adding an interesting conflict of interest to his citation.

Although these educators in the 1930s offer somewhat diverse responses about the place of multi-media in education, they share an underlying conceptualization of how media work: they see a direct effect of media messages on unsuspecting subjects. This early theory of how media works is best exemplified in a mathematical model articulated nearly twenty years later. Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver (1949)

developed a theory of how communication happens through media, where media are mere channels for transmitting messages from a sender to a receiver.

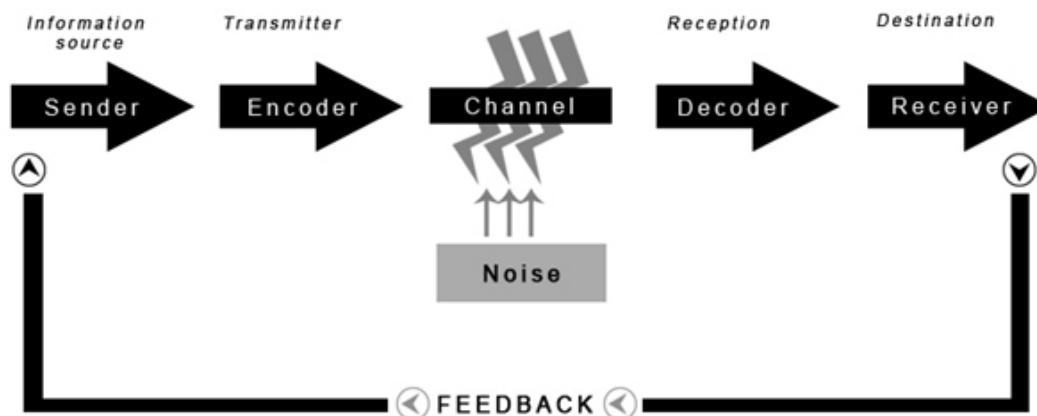


Figure 2. "Shannon-Weaver Model of Communication."

This concept of communication is linear, and assumes the only disruption between the message that the sender encodes and the message decoded by the receiver is the potential "noise" of the channel or medium: "Noise may be loud background noise that makes it difficult to hear, a heavy unfamiliar accent ... a misplaced paragraph in a newspaper, or the imperfect encoding into words of the idea that the encoder had in his mind" (Lorimer, Gasher & Skinner, 2008, p. 11). Any miscommunication is strictly the fault of the encoder or the infidelity of the medium itself. If the receiver offers the sender "feedback," it would merely be to confirm whether the message was received.

In this model and earlier, in the 1930s, the message "receiver" is conceived of as a passive pawn in the communication process. This conception of media messages as actively imposing on passive receivers is evident in Finegan's advocating for film's effectiveness (1931); in warnings of media's "charms" and "influence" and the risks to youth's perceived innocence (Haussler, 1931; Finegan, 1931); in arguments for media

“appreciation” as a way to weed out good and bad media messages (Keller, 1933); and in film’s criminalization of youth (Foreman, 1933).

The Revolution Will Be Televised: The Mid-Century Media in Literacy Education

By the 1950s, practices of studying multi-media in schools began to take shape in North America. This is not to say all educators were comfortable with media’s inclusion: the growth of the television industry introduced a new urgency to study TV’s effects on youth, akin to Foreman’s (1933) moral panic over film. Nonetheless, in this era media education begins to find a home in English departments and literacy studies.

In *The Harvard Educational Review*, educator Betty Levin (1950) passionately argues popular television programming will negatively influence youth. She proclaims popular television programs are unwholesome, affecting the mental and physical health of youth by encouraging laziness, threatening to take the place of the family, and possibly leading to a passive society (Levin, 1950). Levin’s article is written in response to the president of CBS Broadcasting’s Frank Stanton (1949) who believed television would encourage democracy by replacing the centralization of national politics. Levin responds that any democratic potential television could have would be compromised by its *commercial* nature: “business is good for business ... this is the first thing that a television executive must know” (Levin, 1950, p. 257). Overall, she sees television as crassly commercial and unwholesome, and encouraging a passive and lazy student. For these reasons, she believes TV is a cultural ailment education must work against.

Levin’s critiques of television are vaguely reminiscent of Henry James Foreman’s (1933) analysis of film in the PFS summary, with some key changes. Levin doesn’t go so far as to decry children as criminals like Foreman, but she does attribute the social

ills of laziness and passivity to television. Levin's concerns also add the then-timely concerns over commercial culture: whereas commercials had only begun permeating public life in the early twentieth century, by mid-century, advertising had become an industry. The 1950–60s marks a cultural upswing for Madison Avenue's advertising, dubbed the 'Creative Revolution,' where legendary ad man Bill Bernach announces, "Let us prove to the world that good taste, good art, good writing can be good selling" (Bernach 1949, cited in Bachelor & Coombs 2014, p.171). This is to say, Levin's new concern over television's commercialization was timely.

In *The Journal of Communication*, Richard Braddock (1956) tweaks Levin's discussion around democracy, and suggests that a democratic citizenship can only be achieved if students are taught "critical reception" for print and electronic media. Conceding television as crassly commercial, he believes education can step in to encourage students to critique. In using the term "critical" he is referring to cultivating students' tastes: "the lives of many young people might be enriched if they learned how to cultivate taste for quality magazine stories and artistic radio, television, and film dramas" (p. 56). Braddock's ideal media education equates being critical with being a critic and having good taste. In so doing, Braddock's sentiments reflect Fredrick Keller's (1933) call for film appreciation.

Like Braddock, William D. Boutwell (1958) believes that, rather than "kick[ing] out mass communication," media texts deserve the same chance in the classroom as literature, in order "to teach the coming generation how to be masters, not slaves, of mass media" (pp. 138-139). Publishing in an issue of *The English Journal*, he makes an enthusiastic case for English Departments as the perfect home for media education.

Boutwell claims the English teacher's understanding of genre, plot, and general rules of fiction could be applied to media. Attempting to contextualize and legitimize media for the classroom, he argues, "all the media of mass communication are lengthening shadows of the older arts" (p. 140).

Boutwell's call for media education reveals some shifts in thinking. He sees the opportunity for media to be more than mere tools for comprehension in the classroom, and instead believes that popular and high culture content should be taught in tandem. However, he still concedes that popular media may be manipulative. If students do not master them, Boutwell worries that media texts could control the minds of students. Thus, the inclusion of media in English classrooms remains rooted in an attempt to gain mastery over media by knowing them.

The academic journals of the 1960s increasingly entertained the possibilities of media education, including television. From a Canadian perspective, this shift was influenced by new conceptions of pedagogy. In *The English Quarterly*, published by the Canadian Council of Teachers of English, Douglas Barnes (1968) asserts that English was changing pedagogically and therefore canonically. The focus of teaching had shifted away from indoctrinating students with appreciation of texts, since this method assumed a hierarchy of class-based taste. He writes, "Culture seemed to be in the possession of a high-status group ... [defining] not only [students'] accents and dialect, but what books they read, and what they said about them" (p. 105). Barnes is fighting against the concept that culture is primarily in the hands of the bourgeoisie: "The outsider who wished to join the high-status group had to take over their 'culture'" (p.105). By shifting education away from merely *knowing* stories ("since all of these imply 'right

answers' and the need to 'know about'"), he believes language *skills* should be the foundation of English and language learning (p.106). This conception of class, texts, and education created more opportunity for validating popular media texts as important by de-centering canonical texts. Unlike Braddock who hoped to educate on media texts in order to cultivate *taste*, Barnes signals the possibility that media texts should be taught in the classroom if meaningful to the students.

Advocates for the inclusion of media in the mid-twentieth century also looked to teaching media as the solution to a perceived disconnection between adult teachers and their youthful students. The small-circulation journal *Educator's Guide to Media and Methods* (1966)³ ran from 1966–1969, and then became *Media and Methods* (1970–present). Visually it was a unique journal, pairing educator's articles with advertisements for educational technology, and graphic, colourful title pages reflective of a 1960's "hippie" style.

In a piece entitled *Three Thinkers for the Generation Gap*, Jeffery J. Shrank (1968) used Marshal McLuhan's (1964) concept of "the medium is the message" to explore a perceived culture gap between adults and youth in the 1960s. Shrank deduces that, since media technologies help shape the consciousness of users, adult and youth generations fundamentally differ in their cognitive processes. Specifically he argues that then-contemporary adults were raised in a print-based society, provoking linear-thinking, and producing private, individualistic, and emotionally detached individuals. In contrast, electronic-age youth must be fragmented, social, emotional, non-conformist, and "want involvement and participation instead of detachment and mere viewpoint" (Shrank, 1968, p. 14). Shrank's observations were meant to stimulate

³ Formerly the *School Paperback Journal* (1964-1966).

teachers to “get with the times” and explore media education as a means to solve his perceived crisis of a generation gap.

Likewise, Frank McLaughlin (1968) in the same issue of *Media And Methods* asserts that the “never-trust-anyone-over-30-syndrome” of the 1960s was apt. He believes a film like *The Graduate* and the music of Bob Dylan reflect “...the young person’s sense of absurdity when confronted with the adult’s world he’s asked to join” (p. 61). After suggesting that the adult is a “prisoner of his own perceptions,” McLaughlin insists that the idea of “teacher as authority” must be laid to rest “in its proper grave – the middle ages” (p. 62). Here McLaughlin is advocating for a complete shift in pedagogy distinct from Braddock (1956) just a few years before him: whereas Braddock advocates for teaching proper media appreciation, McLaughlin believes the teachers should relinquish their authoritarian role, and explore media alongside their students.

In contrast to the 1930s, the 1950–60s had different conceptual assumptions about the media communication process. Although these educators might not all agree about how to treat multi-media in formal education, they all consider the conditions of the message “receiver” as significant to the communication process. This understanding of media and society goes beyond the linear concept of the Shannon-Weaver model and begs far more complexity. This shift in assumptions about how media communicate is best theorized by Wilbur Schramm (1954) who replaced the transmission model of communication with the idea of viewing media communication as transactional. Here, the decoder is also thought of as an encoder, and vice-versa.

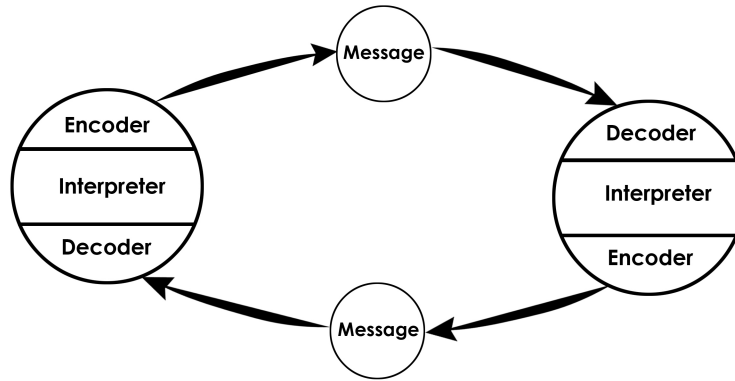


Figure 3. Wilbur Schramm model of communication.

Seeing the process as cyclical rather than linear, Schramm suggests that the initial encoders (the originators of the media messages) create a message so that decoders both interpret the messages and respond with messages of their own through words, symbols, and acts, indicating how the original messages affected them. As such the initial encoders are reliant on interpreting the responses of the decoders to interpret their own messages. Key to this process is Schramm's concept of "interpreter" or interpretive frames as part of the communication process, through which encoders and decoders make meaning. In direct response to the Shannon-Weaver model of communication, Schramm argues the fidelity of the message is not what matters to the decoder, rather the social and personal lens of the decoder affects how and what the decoder reads:

... the message is only one of at least four important elements that determine what response occurs. The other three are (a) the situation in which the communication is received and in which the response, if any, must occur; (b) the personality state of the receiver; and (c) his group relationships and standards. This is why it is so dangerous to try to predict exactly what will be the effect of any message except the simplest one in the simplest situation. (Schramm, 1954, p. 126)

In this quote Schramm offers insight into the "interpreter" element of the communication process: decoding happens in situ; each decoder is bringing a personal lens—their own

personality and personal history—to each decoding; and each decoder fits somewhere in a social order, and their relationships to others and society will affect how they interpret messages.

This additional level of the “interpreter,” and the concept of communication as being cyclical, offers far more agency to the person engaging with a media message than the Shannon-Weaver model. Following suit, in the era of the 1950s–60s educators were less concerned with media producing criminality or hypnotism in people. Instead, educators like Shrank (1968) and McLaughlin (1968) echoed Wood (1931) in suggesting media could make education timely, offering new ways for students to relate themselves to their education. And while Levin (1950) was concerned with the newfound growth of consumerism in media and its effect on youth, Braddock (1956) believed students could be taught to defend themselves through a guided critique, and Barnes (1968) hoped media could even democratize knowledge acquisition by bringing students’ everyday media messages into the realm of formal learning. In this second wave of thinking about media education, the assumption of students as active interpreters in the communication process was given far more due.

The Digital Contemporary: Media Literacy in a Spectrum of Literacies

In this closing section, I review the ways that the conversations in the early twentieth century and mid-century have extended to today. I offer a brief history of the struggle to make an official media literacy curriculum in Ontario. I also consider multiliteracies and multi-modality as new areas of scholarship running in tandem with developments in media literacy. In so doing, I hope to nest my approach to media literacy—Zoom Reading—in a dynamic contemporary, informed by an intricate past.

The Process of Establishing Media Literacy in Ontario's English Curriculum

In Ontario, media education was first and temporarily enacted from 1966 until 1971 as part of the English curriculum (Duncan, 1996; Hanmore, 2005). The first province or state in North America to make media curriculum mandatory, Ontario's first attempts at media education were coloured with diverse influences and methodologies. Tessa Hanmore (2005) notes this first wave of media education aligns closely with the "inoculist" approach of the 1930s (Hanmore, 2005) through which media education was viewed as a protective inoculation for children, to combat what was imagined to be the disease of mass and popular media. Education was imagined to protect the minds of youth. And yet, despite this serious reasoning for Media Literacy, in 1971 media education was cut from the curriculum in favor of returning to educational "basics": reading (literature), writing and math (Hanmore, 2005).

Simultaneous with Ontario educators' struggles to maintain Media Literacy, screen theory—developed in the pages of the prominent journals *Screen Education* (1960–1968) and *Screen* (1969–present)—was helping to establish approaches and methods for media education in Britain. In screen theory, educators began appropriating diverse theories of reading such as semiotics, psychoanalysis, Marxism and ideology, structuralism, and post-structuralism in order to deconstruct media texts (Buckingham, 2003). An example is Umberto Eco's (1979) "Can Television Teach" where he applies general semiotics and theories of encoding and decoding to daily television watching. He suggests that familiarizing children with structures of the television language, including how to read irony, sarcasm, musical cues, and erotic codes, will encourage

young viewers to be critical and empowered: “Don’t switch off television, switch on your critical freedom” (Eco, 1979). Screen also made its mark in Ontario: Canadian Association for Screen Education (CASE) sponsored the first large gathering of media teachers in 1969 at Toronto’s York University (Anderson, Duncan & Pungente, 1999, p. 141).

At this time, and simultaneous with screen theory, Len Masterman (1980, 1985) is widely recognized for applying complex cultural theories, like semiotics, ideology, and representation, to instructional guides for media education. Aiming to expose the political economy of media industries, Masterman hoped students could then objectively analyse media to reveal harmful socio-political and economic ideologies masked as “common sense.” Insofar as teachers’ “intellectual formations owed as much to the influence of popular culture, and particularly cinema, as it did to print-based culture” (Masterman, 1998), this new wave of media educators in Ontario and beyond, would “no longer discriminate against the media but discriminate within it” (Hanmore, 2005).

In this culture of devising more complex approaches to media education, the newly formed Association for Media Literacy (AML)—spearheaded by Barry Duncan, pioneer of Canadian media education—began grassroots promotion in Toronto to revive media texts as subjects in education. By the early 1980s, Ontario’s Ministry of Education took notice of the movement and worked with members of AML to “develop a resource book for educators” (Hanmore, 2005, p. 81) alongside official curriculum. In 1987, the release of *The Media Education Resource Guide* and the reinstatement of media in the curriculum in English “ma[de] Ontario the only educational jurisdiction in North America to have media literacy as a mandatory component of the curriculum”

(Duncan, 1996). Although media education—reconceived through the aim of “media literacy”—had become more nuanced and philosophically complex than its earlier iterations in the early and mid twentieth century, it still retained the discourse of media as being potentially harmful for students.

According to the “Rationale” section of *Media Literacy: Resource Guide/Intermediate and Senior Divisions* (1989), media education hoped to enable “teachers and students to challenge the great inequalities in knowledge and power that exist between those who manufacture information in their own interests and those who consume it innocently as news or entertainment” (p. 6). This document retains the sentiment of student innocence and passivity evident in the 1930s, and uses it as the rationale for student empowerment. In new terms, however, this was now called “demystification” (Buckingham, 2003, p.9). Media theorists Hoechsmann and Poyntz (2012) refer to this period of media education as “Media Literacy 1.0,” whereby dominant media education is “focused primarily on power and influence of broadcast media” and “a critique of *representation*” (p. 2-3). In conceiving of media as taking seriously the politics and hegemonies encoded in media texts, media educators sought to apply complex and often philosophically ideological approaches to reading and decoding. And yet, regardless of this serious framing, media studies are not always taken seriously.

In her thirty years of research and teaching with media educators in Toronto, educator Kari Delhi (2009) notes that teachers “suggested that beyond a ‘unit on advertising’ or ‘doing a poster,’ most of their elementary teacher colleagues ‘have no idea’ what to do with the media strand” in education (p. 66). Her study suggests that

educators and, by extension, students do not take media literacy seriously as an academic activity. For example, the optional stand-alone “Media Studies” course offered for students in Grade Twelve Ontario was conceived of in Delhi’s study as being “easy” and for “applied” (non-academic) students: “It is seen by some teachers, including those who spoke with us, as a ‘dumping ground’ for students viewed as ‘disruptive’ or ‘marginal’” (p. 63). She goes on to suggest any “serious” student may avoid Media Studies, “precisely because of its reputation as an ‘applied’ programme”; and “Students who are heading for university will instead take ‘Canadian literature or something specialized’” (p. 65). This contrast in tone—between the curriculum and Delhi’s findings as a researcher—is striking. It is my hope that media and education can meet in the middle: be taken seriously as a meaningful study, but not studied with such austere ferocity that Media Literacy cannot make room for students’ imaginative meanings.

Hoechsmann and Poyntz (2012) contrast “Media Literacy 1.0,” concerned with issues of representation in media texts, with “Media Literacy 2.0,” which responds to the fact that, since the 1980s, media have also become interactive. In a time when youth can create and interact meaningfully with media texts, they believe educators cannot focus on media reception exclusively. Media literacy 2.0 recognizes this shift by taking the concept of participation into account: “there are more opportunities for young people (and others) to express themselves through digital media, ‘to transform personal reactions’ to the images, sounds and narratives of consumer media culture into forms of ‘social interaction’” (Hoechsmann and Points, 2012, p. 3).

Furthermore, each medium has become more complex and confused through the digitalization of technologies: digital media are not fixed technologies, but contain the

capacities of multiple media types and texts. For one example, the twenty-first century Smartphone combines a telephone, VCR (an extension of film and television), radio, computer, book, and video game console. All of these once-singular media can be accessed on one pocket-sized device, commanded by the request of one finger swipe. In this landscape, the concept of multiliteracies makes a lot of sense.

Originated in 1994 by ten multi-national education theorists, later known as the New London Group, the concept of multiliteracies arose at a conference on “the state of literacy pedagogy”(New London Group, 1996, p. 62). The idea behind multiliteracies was prompted both by the multiple and ever-evolving types of texts and modes within those texts, and the global quality of media (Maher, 2011). Anstey and Bull’s (2006) definition of a multiliterate person is someone who “is flexible and strategic and can understand and use literacy and literate practices with a range of texts and technologies; in socially responsible ways; in a socially, culturally, and linguistically diverse world; and to fully participate in life as an active and informed citizen” (as cited in Bergheim et al., 2008, p. 87). Not only is this approach interested in various media, it seeks to break each text down to its components: linguistic, audio, spatial, gestural, visual, and multimodal (Ball 2006, p. 395). Thus, while considering individual elements of diverse media texts, multiliteracies is also interested in connecting the text with the social, and education with citizenship.

Multi-modal theorists believe the concept of ‘media literacy’ is not attuned to the individual components of a given text, and that educators need to avoid thinking about media as genres of technologies, and instead break down the specifics of each text: “We may speak of ‘media’ at the nominal level, while we may actually think of ‘medium’

in what we do” (Lehtonen & Herman, 2002, p. 117). This is to say, when reading a word-based or more graphically diverse text we should be attuned to all the modes of communication in the text rather than thinking about it as just another example of a static medium. For instance, reading “the internet” can involve drastically different modes depending on the page: a wikipedia.com entry may involve a single descriptive headline, paragraphs of text organized by headings and subheadings, punctuated by sporadic hyper-text links, featuring a few small images with brief captions embedded in the text, and a list of citations at the bottom of the page; whereas the homepage for nationalgeographic.com is presented as a scroll of images and streaming videos with brief titles and descriptions (each linking to a new pages with more like images/videos), icons showing how many times each image/video has been shared through social media, a central navigation bar located horizontally across the top of the page leading to thematically organized content, a side bar with latest and favorite images/videos, and organizational links to learn more about National Geographic located at the bottom of the page. While Wikipedia and National Geographic are both websites, they present and emphasize different modes of communication: the former primarily offers word-based texts, where the latter seeks to promote their image and video-based content. While these are the same medium, they offer uniquely different modes of delivery.

Aside from the term literacy, there are also those who believe media—digital and otherwise—are incompatible with the goals and strategies of the English curriculum. On the one hand, situated in English, Media Literacy appears to dethrone the “formal standard, monomodal” exploration of print literature to the realm of informal and open-ended media and discussions (Mills 2009, p. 105). Or, as previously noted, it seeks to

democratize the canon to the potential chagrin of English literature specialists. On the other hand, the traditional associations of literacy education—reading and writing about texts—may constrain the possibilities of “new forms of digital text” (Mills 2010, p. 250). As with all fields in education, Mills acknowledges, “English has always been contested and political” (Matthewman et al., 2004, p. 154). The inclusion of media in the English curriculum, along with new conceptions of texts, pedagogy, and society, is another in a long line of debates about the borders of inclusivity.

Although media education circulated in Ontario’s curricula beginning in the 1980s, between the years of 2005–2007 Media Literacy became mandatory in all English and Language Arts curriculum from kindergarten to grade twelve. As discussed in Chapter One, the four central strands of English and Language are “Oral Communication,” “Reading,” “Writing,” and “Media Literacy” and are imagined as “interdependent and complementary” with one another (*The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8: Language [Revised]*, 2006, p. 5). And, as discussed in Chapter One, Media Literacy has a particular emphasis on students “critically interpret[ing] the messages they receive through the various media and [using] these media to communicate their own ideas effectively as well” (p. 13). The language in the rationale for Media Literacy recalls the conceptual passivity of readers in the linear Shannon-Weaver model of communication from the 1930s: media messages are “received” (p. 13), and media “wield” “power and pervasive influence” (ibid). However, many of the prompts in the body of the Media Literacy curriculum offer more agency to the students as critical readers of media texts.

Media Literacy has four expectations of students: “Understanding Media Texts”; “Understanding Media Forms, Conventions, and Techniques”; “Creating Media Texts”;

and “Reflecting on Media Literacy Skills and Strategies” (pp. 147-149). In the first two expectations, teachers are encouraged to prompt students’ critical thinking. Interestingly, the use of the word media and the word critical increased in tandem in new iterations of Ontario’s curriculum. For instance, between the iterations of *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 11 and 12: English*⁴ curriculum published in 2000 and 2007, the use of the term ‘critical’ increases 82% in tandem with an 107% hike in the use of the term media.

	“Critical” & “Critically”	“Media”
<i>The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 11 and 12: English (2000)</i>	71 Uses	249 Uses
<i>The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 11 and 12: English [Revised] (2007)</i>	129 Uses	473 Uses

Table 1. Uses of the terms “Critical” and “Media” between Ontario curricula revisions

Granted, while these statistics may not confirm causality on their own, the correlation between media and critical thinking is made apparent through passages such as the one above. Which is to say, while “critical” reading existed in the curriculum before the involvement of media, the push for criticality increased with the inclusion of media.

Critical Literacy is defined in the glossary of both *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 11 and 12: English [Revised] (2007)* and *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8: Language [Revised] (2006)* which suggest that, “Critically literate students adopt a critical stance, asking what view of the world the text advances and whether they find this view acceptable” (*Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8: Language [Revised]*, 2006, p. 152). This critical project echoes Len Masterman’s (1980) project of demystification, with a focus on revealing “the constructed nature of media texts, and thereby to show

⁴ This careful inquiry into the uses of the term critical and media was completed before I switched my focus to *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8: Language [Revised] (2006)* in service of this project.

how media representation reinforced the ideologies of dominant groups in society” (Buckingham, 2003, p. 8). For instance, some prompts in “Understanding Media Texts” include “What kind of driver is this car advertisement designed to appeal to?” (*The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8: Language [Revised]*, 2006, p. 147) and “How are commercial and artistic interests reflected in the contents and presentation of this CD by your favorite group?” (p. 148). And the prompts in “Understanding Media Forms, Conventions, and Techniques” ask students to “identify the conventions and techniques used in a variety of media forms and explain how they help convey meaning and influence or engage the audience” (p. 148). Taken together, the goals of these two expectations of Media Literacy aim to cultivate more critical students, asking them to reflect on the commercial or artistic interests of the producers; consider the relationship between identity and the appeal of advertisements; and consider how modes within a media text combine to influence a particular reading. Again, what is missing here is an allowance of multi-media texts to help students develop a love of reading, as sites of exploration and imagination.

The inclusion of “Creating Media Texts” reflects a shift toward Henchman and Poyntz’s “Media Literacy 2.0” where students (and teachers!) are challenged to learn to use media technologies to create texts. This particular expectation seems to acknowledge that students are participating in creating media texts, whether through making images, films, or websites, or by customizing characters and building stories through interactive videogames. Overall the goal of this element of media literacy is to “produce a variety of media texts of some technical complexity for specific purposes and audiences, using appropriate forms, conventions, and techniques” (p. 149). As

previously discussed, Zoom Reading is not a media-writing practice per-se, though I believe the Selfie level asks students to consider themselves as active meaning-makers. Nonetheless, Zoom Reading does not have a direct relationship with multi-media production, though I believe it can pair well with pedagogies of production.

The final goal for the Ontario curriculum's Media Literacy is "Reflecting on Media Literacy Skills and Practices." This last prompt asks students be cognizant of the ways they learned about media texts. Specifically, it asks students to "identify what strategies they found most helpful in making sense of and creating media texts, and explain how these and other strategies can help them improve as media viewers/listeners/producers" (p. 149). This last aspect asks students think meta-cognitively about their "frameworks of knowledge" as Stuart Hall (1980) would say. Frankly, I believe it is too complex a task for students in grade eight and I am not convinced of the value it brings to their reading of the texts. In its place, by asking students to think about who they are and how the text speaks to them—the Selfie Zoom—I hope that my media practice can infuse the interactivity students come to expect with contemporary digital media.

Through Zoom Reading, I intend to balance politics and pleasure, text and self. Although a history of thinking about media education, as outlined in this chapter, may suggest a progressive evolution—from anxious educators to valiant media practitioners—this is not the case. These historical concerns about media still undergird educators' perspectives on media today, and are evident in the approaches I take to media pedagogy. In the following chapter, I detail the methodology for my research, which includes what media I included and how I organized Media Club to explore the possibilities for Zoom Reading.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY: HOW I IMPLEMENTED ZOOM READING

In the following chapter, I detail the methodological design of my qualitative study with which I set out to see how Zoom Reading plays out in practice. First I ground my methods in the philosophical paradigms of Cultural Studies and ethnography to signal the ways I am conceiving of culture, people, and qualitative methods in my research design. I also discuss ethical considerations for my project by looking at ethics as a moral consideration for research, and a formal contemporary institution. Next I outline the socio-geographic context of my study, including details about the town, the participants and their participation. As the title suggests, I also outline my research methods: how I organized Media Club, the setting through which I practiced Zoom Reading, and how I collected four different sources of data. At the conclusion of this chapter, I outline the thematic analysis as the approach to my data analysis.

Philosophy of Method: Inspired by Cultural Studies and Ethnography

First, the methodological approach to this qualitative study is informed by paradigms found in ethnography and cultural studies. Guba and Lincoln (1994) explain that a paradigm encompasses the broad “worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the ‘world’, the individual’s place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts” (as cited in Lundberg & Young, 2005, p. 47). Or, put simply, a paradigm indicates a researcher’s epistemological and ontological leanings, and it inevitably informs their methodology.

Cultural studies position the concept of culture as a living process, or something that is enacted by people. That is, a cultural studies paradigm understands social organizations, objects, and rituals (or, culture) as constantly being made, deconstructed, and re-made in a collaboration between people in and over time. Thus any media text or interaction with a student in this qualitative study is tinted by the understanding that any text or act is both presented and negotiated, bound by culturally situated meaning. Anne Gray (2002) suggests that, when cultural studies researchers approach qualitative studies, they need to consider how meanings made of texts both reflect the creator(s) and the reader: “The meanings, processes and artifacts of culture are produced, distributed and consumed within particular material circumstances. In other words, texts and practices are both products of and constitutive of the social world” (p. 12). This constant negotiation is also reflected in the process of reading multi-media texts in Hall’s “Encoding/Decoding”, and subsequently in Zoom Reading (see Chapter One).

In addition to the field of cultural studies, as a particular way to approach the concept of culture, my qualitative methodology is also influenced by ethnographic studies. Ethnography is a research method that seeks to understand culture by “producing knowledge from an intense, intersubjective engagement” (Clifford, 1983, p. 119). That “knowledge” typically takes the form of observations recorded through field notes or audio/video files, and subsequently narrated as a “representational text authored by the participant-observer” (p. 128). As previously mentioned, I understand data collection and analysis as an act of

both reading and constructing the study and participants. Michael Agar (1996) suggests to ethnographers, “You do not want to go into the field as a passive recorder of objective data. During fieldwork, you are surrounded by a multitude of noises and activities. As you choose what to attend to and how to interpret it, mental doors slam shut on the alternatives” (p. 98). Although research necessarily begins with a planned approach to an anticipated circumstance, it is experienced as a constellation of moments between researcher and subjects, and results in a narrative created by the researcher for a particular audience and purpose. Research studies should avoid “parochial, romantic and limited vision” narratives (Van Maanen, 1988) by both being open to change and relying on a keen self-reflexivity: “specify[ing] who writes, about whom, and from what positions of knowledge and power” (Jensen & Jankowski, 1991). This is to say, ethnographers must be aware of themselves as interpreters creating a particular version of a narrative, in a specific place, for a particular audience.

This is not to say I conducted an ethnography; the question at the center of this research—*how can teachers practice a critical and imaginative multi-media education?*—is not focused on a particular culture, but a particular approach for reading multi-media texts. Accordingly, my specific research methods—focus groups, interviews, and blog data collection—were not aimed at strictly understanding the culture of people who participated in my study, but how those participants read the texts. However, in that I understand culture as a necessary ground on and through which we have the ability to make meaning, I

am inspired by an ethnographic methodology to emphasize the importance a participants' culture brings to bear on a study.

By prioritizing a cultural framework in the process of collecting and re-telling of data, I hope my qualitative research project can produce specific insights that may assist a broader application of Zoom Reading as a media approach. While these approaches to qualitative research have offered me a framework for thinking about research with students in situ, it is also important to acknowledge this research as being affected by several ethical considerations.

Ethical Issues

There are three elements of the methodological design of this project that raise important ethical issues: 1) the research was conducted in a school; 2) I entered the school as an adult researcher to study youth's experiences; and, 3) I conducted the research at the school where I was once a student. As such, my research is troubled by an exaggerated tension of the 'insider/outsider' concept already present in any ethnographically informed studies. In this section I explore each of these ethical dilemmas.

Working in a School

As any Canadian qualitative researcher who has attempted such work in the last twenty years can attest, working in a school is no small feat. Research with students in a school has become something of a minefield of red tape. In this project, there were two major ethical filters I had to pass through before sitting down with the students. These were: applying to and passing a Human Participants Review Committee protocol at York University, which included four

different sets of forms, sample consent letters to parents and students; proof of passing the “Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans Course on Research Ethics” online tutorial; and applying to and passing the “Research Application” for the school board, which included a detailed form, sample consent letters to parents and students, and a twenty page document detailing my “Project Outline,” “Literature Review,” and “Methodology.” This process of ethics review began in late August of 2011 and was completed by January 2012.

Significantly, my application was only approved with specific contingencies, as outlined by the school board’s ethics committee. They asserted, “All materials shown to students had to be previewed by principal [at CSS]. Final report must be submitted. School identity must be kept confidential.” The latter two requirements did not affect my project in any significant way: I am pleased to share a condensed report of my findings, especially if it would be of any help to develop media education at the school or board; and I had already built confidentiality into my project, having previously worked with minors. It is the first requirement, that “all materials be previewed by the principal,” which profoundly affected the logistics and tone of my project. Requiring the principal to view all media texts before Media Club meetings was a challenge for scheduling and a challenge to the flexibility I intended for my project.

First, it was an issue to schedule a time suitable for the principal and me to connect and view the media. Cedarwood’s principal managed two adjacent public schools. And when at CSS, she was perpetually *doing her job*: engaged

with students and staff, running meetings, and attending to any emergencies that arose. Although she was kind and accommodating, I recognized this ethical request as a burden to her schedule and I attempted always to be respectful of her time.

Media Club viewed eight unique media texts of varying length and technological requirements. For example, *The Outsiders* (1983) required that the principal use time after work to view it, since it was two (edited) hours long. In another week, Media Club was scheduled to play a few different video games, but ultimately *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (2010) was the only game we were able to co-ordinate in our schedules so she could play it on the Xbox I brought with me to CSS. For the other video games I resorted to describing.

The second issue was coming to decide what was appropriate for Media Club. The ethics requirement signaled to me, as the researcher, that I did not have sound enough judgment to select appropriate media texts and that the media I might choose could be potentially harmful or inappropriate for children. In practice, I found myself persistently striving for an unspoken level of appropriateness without having guidelines or expectations stated by the ethics approval board or by the principal.

I practiced zealous (and anxious) media editing throughout the study just in case any text was not fully appropriate. I later learned that teachers at the school did not require my editing practices. For one example, before screening a clip of *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* for students, I edited out a 1.5 second image of CGI blood from a CGI ape. I later learned both classes watched the

movie in full and unedited the following week. These teachers were trusted to exercise their discretion with students, and they deemed the film suitable without edits. This ethical requirement informed my understanding of how students were viewed by governing bodies, as I explore in Chapter Six.

Working in a School as an Adult Researcher with Youth

Generally, working with youth is different from working with adult participants. Lahman (2008) notes that there is a dearth of ideas around “methodology on interviewing children,” despite (or perhaps because of) the anxiety youth and research seem to provoke (p. 72). Marilyn Lichtman (2010) argues that youth research participants may respond to a researcher’s prompts in two problematic ways. They may either “say what he or she perceives the researcher wants to hear,” or, on the contrary, “might give the shocking response” (p. 143). This compliance or rebellion is credited to the fact of youth’s becoming (which I will explore in greater detail in Chapter Five): adolescents are attempting to enter into adulthood as independent thinking subjects, “they also have mastered the art of impression management and, like adults, will tend to edit their answers” (Fine and Sandstorm 1988 as cited in Scott, 2008 p. 90). That is, whether they intend to conform to the researcher’s tacit and explicit expectations, or to revolt, youth are filtering their responses through the emotional and social discourses of becoming (and not yet being) adults.

This issue becomes more complex in a school setting. Schools are socializing institutions where rules, procedures, and penalties are engrained in youth by the time of adolescence. A student who may be sensitive to gaining the

approval of the researcher may avoid taking the time to provide careful and deep thought in the face of a difficult question. As Jaqueline Scott (2008) notes, “Children are often called on by adults to give answers even when they do not have the information and responses of ‘don’t know’ can be deemed as cheek, inattention or lack of cooperation” (p. 96). Particularly in a school setting, providing an answer for the sake of answering may be a knee-jerk reaction for youth participants, regardless of their more intimate interpretations. On the flip side, a student who is more focused on siding with the group’s interpretation may filter their responses accordingly: “A main drawback of school-based interviewing is that children of all ages are likely to be influenced by the proximity of classmates” (p. 92). That is, student may sacrifice a divergence from what they determine to be the norm for responses in favor of contributing to what they perceive to be a group mentality.

Ultimately, Scott asserts that “the rapport between interviewer and child are crucial” in qualitative studies with youth (p. 98). I found this the single most difficult part of my study: who was I to the students? As a researcher, I hoped to be viewed by the students as a confidant, with whom they were welcome to share their personal and interpersonal readings of the texts confidentially. And yet, I was an adult/educator in the classroom facilitating the conversations of the students, which also gave me the de facto role of being a teacher. In addition, my various roles during my time at CSS did not help clarify my purpose there.

First, I volunteered in the research participants’ classrooms in advance of my study in order to initiate a rapport with the students, and to overcome what

social scientists call the Hawthorne effect, which is the psychological effect of a study on the participants who may realize their role as guinea pig (Cohen et al. 2007, p.156). I also hoped to provoke interest in reading media together to procure volunteers for Media Club. During these volunteer sessions, I agreed to first sit in as an observer at the back of the class during students' lessons, and then volunteer to run a few multi-media based lessons related to the subjects the students were studying. After several correspondences with the two teachers, they decided I could best help by contributing a media-based element to their upcoming unit on "Cells." Contemporary elementary education in Ontario curriculum is interested in promoting an integrated approach to teaching and learning, which means that, although there are separate expectations for different disciplines and subjects (math, geography, language arts) each element is integrated into one thematic study unit. Thus, although the cells unit was a science-based study, it would also integrate the language arts requirement of media literacy.

The teachers gave me a list of topics they would be teaching and subsequently ask the students to complete assignments about, and from this list I drew two cell-themed topics: gene therapy and synthetic organs. After some initial research into the meanings and issues related to the topics, I created a list of potential media texts for the teachers. They responded to the list with enthusiasm, and suggested I lead the classes using the Zoom Reading method, thinking that students could also get a feel for how we might read multi-media texts in Media Club. After editing the volume and content of the media I selected,

appropriate to both the time restrictions and aforementioned “appropriateness” for the students, I led two classes on both January 12 and 13, 2012 for a total of four sessions.

As an example of the content in these introductory sessions before Media Club, to begin a discussion about gene therapy, I contrasted an online article and BBC clip of a news story about a man who was free of HIV after gene therapy, with a clip from the fictional film *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (2011). I read the story aloud, and played the clips for the students, prefaced by the request that they think about contrasting the two narratives. I then asked students questions based on the structure of Zoom Reading.

Zoom Level	Question Prompts: January 12, 2012
Close-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is a gene, and what is its function normally? • How does gene therapy work: 1) according to news media? 2) according to fictional media? • What happens to the people who receive gene therapy: 1) according to news media? 2) according to fictional media?
Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What sorts of special effects are used in the movies and news stories about gene therapy? Why use special effects? What are some differences between non-fiction and fiction CGI?
Panoramic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is at stake, for society, in gene therapy? (What is the risk/benefit?) • What potential concerns does the movie show? Does the news discuss?
Selfie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the emotional responses you have to each media? To the uses of special effects in each medium?

Table 2. An example of question prompts using Zoom Reading

These pre-Media Club volunteer sessions gave me insights into a few important things. For one, I gained first-hand experience of the differences in pedagogy between the two educators, as well as the expectations they had of the students. I also began to get an idea of who the students were, and

how/whether they engaged with material. From a practical standpoint, I was also able to practice presenting and engaging with adolescent students, as my last several years of teaching have focused on university-aged students. I was reminded when to encourage enthusiastic students, and when to remind students about boundaries of mutual respect; the latter, I have found, is rarely needed with adult students.

I can also acknowledge that the volunteer sessions were potentially at odds with my status as a researcher. In my research design, I intended to cultivate Media Club as an open and informal space for students to share their thoughts about media and media texts. By introducing myself in the capacity of a teacher, students may have then perceived me as aligned with the expectations and formalities of teaching. This anxiety was exacerbated later on, while Media Club was in full swing, and I agreed to help one of the two teachers by volunteering to do another guest-lecture. This session went awry.

This unit I volunteered for was the geographically informed “[International] People and Development Issues.” After some research and preparation, I found an award-winning online videogame appropriate to considering the complexities of international development. On the day that I was scheduled to volunteer between Media Club sessions, I learned the teachers were at a conference and a supply teacher would be there as the formal educator. However, in a mix-up, I ended up being the only adult in the room, and I improvised for an hour by leading the class in the videogame multiple times. After this volunteer session, the principal apologized for the misunderstanding: apparently the supply teacher

came to the door, saw me, and assumed I was the supply teacher. I was troubled that I had compromised my identity as receptive, confidential qualitative researcher by standing in as a teacher in control of the classroom. This difference is punctuated by the logistical goals and expectations of a teacher and a researcher: as a teacher, I have learning goals, would (eventually) require assignments, and would be obliged to record and share grades for students' work; as a researcher, I merely hoped for open and honest participation.

Conversely, I also struggled with my urges to jump into the students' conversations around the multi-media texts and guide their thinking, or teach. These urges became particularly poignant in instances when I found the students' comments potentially sexist or racist.

An instance of potential sexism was during the reading of a Japanese graphic novel (manga) *+Anima: Volume 1* (2002). The first question a student asked about the book was, "Is that a girl or a guy?" (March 7, 2012). In my field notes I noted that the student pointed at the large image of Husky—the character in question—projected on the SMARTBoard.



Figure 4. Image of Husky.

Like many teenage manga characters, he is slim and pre-pubescent. He has silver hair, purple eyes and wears pearl stud earrings. Furthermore, in the excerpt of the text we read, Husky is a mutant fish-boy, exploited by a circus master who dresses him as a feminine mermaid in the circus. All things considered, Husky represents a non-normative gender expression. So when the student asked, “Is that a girl or a guy?” I understood this as a way of evaluating Husky’s gender presentation rather than differentiating his sex. In response to this question, I immediately confirmed his gender:

Taunya:	His name is Husky.
M/Student:	Oh, Okay. Oh, well I don’t know, it could be a girl.
Taunya:	Yeah.
M/Student:	It looks like a girl.
Taunya:	Ah, well we’ll see as we go along. (March 7, 2012)

By answering the question with a confirmation of his pronoun, I concluded that the student's question was about success or failure of a normative gender performance, whereas perhaps the conversation might have evolved to discuss gender lines (if and where any exist). The fact of the student's reaction to Husky made me extremely anxious: I went home and re-read several theoretical articles about feminist teaching and teaching queer identities. I worried about how much I should re-direct their readings in light of my role as researcher. I decided to remain as hands-off as I could while maintaining a respectful environment, both for the participants' opinions and their own identities.

In Group Two the question of Husky came up again, although this time a student's prior knowledge of the series put her in a position to defend Husky's gender as male:

- F/Student: I thought he was a guy and then he turned into a princess.
F/Student: He's a merman, but they dress him up as a girl because people—
F/Student: But then the other guy [Cooro] likes him? I don't know.
F/Student: No, the guy was a girl and he's like, "Cool."
F/Student: Is that why he's like, "I'm not fine with you," because he's actually a guy and tells the other guy? I don't get it.
F/Student: They're both guys.
F/Student: But [Husky] wears earrings.
F/Student: He's a mermaid. Mermaids wear earrings.
F/Student: Further in the series, he's from a royal family sort of thing....
Taunya: Oh, oh, listen up guys. Go ahead.
F/Student: Further through the series, you find out that he's like—his parents are literally king and queen in another country. And the king has a whole bunch of his wives and kids and all this. And they wear earrings. And the guys just wear earrings but the girls go completely decked out in gowns and all that.
F/Student: It looks cool. (March 7, 2012)

Through her position of authority—as an avid reader of manga, and the participant who selected the text—one student jumped in to explain that a) Husky

was a merman; b) he and Cooro are both “guys”; c) his earrings are a symbol of his culture, where all aristocratic men wear earrings. The student used her knowledge of the series to base her claim of Husky’s sex and, in effect, put Husky’s gender to rest. This is to say, when I stepped back, another teacher stepped in: a knowledgeable student.

In another example of a difficult moment in Media Club, I wanted to inquire into students’ familiarity with Japanese culture and I arrived at a troubling, racist response. After responding a sarcastic, “Yeah sure,” to my query of whether or not anyone had been to Japan, I asked:

Taunya: Does anybody want to go to Japan?
F/Student: No.
F/Student: Oh, yeah.
F/Student: I think it would be creepy. Way too many people.
F/Student: Yeah, that’s the only thing. There’s so many people there that it’s like...
F/Student: I think it would be scary because it’s so crowded.
Taunya: Do you think so?
F/Student: No, I don’t think it’s like here because like I think a lot of people...
F/Student: A lot of people know how to fight there.
F/Student: Yeah.
Taunya: But don’t people know how to fight here?
F/Student: Well, not like them. They’re like quiet. They like, sneak up.
F/Student: They got monks and stuff.
Taunya: They have monks. They have a different religion—different religious practices like they have different reading practices. Okay I have another question. Who like, specifically about this story: who are the good guys and who are the bad guys? (March 21, 2012)

My question provoked students to respond with guesses and racist stereotypes of Japanese culture. For all intents and purposes I panicked, attempting to shut down the discussion. Faced with the troubling stereotype of the “sneaky Asian,” I attempted to connect a student’s claim that “They got monks” with a vague comment about cultural difference and a blunt attempt to move on with another

question. I believe this moment, and the previous moments with Husky's gender identity, are symptomatic of my anxiety about how much I would curb or inform students' readings, especially when they were troubling. In Chapter Six, I will return to the Japan moment as an exemplar for what I learned about media pedagogy.

Although working with youth subjects posed some methodological complexities, I believe these participants provide invaluable insights into media education. At thirteen and fourteen years of age, as the "seniors" at a Junior/Intermediate school, these students had developed a sophisticated media literacy and were able to draw on a broader history of familiar media texts. And yet these youth lacked the mobility of a driver's license, and the independence of adults; they would not travel outside their small town or take in new experiences without the filter of family members, guardians or educators. However, media texts may significantly inform their understandings of other uncharted geographies, cultures, and people. In the following sub-section, I think about the ethical challenges posed by returning to a school in the rural region where I grew up to study new media.

Inside/Outside

In thinking about a location for my study, I was drawn to a rural school for a few reasons. Academically speaking, there are very few qualitative studies done in rural Canada—particularly with media and technologies—and I see this work as speaking to a gap in educational research (for more on this, see Chapter Four). With regards to my personal history, I was raised and educated in a small

town and have first-hand knowledge of the strengths and struggles of a rural community. As I began my study, I felt that I could offer an informed perspective. And finally, logistically gaining access to a school for research is often aided by knowing someone in the community or at the school. For example, prior to my Masters' ethnographic research, I spent significant time approaching several school principals without much response until a colleague introduced me to a teacher at Rosenguild High School⁵ and my study was set in motion. With this experience in mind, I decided to return to my own rural school to focus my study in that I still had willing contacts and support there. I also felt that my native knowledge of the town and school could help me gain a deeper understanding of the students' experiences at Media Club. However this "native knowledge" of my research setting also complicates the already complex position of researcher as an insider/outsider.

Adler and Adler (1987) identify three "membership roles" of qualitative researchers engaged in observational methods: (a) peripheral member researchers, who do not participate in the core activities of group members; (b) active member researchers, who become involved with the central activities of the group without fully committing themselves to the members' values and goals; and (c) complete member researchers, who are already members of the group or who become fully affiliated during the course of the research (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p.55). Although the precise boundaries of these roles are debatable, they are useful for considering degrees of association with the culture and participants at the focus of the study. With regards to returning to my former town, to my

⁵ A pseudonym for a school in Toronto, Ontario (Tremblay 2008).

former school, I found myself teetering between the second and third membership roles.

In some ways, I was already a member of the group, or a ‘complete member’: I was familiar with the history of many of the students, since they were related to my former classmates or community members (I was working with their children or grandchildren); I already knew many of the staff members as former teachers and administrators, former classmates, or community members familiar to my family; and I was intimately acquainted with the school grounds, even to the extent that the room in which I ran my study was my former grade eight classroom. In fact, when I was devising the study, I anticipated it might take place there, and was pleased when the administration felt it was the best-suited classroom.

And yet, I was also not a complete member of the school and town. Despite visiting the town and community members over the years since moving to Toronto to pursue graduate school, I did not still live there. I was not an employee at the school. I was still a person from outside—a researcher from a university, from an urban center—and the foundation of my associations was historic, based in memory. In this way, I could also fit in the second of Adler and Adler’s categories: for as much as I was involved with, and saw myself as connected to, the culture of the school and the town, I did not entirely share the values and goals of my participants. I had a unique and foreign agenda and framework for thinking. My history and current circumstances now included time living out of town.

Despite advocating that a qualitative researcher inevitably must maintain a sense of “detached involvement” with the subject(s) of the study, Agar (1996) also concedes that “the ethnographer’s background is the initial framework against which similarities and differences in the studied group are assessed” (p. 93). This is to say, an ethnography is inherently personal: the ethnographer connects to and understands what they encounter through their own background and experience, and yet it is also a study of the experiences of others. Thus, the researcher finds herself at a crossroads: connecting and yet observing, engaging and analyzing. Maykut & Morehouse (1994) rightly point out “the qualitative researcher’s perspective is perhaps a paradoxical one: it is to be acutely tuned-in to the experiences and meaning systems of others and at the same time to be aware of how one’s own biases and preconceptions may be influencing what one is trying to understand” (as cited in Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p.55). Ethically, I found myself within this paradox in my research: at what point can I say this project was about the students at CSS, and at what point was this project about me as a former student turned researcher?

I am acknowledging these complexities to appreciate my lack of scientific objectivity, despite my dedication to qualitative research as a social science methodology. As Rose (1985) writes, “There is no neutrality. There is only greater or less awareness of one’s biases” (as cited in Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p.55). With Rose’s thinking guiding my status as researcher, I hope to offer the possibility of Zoom Reading as something generative for other educators

attempting to do media education through the lens of my experiences at Cedarwood Senior School.

Research context and participants

My study is located in Cedarwood, a historic town settled in the mid 1800s. At that time it was sustained by farming, mining, and lumbering. In the twenty-first century, the town population is less than 2000 people with a modest downtown core surrounded by farms and large-acre residential properties. The town's important social hubs include two Catholic churches, four protestant churches, two pubs, a grocery store, a busy hockey arena and curling club, a large private event center, and a public park situated on a lake.

According to a recent census, the majority of the population of the town's municipality is between the ages of forty-five and sixty-four, with a noted dip in the population of residents ages twenty to thirty-nine. This dip could be accounted for by the fact that the closest university is a few hours drive away. Although all students in secondary education must bus out of town for high school (Cedarwood does not have a high school), young adults often move away for higher education, and clearly not all return. The 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) shows that, once at school, students from the municipality of Cedarwood choose "practical" or job-oriented educative foci: thirty two percent take Architecture & Engineering; twenty percent pursue Health & Related Fields; fifteen percent explore Business & Administration; and eight percent study Education. *Combined*, only four percent of students study Visual & Performing Arts, Humanities, and Mathematics & Computer Sciences. Indeed, the common

question commonly I faced from community members – even while doing this study for my doctorate – was, “but what will you be afterwards?”

On the issue of race, the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) shows that less than one percent of the municipality’s population identifies as a visible minority, and five percent identify as Aboriginal (there is no band housing in the municipality). With regards to religion, seventy percent identifies as Christian (with Catholic and United churches dominant) and twenty-nine percent identify as non-religious. The 2011 Canadian census signals that ninety-eight percent of the population in the municipality speaks English at home (the remaining languages include French, Dutch, Polish and Italian) and 100% of the population speaks English at work. Cedarwood is an overwhelmingly Anglo-Saxon town.

The 2011 average valuation of a residential property in Cedarwood is around \$200 000 compared to the Ontario average of \$291 600,⁶ making the cost of living lower than the provincial average and reflective of a steady-state local economy. The main jobs in the area according to the NHS are Retail, Health Care, Manufacturing, Construction and Agriculture, though these are altered by gender lines: the majority of men in the municipality of Cedarwood work in Manufacturing, Construction, and Retail; the majority of women work in Retail, Health Care and Educational Services. In my experience, there is a common mentality in the town that once a “good job” has been obtained, the goal is to retire in it; there is little desire for lateral mobility.

In my twenty-five years of social experience in Cedarwood, I found the community to be close-knit. Its citizenry is interconnected, and even inter-related,

⁶ <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/140528/dq140528b-eng.htm>

thus socially supportive and neighbourly. It is a town in which a trip to get groceries would last over an hour due to “How’s your family?” inquiries with each person you meet. Nonetheless, social and employment opportunities can be influenced by nepotism and communal standing where the old adage “blood is thicker than water” holds weight. Where they can, families take care of their own, by parsing out pre-existing farmland to help others build a home, or by ensuring job security in a town where fluctuating employment can be an issue. Thus it is important to build strong familial or communal networks in Cedarwood.

As a Junior/Intermediate school, Cedarwood offers grades four to eight, with an average of two classes per grade. A mid-century building, the school is contained on a single level, includes a library and gymnasium, and is positioned on an expansive playground with an 800 meter track, multiple soccer fields, a tennis court, a baseball diamond, and woodland. Across the street is the feeder school for students in Kindergarten to grade three.

The staff and student body reflect the demographics of the town, save for religion: there is a Catholic elementary school nearby, so the majority of the students at CSS are from Protestant Christian or non-religious families. The majority of the students and staff are Caucasian. During my study, one of the teachers noted that I had one brown student in Media Club amongst white participants. I later learned, through private inquiry, the student in question had a South Asian parent and a Caucasian parent. Aside from this, there was no other visible or disclosed racial difference in Media Club. The students did not display extreme economic disparity through their appearance: overall the community of

CSS is casual in dress, and no visible “cliques” stood out through the students’ styling. Most students wore jeans, button-ups and t-shirts, or athletic wear, and most girls did not wear skirts or dresses. I noted that a minority of the girls in my study wore visible make-up.

With regards to the staff, there are a core group of educators at CSS who began and intend to end their careers at the school: for example, there remained the same administrative secretary who had been there when I was a student, and who greeted me by name upon seeing me fifteen years later (she even remembered my father without prompting, who brought me a forgotten item on one occasion). There are also cycles of (particularly young) educators, who work at CSS to gain experience before moving on to a more desirable position or are still planning around future career and/or family moves. The administrative, teaching, and custodial staffs have a genuinely warm camaraderie, and welcomed me universally. Early on, I found myself playing the casual but inquisitive “Who do you know?” game with some staff to connect and place each other within the network of the Cedarwood community. Throughout the study I enjoyed many informal discussions with several staff members about our own histories of teaching. Although I did some work for my study in the staff room between Media Club sessions, I also regularly engaged in the vibrant social sphere of the school; like at the grocery store, there were regular chats about our families and mutually known community members. This is to say that, I felt graciously welcomed back to the community during the course of my study.

Research Methods

The study generated four primary sources of data: 1) transcribed audio recordings of two Media Club focus groups that met three times a week for a total of eight weeks; 2) two types of field notes about Media Club, one taken in a book for a jot-notes used during Media Club meetings, and another in a field reflection book where I meditated on my impressions of the meetings; 3) an online blog where students were to submit comments for the opportunity to extend Media Club conversations, and 4) transcribed audio recordings of semi-structured interviews with nine select student participants at the conclusion of the Media Club study group. I will note upfront that the third source, the blog, did not produce a significant volume of data.

Media Club

The thrice-weekly Media Club meetings were conducted as semi-structured focus groups for five to eighteen volunteer participants in each group. Before Media Club began, students suggested a canon of media texts, on which I based the media curriculum (for more on how I chose texts, see below).

During Club meetings, I attempted to enact the role of participant-as-observer, which includes making clear my position as researcher while simultaneously leading, provoking, and interacting in discussions using the Zoom Reading framework. According to the literature, a participant-as-observer “may gain ‘insider knowledge’ but [also] may lack the necessary objectivity to observe reliably and with whom confidences and confidential data may not be shared” (Erikson, 2006, p. 457). That is, by revealing my intentions as a researcher, I

would not have necessarily been privy to confidential or intimate data, like a friend or insider may have, though I was also not aiming for any semblance of objectivity in the study. This method of focus groups has proven to be useful for youth as it “enables them to challenge each other ... using language that children themselves use” (Erickson, 2006, p. 433). By framing our meetings as a club, I attempted to encourage an informal environment—as a way to open the spaces for affective and reflective conversations—while functioning within the school space, which delineated some of the unspoken social boundaries and perhaps the rigor of our inquiry into the texts.

Overall, I approached the student participants with hopes of collaboration, or, with the aim of “studying side by side” (Erickson, 2006). Thus, rather than entering the field initially with a strict program of study, I desired to build a media study with the students using their preferred media texts, as a way to explore the images and issues they found pertinent to their lives. This research design is meant to allow for “observer and observed [to] exchange and share outsider/insider roles” (Erickson 2006, p. 439). By opening the selection of texts to the students, I hoped to provide the opportunity for each of us to be media experts.

One of the key decisions I made in Media Club was to withhold the explicit method and goals of Zoom Reading as an approach to multi-media texts. In that I was attempting to cultivate a club-like atmosphere, I was concerned that students’ awareness of my particular reading approach – Zoom Reading – might change the tone of our gatherings: from casual and friendly club to analytical school-like

study. While I see Zoom Reading as allowing for both pleasure and critique to build a complex analysis, I wanted to see the possibilities in a setting with students. My choice to withhold Zoom Reading was also symptomatic of how I imagined my role in that space: I chose to enter Media Club as a researcher gathering data about the students reactions to the text and my questions, rather than an educator, who wanted to teach the students particular things about the media (including the method of reading).

During Club meetings, data collection techniques included digital audio recording, intended for transcription, as well as written field notes. I made use of observational field notes in situ, comprised of fragmentary jottings of key words and moments, as well as logistical data, such as the number of participants and their genders, the types of media we screened, students who left early, and any interruptions to the program. Following the majority of Media Club meetings, I also composed separate in-depth field notes, detailing regular or irregular behaviors, any notable non-verbal communication, as well as preliminary reflections. The latter included significant issues for myself, the school or the students, any ethical tensions, and possible lines of further inquiry.

Blog

As a companion to Media Club meetings, I created a password protected Tumblr blog to allow us to take advantage of an extended, digital space and provide a “virtual forum” for potential, continued discussion (Hesse-Biber & Leavey, 2006). In designing the blog, I ensured students could post comments

under pseudonyms, while I retained the right to delete any inappropriate comments. Originally I wanted to include links to the media we screened in Media Club, so that students might refresh or repeat their readings, and anyone who missed any in-person Media Club meetings would have the opportunity to watch and comment online. However, in that I edited a fair bit of the media and did not have the rights to distribute it, I gave up on this function of the blog. Ultimately, the blog came to function as an itinerary: previewing what was coming, and offering a chance to anonymously discuss text we had watched. I updated the blog each week to alter the write-ups in accordance with our progress. I also used the blog to let students know how we would proceed if Media Club fell on a snow day (it did, twice).

At the onset, and throughout Media Club workshops, I shared the URL and password. Some of the students wrote it down, and students would recite to me the password when I asked the group. Ultimately, there were only two comments made to two different posts, both by the actual name of a female student (whether or not it was that student, I did not confirm). On the post “Week Two: What did you think?” I listed the media we had read—Jason Aldean and Justin Bieber’s music videos, and *Kinect Adventures!* (2010)—the student wrote “fun!” And on the “Welcome to Media Club” post, I explain: “Click on posts, add comments or catch up if you miss a meeting. If you have questions, click above or email me at: taunya_tremblay@***.” To this the student wrote “soup.” Despite my attempt at playfully replying, “Soup, eh?” there were no further posts. I spent

many nights considering deleting and revising my response, though I do not know if any other reply would have had better luck making the blog more popular.

Overall, the blog did not yield any significant data, though the lack of data is meaningful. Indeed, several students had mentioned that they had limited Internet access; limited both by parental and/or technological restrictions. It is also notable that I did not make the blog a priority (it was not required in order to participate), so there was not any particular incentive to join Media Club online. Also, although it was an anonymous site, the required password potentially reminded students that it was not a public site; despite my wanting it to be a social space, it was still protected and watched over by me. Regardless of how I read into the absence of participation on the blog, it did not necessarily help me triangulate my research data. In the future, to ensure the blog as a necessary part of Media Club, I would ask students to access the blog and vote for which texts we should read, or engage in some other participatory exercise. In that they were not required to visit and participate on the blog, I believe it was seen as tangential.

Interviews

At conclusion of the Media Club meetings, I conducted nine semi-structured interviews with student participants, all of whom remained anonymous by choosing pseudonyms, ranging from twenty to forty minutes. I selected participants in hopes of having a cross-sectional representation of the group (i.e. a mix of genders, a range of media interests and access, and a range of academic histories). In doing so, I was not hoping to make any general claims

about types of students; I hoped to collect richer details about students' experiences of media club from a range of participants. I also based participant selection on a few particular criteria: that they had attended media club at varying frequencies (some attended every workshop, some attended only a few); that they had varying vocal participation levels (some spoke frequently, some not at all); and that they had contributed in a way, or with a particular idea that I was interested in following up about. I followed an interview guide approach where "topics and issues are specified in advance in outline form [and the] interviewer decides sequence and working of questions in the course of the interview" (Erikson, 2006, p. 413). This type of interview is intended to grant flexibility to the interviewer, to clear up or extend the questions as the interview proceeds, allowing for unanticipated answers and allowing the respondent to express their beliefs more fully (Cohen et al., 2007). Like Media Club meetings, I recorded interview conversations using a digital audio recorder. Interviews were conducted in April 2012, after Media Club had completed its meetings, during lunch hours. I intended to use the interview data to supplement my findings in Media Club: to gain further or specific insight into issues important to these youth about media and media education, as well as into who they perceive themselves to be.

The Multi-Media Texts and the Logistics of Reading

One of the important elements of the Media Club design is that students chose the texts we read. To achieve this, I attached a Media Request page to the student and parental consent form so that students could suggest particular media texts and platforms we would engage with in Media Club (for example: see

Appendix A). Of the thirty-four completed consent forms, seventeen offered at least one media/text suggestion. After organizing the students' media requests to remove repeated titles and non-specific requests (such as “funny video on youtube” [sic]), twenty-two of those twenty eight texts requested fell within what was considered to be age-appropriate for twelve to thirteen year old students, according to external media rating systems such as ESRB (video games), MPAA (film), book genres (Young Adult) and The Canadian TV Classification System.⁷ I discuss the issue of the age appropriateness of media texts in greater detail, in Chapter Five.

Additionally, I also filtered my choices from their suggested texts based on time. For one, I had suggested to the principal that Media Club would only last around eight weeks, and would happen out of class during lunch hours. Lunch was actually broken into two forty-minute periods—at 10:55am and 1:15pm—and there were limited lunch periods available to Media Club due to various school sports and activities. Additionally, of the forty-five students in grade eight at Cedarwood Senior School, thirty-four of them volunteered for Media Club (thirty three initially, and another girl joined Media Club during week three): sixteen girls and eighteen boys. Since thirty-four students were too many to converse with at one time, I decided to split them into two groups. I wanted all of the students to read the same texts, so I would have one group meet to read a text, followed by the next. For instance, Group One would meet three times consecutively for Week One of Media Club in which we read *The Outsiders* (1983) in three

⁷ Many disagree with the methodologies and parameters of these rating systems. One such case explores the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) in acclaimed documentary *This Film is Not Yet Rated* (2005).

segments; the following week, Group Two would meet three times consecutively to read *The Outsiders* in three segments for their Week One. Some texts required more time—like the film *The Outsiders*, which was ninety-one minutes uncut—and others could be read in the matter of a few minutes.

Lastly I was interested cultivating a diverse group of texts. This meant choosing texts with a variety of media forms, and with diverse content. I also attempted to draw only one text from each student, so that more students' requests were included.

All things considered, I curated the following program: Week One focused entirely on the film *The Outsiders* (1983); Week Two included the music videos, “Baby” by Justin Bieber (2010), and “Dirt Road Anthem” by Jason Aldean (2011), and the videogames *Kinect Adventures!* (2010), and *Dance Central 2* (2011) for the Xbox Kinect; Week Three looked at the *Family Guy* episode “Let’s go to the hop” (2000), the chapter “The Black Angel and the Silver Princess” in the Japanese graphic novel *+Anima: Volume 1* (2002), and a collection of popular YouTube videos including “I’m Elmo and I know it” (2012), “The evolution of dance” (2006), and “David after dentist” (2009); Week Four focused two meetings on *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (2010) and a text-free wrap-up session where we reflected on Media Club. In the following, I will give a brief synopsis of the texts based on my own interpretation. I offer a more thorough analysis of some of the texts in Chapters Four, Five, and Six based on the general themes of place, age, and pedagogy respectively.

The film *The Outsiders* (1983) follows Pony Boy and Johnny, members of a rough gang of boys called “the greasers,” who become embattled with a rival gang and must flee to avoid Johnny being penalized for killing a rival in self-defence. When Johnny is injured while saving the lives of school children caught in a burning building, the two return to town only for Johnny to succumb to his burn wounds. The movie concludes with Pony Boy writing a memoir about the misadventures of the greasers.

Justin Bieber’s music video “Baby” (2010) narrates a meet-cute between Bieber and a girl at a bowling alley, where Bieber engages in a flirty dance-off along with a posse against the girl and her posse. In attendance, celebrity rappers Drake, Lil Twist, and Ludacris watch the dance-off with delight. At the end of the video, Bieber and the girl walk away from the bowling alley arm-in-arm, inferring that he has won the girl’s affections.

Jason Aldean’s (2011) “Dirt Road Anthem” video is shot in black and white and cycles between images of Aldean driving a truck to an empty field to sing, and youth driving to that same field for a tailgate party. That the youth at the tailgate party fade in and out of frame suggests Aldean is singing an anthem about the memories of his youth.

The videogame *Kinect Adventures!* (2010) offers a series of adventure-themed mini-games that challenge players to gain points and achieve the highest score. Players can complete each game individually or work together as a pair. For example, in the mini-game “River Rush” one or both players are standing in an inflated raft, careening over rapids. By leaning side-to-side to move the

direction of the raft or jumping (lifting the raft out of the water) the players collect coins, which are scattered across the rapids. At the end of the rapid course, their coin total is compared to previous plays to see how they did.

The videogame *Dance Central 2* (2011) allows up to two players to choose a contemporary pop song and dance either against the computer-generated character or another person playing. When each song begins, the players attempt to emulate the moves on the screen and the Kinect sensor reads their body movements to allocate points for each correct dance move. The player with the highest score wins the dance-off.

Family Guy (2000) is a cartoon about a dysfunctional family in Quahog, Rhode Island, and the episode “Let’s Go to the Hop” offers a parody around youth rebellion in high school. In this episode Peter, the patriarch, learns that his daughter Meg has brought home drugs; specifically, Meg has brought home a type of exotic toad that, when licked, results in a psychedelic trip. To save his daughter, Peter goes undercover as a cool student at her school to talk the kids out of taking drugs and ends up taking his daughter to the prom as the most popular boy in school.

The graphic novel *+Anima: Volume 1* (2002) is the first instalment of a ten-part series. In the chapter we read in Media Club, “The Black Angel and the Silver Princess,” we are introduced to Cooro, an orphan boy who can grow and retract black wings, and Husky, who can transform into a partial fish with a tail and gills. Cooro rescues Husky from a corrupt circus in which he is forced to dress up and work as a mermaid princess. The images are drawn in classic

Japanese anime style and, although translated to English, feature Japanese characters throughout the illustrations.

The YouTube video “I’m Elmo and I know it” (2012) is a user-made pastiche video, where clips of Elmo from the show *Sesame Street* are sewn together along with a parody of the LMFAO (2011) song “I’m sexy and I know it,” sung by the voice of Elmo. “The evolution of dance” (2006) is a video recording of “inspirational comedian” Judson Laipply presenting his comedic dance routine on a stage. “David after dentist” (2009) is a video recording of a seven-year-old boy who, after visiting the dentist, has a conversation with his father while under the influence of a waning anaesthetic.

In the videogame *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (2010) the player re-enacts battles in the Vietnam and Cold Wars through combat. In class, to encourage more participation, we played in the four-person training mode where players essentially play tag with weapons for an allotted timeframe. Each time a player is killed by an opposing player, the opponent receives a point and the deceased player is reset at a different point on the map. Play continues until time runs out, and the person or team with the most kills wins the round.

Overall, the worst attended media was *+Anima: Volume 1* (2002), while the best-attended media text was *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (2010). In Group One, the best-attended media was tied between the first screening of *The Outsiders* (1983) (which quickly dropped off), the music videos, and the first *Call Of Duty* meeting. In Group Two, the best-attended media text was *Kinect Adventures!* (2010).

Media Text	Group One: # of Attendants	Group Two: # of Attendants	Total Sum of Attendants
The Outsiders (Screening 1)	14	14	28
The Outsiders (Screening 2)	12	15	27
The Outsiders (Screening 3)	6	17	23
Music Videos	14	15	29
Kinect Adventures!	12	18	30
Dance Central 2	13	16	29
Family Guy	9	16	25
+Anima: Volume 1	5	9	14
Various Youtube Clips	5	13	18
Call of Duty (Screening 1)	14	17	31
Call of Duty (Screening 2)	11	14	25

Table 3. Students' attendance in Media Club according to text and group

I will also note the logistical details of how I set up to read the texts in Media Club, in that the set-up affected how the students interacted with the texts. For the majority of the texts I used the classroom's SMARTboard as a central screen. In the case of the film, television show, music videos, and YouTube videos, we shut the curtains and the door to conceal our viewing from extra light and noise, and drew informal rows of chairs around the Board in a semi circle⁸. In this stationary formation, students ate their lunches and snacks, balanced in their laps, while watching the week's texts. The video games required different orientations.

⁸ Initially we began sitting behind the classroom desks, but following an incident where one of my grade eight Media Club students vandalized the property within the desk of one of the grade seven students in that homeroom, it became my rule that desks were to be moved aside and returned before the following class.

The students required open space when we played Xbox Kinect's *Dance Central 2* (2011) and *Kinect Adventures!* (2010). To play, we pushed all desks and chairs to the edges of the classroom to ensure the two dance performers could easily be "read" by the Xbox sensor in front of the SMART Board⁹. We also played the video game *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (2010), a traditional controller-based first-person shooter game, on the Xbox 360 console. For the purposes of Media Club, we played in Offline Multiplayer mode, allowing up to four players in split-screen to play as teams of two. We set four chairs in front of the screen, the distance of the controller wire, and students rotated into the four seats from the audience chairs in the periphery.

For all video game engagements, I helped organize groups of players on a first-volunteer basis and attempted to offer everyone a turn. I found that, if I encouraged mixed-gender teams, students were generally more positive and generous with each other. Unfortunately I did not maintain statistics on the specifics of each mixed-gender team: game play typically lasted less than two minutes, and then another pairing would cycle in. Which is to say, it was fast-paced and the dozen or so pairings each game were spontaneous and sporadic. I merely offer the note about the mixed-gendered teams anecdotally, as something I learned in attempting to produce co-operative camaraderie.

I was also interested in encouraging students to play video games for the first time. For example, several of the students had not played Xbox Kinect

⁹ When we first began *Dance Central 2*, we had trouble getting the game going and positioning the floor space. For some reason, the Kinect sensor was not picking up my movements and would not allow us to begin selecting game options. In my field notes I explain that "one of the boys—who said he's really good at it—helped me set [the game] up, went first, and didn't mind when he accidentally played alone" (Feb 24, 2012).

games (as it requires an extra piece of equipment beyond the average Xbox games), and I was keen to schedule them into the rotation at their ready. In the case of *Call of Duty: Black Ops* I was cognizant of encouraging female players who had previously admitted that they avoided playing first-person shooter games, by suggesting that they play repeatedly in order to create gender-balanced teams.

Distinct from my experience setting up the electronic media, I struggled with how to use the graphic novel in a group setting. Beneficial for seating arrangements, the novel proved to be a notably unpopular Media Club workshop: only five and eight students showed up in each week, respectively. With Group One, my initial plan was to hand out the photocopied chapter from the graphic novel for the students to use, with a PDF copy on the SMARTBoard, which I could point to and read from. As with the film and television screenings, the students positioned their chairs around the Board. I read the book aloud while the students followed along with their handouts. However, after a few pages, all the participants of Group One abandoned reading their copies for watching the screen. At the conclusion of the reading, the students voiced their confusion over the text, citing the fact that it was laid out differently (right to left) and that the story was unclear, in their opinion. Unsatisfied with the way I presented the text to Group One, I altered the way we approached the graphic novel with Group Two in hopes that the second reading would be more successful.

For the manga reading with Group Two, I left the SMARTBoard off, gathered the eight participants in a circle facing one another, and handed out

photocopies to each participant. Despite some initial shyness, I confirmed readers for each character in the story to distribute the responsibility of reading aloud. In this format the reading was much more successful, with stops and starts allowing for participants to clarify curiosities in the moment of confusion. While I am not concluding with any certainty that the presentation of the graphic novel directly corresponds to the understanding of it, I am suspicious that the first approach I took did less to aid students' understanding.

Data Analysis

At the conclusion of data collection and transcription, I approached my data analysis through thematic analysis. Specifically, I was inspired by Catherine Kohler Riessman's (2008) approach to narratives through thematic analysis. Thematic analysis looks at data as narratives, which allows me to "focus on 'what' is said, rather than 'how' or 'to whom' and 'for what purpose'" (Riessman, 2008, p. 59). By analyzing particular themes of speech, I am able to consider that these narratives "have effects beyond their meanings for individual storytellers, creating possibilities for social identities" (Riessman, 2008, p. 54). That is, a thematic analysis is focused on the discourses and identities through which the participants make sense of the questions they're being asked.

She asserts that a previously articulated social theory, a pre-existing "unit of analysis," guides inquiry into the data (pg. 74-75). In my case, I was guided by the theory of Zoom Reading, through which multi-media texts could be read both critically and imaginatively, as a launching point for pleasure and evaluation. As such, I coded the data looking for thematic moments in responses to the texts,

where students critiqued and loved the texts based on a unifying thematic social discourse or identity. Riessman also contrasts narrative thematic analysis with grounded theory, arguing that thematic analysis is case-centered and is not intended to “generate inductively a set of stable concepts that can be used to theorize *across* cases” (p. 74). In my research I hope to show how these particular students, who were exposed to the Zoom Reading method as an approach to reading, offered their own unique imaginations and critiques. Their readings will not be the same readings made by other students, but can serve as examples of the types of conversation that can be generated.

In the following three chapters, I will offer two thematic analyses based on the data collected in and around Media Club. The first is based on the general thematic of setting, or the rural culture through which the students offered readings of the texts. The next is the theme of age, which relates both to the actual and perceived age of the students, the age-appropriateness or relevance of the media texts to the students, and the relationship between the two.

CHAPTER FOUR

PLACING MEDIA: BETWEEN COUNTRY FIELD AND GLOBAL VILLAGE

In this chapter I will consider the ways Zoom Reading allowed students to explore critical and imaginative meanings in the media texts, such that they were able to wrestle with their socio-geographic experiences through their readings. Here, I will discuss the ways students read their socio-geography through the diverse texts in Media Club.

The general location of my research study is ex-urban: a few hours' drive to any major city (with a population of 100 000 people or more) by car: even the closest mass transportation stop is twenty kilometres away from the town. This is to say, Cedarwood is not easily accessed by outside visitors; nor is it easy to travel to any major cities from Cedarwood. Geographically, and by extension culturally, Cedarwood feels distinct from a city: the tallest buildings are two stories high; the downtown has only two traffic lights; and the majority of the land surrounding the town is a mix of forestry and farming. As such, Cedarwood commonly comes with the label of being part of the country. Discourses around the country are used make sense of small town life, by people inside and out of rural places. Importantly for this project, Zoom Reading revealed how important and problematic country discourses were for the students of Media Club.

Throughout this discussion I refer to Cedarwood, a small town, by using the terms rural and country interchangeably; these two words have some distinctions. "Rural" (adjective) has been used since the 1400s and refers to "living in the country as opposed to a town or city; engaged in country

occupations; having the appearance or manners of a country person; lacking in elegance, refinement or education” (Oxford English Dictionary, accessed 2014). That is, the word rural denotes a geographic distance from highly structured societies (towns or cities), which then connotes a social distance from cities reflected in a rural person’s appearance, manners, and education. It is both a geographic marker and an evaluation of culture. To this Raymond Williams (1973) adds that the word “country” means “both a nation and a part of a ‘land’; The Country can be the whole society or its rural area” (p. 73). Williams adds two important connections for the word country: in relation to nation, where the Country is seen as fundamental to a nation’s identity (particularly its history); and the country as a particular land, which through a colonialist viewpoint is contrasted against the “civilization” of the city. In the case of the latter, it is arguable that the end of the suburbs marks the end of the logic of the city as civilisation. In his critique of a colonial view of civilization, Dwayne Donald (2009) surmises, “the historical prominence of the fort, and the colonial frontier logics that it teaches, traces a social and spatial geography that perpetuates the belief that Aboriginal peoples and Canadians inhabit separate realities” (p. 4). Likewise, the invisible borders between the urban and non-urban marks the difference between a civilized, colonial subject and the mythologized (Barthes, 1957) Other¹⁰. These connotations of rural and country in particular arose in my discussions with the students as they viewed media texts, sometimes prompted and most often unprompted.

¹⁰ In this case of this study, the “mythologized” subjects are predominantly Caucasian, rural inhabitants; non-native settlers who have become exoticized by virtue of their distance from “civilization.”

In this chapter I will analyze the way students discuss their socio-geography in two distinct ways: as “The Country,” or as a certain type of place inherent with the characteristics of nowhere-ness, memory, and safety; and “Country” as a culture, with certain types of people (“rednecks”) and associated with particular (re)presentations (specifically, not [Black] rappers). Finally, I will complicate these two idealizations by exploring how the media as Global Village (McLuhan, 1968) complicates any attempt to make clean divides between what is rural and what is outside it.

In preparing my curriculum for Media Club, I selected one explicitly Country text from their list of requests: Jason Aldean’s (2011) music video for “Dirt Road Anthem.” I also purposefully interspersed Media Club prompts with questions of setting. I would ask where the story took place, and how it might work differently if it were set in another place (*Close-up Zoom*); I also asked about the place of production (*Panoramic Zoom*); and if they would want to go to that place (*Selfie Zoom*). In doing so I was not interested in locating legitimate or authentic rural or Country experiences, but rather in assessing the many and often conflicting experiences of rural culture, both immediately lived by the students and mediated through media texts.

The specific texts I will discuss in this chapter are Jason Aldean’s (2011) music video, “Dirt Road Anthem,” Justin Bieber’s (2010) music video “Baby,” the film *The Outsiders* (1983), and the Japanese graphic novel (manga) *+Anima: Volume 1* (2002). Each of these texts inspired conversation about rurality in different ways.

Place, as a socio-geographical concept, has a tradition of being largely ignored by scholars across educational and general philosophical thinking.

Acknowledging educational theorists' avoidance of place and locatedness, Paulo Freire (1970)

attributes this indifference to a syndrome he calls 'mental bureaucratism' ... a compartmentalization of intellectual work from its material contexts, the ability to separate the mind from the body, or at least to dramatize this separation in the disjunction between one's scholarship and one's institution, community and region. (as cited in Powell, 2012, p. 193)

In recent years, education scholars have been exploring the possibilities of a place-based education (Theobald, 1991; Kinchlow & Pinar, 1991; Sobel, 2006) and the socio-political conception of regionalism (Powell, 2012; Hall & Stern, 2009) as an important vantage for locating and localizing thinking about schooling and culture. These scholarly conversations around place in media education are still underdeveloped, and yet, discussing place in Media Club was not only relevant but unavoidable. I hope the following chapter can add to considerations around our lived and mediated experiences of place. However, as an entryway to thinking about place as an abstract concept, I will lean on Michel Foucault's (1984) concept of *heterotopia* to guide my analysis of the ways the Media Club participants thought about their place in the world.

Place as a Heterotopia

Posthumously published, in his work "Of Other Spaces" Foucault (1984) offers a productive theory for thinking about a place as a paradox: as something both real and experienced, and imagined and depicted. Foucault is interested in a concept of place endowed with an incorrigible duplicity he calls "heterotopia."

Set apart from utopias, which are perfected fantasies analogous to the real world, Foucault designates a heterotopia as “a kind of both mystical and real contestation of the space in which we live” (1984, p. 353). Where a utopia is a fantasy place with no real location, a heterotopia is an actualized location in which other cultural sites and ideals are “simultaneously represented, contested and inverted” (p. 24). Very briefly, I will outline Foucault’s principles of heterotopology in order to propose The Country as a heterotopia, and to explore the students’ experiences of place as both lived and represented.

To function as heterotopia, according to Foucault, rural places should maintain multiple functions. Foucault writes that “...each heterotopia has a precise and well-defined function within society and the same heterotopia can, in accordance with the synchronicity of the culture in which it is located, have a different function” (p. 25). This is to say that the functions of a particular heterotopia can both shift over time, and also maintain multiple functions and readings simultaneously.

A review of recent film and television texts suggests rural places can be depicted in contrasting and yet interconnected ways. They are popularly depicted as places populated by people who are plagued by xenophobia, incest and sexual abuse, lack of formal education and cultural refinement, and entrenched in a dogmatic commitment to folk or religious practices. Some high-grossing and recent popular North American films and television series of this type of rural horror and dysfunction include *Deliverance* (1972), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1973), *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977), *Friday the 13th* (1980), *Children*

of the Corn (1984), *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991), *A Time to Kill* (1996), *Fargo* (1996), *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), *The Village* (2004), *No Country for Old Men* (2007), *Sons of Anarchy* (2008-Present), and *True Detective* (2014). In each of these texts, the countryside is not only a setting in which horrific and dysfunctional scenes play out, but The Country is implicitly or explicitly a *raison d'être* for horror and dysfunction.

And yet, media texts simultaneously depict the rural countryside as a rich landscape populated with salt-of-the-earth trades people. These rural people are supposedly strengthened by their commitments to family and community, informed by generational and socio-geographic wisdom, and can be unselfconsciously and unintentionally comedic in their genuine simplicity. Some of these romantic and comedic depictions of “good old Country folks” in recent popular North American film and television include *The Last Picture Show* (1971), *Paper Moon* (1973), *Coal Miner's Daughter* (1980), *The Trip to Bountiful* (1985), *City Slickers* (1991), *Forrest Gump* (1994), *Babe* (1995), *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000), *Trailer Park Boys* (2001-2008), *Walk the Line* (2005), *Corner Gas* (2004-2009), and *Little Mosque on the Prairie* (2007-2012).

These types of rural-centric texts are of course not diametrically opposed; they are interconnected in their relationship of being not-city, and can contain contrasting ideas that are called upon in the same text at different times. Both of these stereotypical rural representations played out in the students' responses and in my understandings of the media, and in the following two sections I explore how the students conceived of The Country (noun) as a landscape

depicted in media, and Country (adjective) as associated with their lifestyle and cultural experiences. In so doing, I will frequently draw on Foucault's (1984) heterotopia to make the case that The Country and Country are "both mystical and real contestation[s] of the space in which [they] live" (p. 353)

Country Field: The Country as "Nowhere," as Place of Memory, as Safe

During Media Club, the students referred to The Country as a noun, as rural place(s) set a distance from urban centers. However, the fact of it being geographically distant from urbanity was foundational to understanding the value of The Country. For example, in our discussion of the film *The Outsiders* (1983), the students identified it as being nowhere. The prompt for this discussion was a Close-up Zoom question about the setting of the text:

Taunya: So where does this part take place?

F/Student: In the country.

F/Student: In the country, in the middle of nowhere.

Taunya: And how is that different from their life in the city?

M/Student: Because there is nothing. Like there's less people and stuff.

F/Student: There's nothing around, not much, just the church. (February 16, 2012)

They characterize The Country by an absence of "people and stuff," as having "nothing around," and by it being "the middle of nowhere". Granted, this idea of The Country as being away from people is built into the plot at this moment in *The Outsiders*: two boys have just murdered a third in a gang fight gone too far, and they sneak into a railcar to escape to an abandoned rural church. Which is to say, The Country is outside of the law, and a safe haven for our protagonist outlaws. Moreover, the Country becomes the grounds for the protagonists' redemption: the rural church is suddenly on fire, and Pony Boy and Johnny come

to the rescue of school children who are suddenly (and mysteriously, I might add) trapped inside. The students of Media Club agreed that this moment was a turning point for their opinion of the boys (February 16, 2012).

Later, the students repeat their reading of *The Country* as being “nowhere.”

To compare two music videos, by Justin Bieber and Jason Aldean, I asked a

Close-up Zoom question about the details of the texts settings:

Taunya: What are the two different settings?

M/Student: One’s in the city, one’s in the country.

M/Student : [Bieber’s] looks like a bowling alley.

Taunya: City and country. How do you know the first one’s... How do you know that Bieber is in the city?

M/Student: Like just by the lights.

F/Student: Cause it’s like bright and it’s like bowling...

F/Student: You don’t find a bowling alley with all that here.

F/Student: All those lights and in the middle of nowhere! <laugh>

F/Student: You wouldn’t find that in the middle of a field. (March 6, 2012)

Again, the students identify *The Country* through an absence (of light) and a lack of significance: “the middle of nowhere” and “in the middle of a field”(March 6, 2012). And yet, the students are themselves geographically positioned in the exurban, speaking from and about *The Country* as students living “nowhere” significant.

Raymond Williams (1973) suggests that rural culture and people have been conceptualized in media and literature as lacking in relation to the possibilities and standards of the city. He explains it is no accident that “people have often said ‘the city’ when they meant capitalism or bureaucracy or centralized power, while *The Country*, as we have seen, has at times meant everything from independence to deprivation” (p. 291). This idea follows a colonial fantasy where natural or un(der)developed landscapes are seen as a

sort of tabula rasa, onto which Western “civilization” can be built, or where development is imagined to be lacking¹¹.

Williams (1973) diligently examines the depiction of rural space throughout the Western literary canon, and recounts that in poetry as far back as Hesiod (c. 700 BCE), rural spaces have been conceived of as time capsules where simpler and traditional cultural values are imagined to remain safe. Here, The Country acts as a safe haven for cultural history; as a place in which outmoded folk culture thrives, and as a place that exists in the past. Powell (2012) writes, “regional communities [as] Other Places, are held by both left and right to be entirely separate from the central political and ethical struggles of American culture, and hence neutralized” (p. 105). From this, a perceived lack of power (economic, social, political) associated with The Country propagates a romantic vision of it, and neuters the political potency of the exurban. In this way – in contrast to the city – the country is understood as nowhere significant.

The content of Jason Aldean’s (2011) “Dirt Road Anthem” functions as a tribute to The Country as a “good old place.” Lyrics such as “I sit back and think about them good old days/The way we were raised in our Southern ways,” and “Memory Lane up in the headlights/It’s got me reminiscing on them good times,” articulate Aldean’s ode to remembering The Country. Aside from the lyrics, the students perceptively read this theme through the filming of the video. Once again, I was asking them a series of Close-up questions, asking them to Zoom in on the details of the texts:

¹¹ Interestingly, as Miller (1993) suggests, schools are imagined as integral sites for rural “development”: “the school remained one of the only viable institutions in these economically declining communities. It served as a gathering place, a key recreational facility, and an employer” (cited in Barter 2008, p. 471).

Taunya: Okay, is there anything else that you can compare between these two [music] videos?

F/Student: <hesitant> One's black and white.

Taunya: No, that's awesome.

F/Student: Yeah, that was my idea.

F/Student: And one's like really bright and colourful.

Taunya: So what's the difference? Why would Jason Aldean do his video in black and white?

Student: 'Cause it's like...

F/Student: /'Cause he's old.

F/Student: 'Cause of memories. (March 6, 2012)

Indeed, Aldean is “old” in relation to the students. More importantly, this video is depicted as his memory. Filmed in black and white, the video begins with an establishing shot of Aldean driving a truck (a Dodge Ram, to be specific about the product-placement) over a bridge. For the first thirty seconds it is established he's driving into The Country: over a bridge, through a town, over train-tracks, and finally into an empty field. The narrative continues—inter-spliced with close-up and medium-frame shots of his singing in a tree-lined laneway—by Aldean looking into the empty field, and his memories fade-in, superimposed onto the field. His memory includes teens hopping the fence, parking in a circle around a fire pit, and having a tailgate party. This narrative is a poignant representation of The Country as a place outside of contemporary time and away from the populace.

Conceptualizing The Country as a break in not only geography but also time echoes Foucault's outline of a heterotopia. He links heterotopias to particular and unique slices of time: “The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men [sic] arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time” (p. 26). It is a space in part carved out by unique timeframes, rhythms, and

observances. In Aldean's video, he drives into The Country and into the place of his memories.

The students bought into the idea of The Country as "normal" and safe in comparison to non-Country places. For example, when I asked the students about which parts of *The Outsiders* (1983) were still relevant to youth today, two students identified cities as places of violence. This time, their thoughts were prompted by a Panoramic Zoom question asking them to consider the social moment of the text and compare it to our contemporary social moment:

Taunya: What about the gang wars?
M/Student: Yeah.
M/Student: Yes, still.
Taunya: You think they are still relevant?
F/Student: The bad persons.
F/Student: Ya! There was just one in [a nearby city] at [a school].
Taunya: Was there?
F/Student: Yes. There were like nine girls and they like, beat-up this one girl. [...]
M/Student: You don't really have to worry about being sliced up.
M/Student: Or shot.
F/Student: There's not really very many big gangs in like normal little towns around, this size of town. It's more in the bad parts of cities and stuff. (February 6, 2012)

The students position the danger of gangs as something outside of the Country sphere, outside of the "normal little towns." The students imagined The Country was outside the social ills of violence and aggression.

In contrast to this declaration, one of the students I interviewed, Timothy, recalled times when his brother and his brother's friend bullied and physically intimidated him. He described an incident at his home:

I was having fun on the lawnmower because my favourite thing to do is usually cut the grass because we have a mower, a driving one, and it's awesome. I was fooling around on it and [my brother's

friend/Timothy's classmate] has one of those powerful paint ball guns, those ones that have the [scope] on it. He has one of those.

When he was shooting it as I was on the mover. He shot it. He let my brother use it. My brother was shooting at the woodshed where I was and I thought I was getting shot at.

So then I ran over here, and then I said, "What are you doing?" Then I looked over and there was a big paint gun in his hand. I was like, I don't want to get hit by that. I pretended to go to the side of the [wood] pile, behind it so I didn't get hit. I pretended to pet my cat. (April 24, 2012).

He went on to describe all the guns his brother owns, and how he would never shoot at a person. While he came out of this incident without physical wounds, and the wounds he would have sustained would have been superficial, the fact of him relaying this anecdote when I asked if he sees any of his classmates outside of school suggests it was emotionally significant to him. Two months after a Media Club session when the students suggested they didn't have to worry about being shot at in "normal little towns," Timothy shared this story of being shot at by a classmate and his older brother.

More poignantly, a few years before my study, Cedarwood and surrounding communities were brought to national and international media attention when a man murdered and sexually assaulted multiple women while residing in the area¹². Although I am beholden to confidentiality, and I do not want to quote any publications around the incident for fear of revealing the identity of the town and school, I will note that Cedarwood's public figures went on public record bemoaning the loss of the town's innocence, its sense of safety and security. They feared that they would no longer feel safe or be safe. This

¹² For issues of confidentiality, I will not cite specific articles or reports around the details of the case. I believe citing the specifics will make it easy to find the town and the school, in the age of Google.

tragedy, and the students' awareness of it, was not broached in Media Club. However, it serves as a painful and glaring contradiction to the idea of The Country as a safe haven from violence. It also serves to complicate the narratives that the students (and public figures) attempted to share about their town: although the country is outside of the city limits, it is not outside of its social ills.

As a place, The Country was variously described, by the students and in the media, as being nowhere and being safe. These descriptions were prompted by my asking Close-up and Panoramic Zoom level questions, where the students relayed their understanding of the settings to their own socio-geographic imaginary. And, after contrasting their readings with the fact that they are indeed *somewhere*, and that they are not necessarily safe from all violence, it is clear that their readings are very similar to a heterotopia. Foucault (1985) insists that, on the one hand heterotopia

perform the task of creating a space of illusion that reveals how all of real space is more illusory, all the location within which life is fragmented. On the other, they have the function of forming another space, another real space, as perfect, meticulous and well arranged as ours is disordered, ill conceived and in a sketchy state. (p.356)

A heterotopia is both an illusion and a real space. And at the apex of this hybridity, The Country as heterotopia allows us—whoever and wherever we may be—a place of reflection: a reflection on the illusions we are always/already entrenched in through the discourses about our own location(s); and a place to reflect, and deflect, who we hope to be and wish not to be. In the following

section, I shift from examining The Country, as a place, to the culture of Country, as a people.

“We Do It Different ‘Round Here”: Country and Rednecks as Divergent

In addition to conceiving of The Country as a noun, the students referred to “Country” as an adjective, as a cultural practice, as an act of *being* Country. This culture often had a tenuous connection to The Country. For example, the students of Media Club gave Jason Aldean approval as being Country, despite the fact they did not know *where* he (had) lived. I asked a Panoramic Zoom question to extend their thinking about “Dirt Road Anthem” as a text locating Aldean as a social actor in the world:

Taunya: Now what about Jason Aldean? Do you guys know where he’s from?

[overtalking]

M/Student: From Nashville.

F/Student: The world. He’s from the world.

Taunya: Somebody say Nashville?

M/Student: Yeah.

M/Student: Where’d you say he’s from?

Taunya: Is he from Nashville?

M/Student: Yeah, United States, around Tennessee.

F/Student You can tell. (March 6, 2012)

Based on his association with Country, his music and presentation, the students guess he’s from in or around Nashville, Tennessee USA, known as “Music City” or the home of Country music. In actuality, he was born and raised in Macon, Georgia’s fourth-largest city with a population at nearly a million, spent summers with his father in Miami suburb Homestead, Florida, and was educated at the private (tuition-based) school, Windsor Academy. While Aldean does loosely originate from Tennessee, his upbringing in sub/urban settings and private

school education does not fit the stereotypical Country culture. On the other hand, Justin Bieber was born and raised in the rural town Stratford, Ontario. And yet, in a comparison, Jason Aldean was the one described as Country by the students.

To prompt this comparison, I asked a similar Panoramic question about Justin

Bieber:

M/Student: It's Cedarwood, Justin Bieber wouldn't come here.

F/Student: It's such a small town and he's like not here.

M/Student: He sucks.

Taunya: Does anybody know where Bieber is from?

F/Student: Yes, Stratford, Ontario.

Taunya: Is that a city or a town?

F/Student: It's a small town.

M/Student: A small town like Cedarwood.

Taunya: Why wouldn't he come here to a small town?

F/Student: Because he's too cool for a small town. He's too cool now; he hangs out with Ludacris.

...

Taunya: So Jason Aldean is coming to [perform in] Cedarwood?

M/Student: Yes.

F/Student: He's country. (February 22, 2012)

Based on multiple searches, I was not able to confirm that Jason Aldean had performed in Cedarwood, before or after our Media Club discussions. The important thing is that the students believed he would, *because* he was Country. As David Buckingham (1993) argues, cultures are necessarily informed “by material factors; and yet their *meanings* are actively constructed and negotiated, defined and redefined” (p. 268). This disassociation of Aldean’s place of origin—the fact that he was from urban and suburban settings and a privileged class—emphasizes that the students associated Country music with Country style through objects and appearances associated with the American cowboy and North American hunting traditions. In our discussion of the music videos,

students identified Aldean and Country broadly with “plaid shirts” (Feb 22, 2012) and “cowboy” hats: “Jason only wears a cowboy hat” (Ibid). It is important to note that, according to my observations, none of the students in Media Club were dressed according to Country as they described it. While some students wore the odd plaid button-up shirt, and denim was popular, the students acknowledged that no one wore Country markers such as cowboy boots or hats. I asked them a direct, Selfie Zoom question:

Taunya: Does anyone [here] wear cowboy hat?

F/Student: No.

Taunya: No one?

M/Student: My dad does.

M/Student: Like Crocodile Dundee when he goes to New York. (February 22, 2012).

This Selfie question offered an interesting deflection: although they were claiming they were Country people, none of them were wearing the traditional Country markers. In my field notes, I noted that students predominantly wore sporty or casual clothes: athletic wear, jeans or casual pants, t-shirts, hooded sweatshirts. To the question “Who here wears cowboy hats?” students looked to other people: one suggested his dad does; the other referenced a fictional Australian character, Crocodile Dundee, whose comedy was based on the fact that his outback-ways didn’t accord with New York City customs. In so doing, the student jokingly acknowledges a comedic gap between the iconography of Country and people who live rurally.

And yet, when I asked the students, “Who is Country [music] for?” multiple respondents offered the name of their own town. My question Zoomed out to the

Panoramic level to provoke students' thinking about the audience for Aldean's song:

Taunya: Who is country for? Like who is this [Jason Aldean] song for do you think?

M/Student: Country people.

M/Student: Country people!

M/Student: Cedarwood.

M/Student: Cedarwood.

M/Student: Cedarwood.

Taunya: Okay, what's a country person?

F/Student: Cedarwood.

M/Student: People that live in the country.

F/Student: Well, people in the city can still listen to country.

F/Student: Redneck. (Feb 22, 2012)

At first some students attempt to connect Country with "people that live" in a rural geography like Cedarwood. However, this distinction is quickly expanded by two interesting assertions: that people in cities *can* listen to Country music; and that "redneck" people are Country. The former acknowledges Country music can transcend place, in that it is a mobile product, and consumed regardless of location. Their latter comment connects Country to a contemporary cultural industry: Blue Collar Comedy. Specifically their follow-up comments narrowed in on two Blue Collar Comedians. In asking them to think about the social connotations of "redneck" I was asking them a Panoramic Zoom question:

Taunya: Redneck? All right. And what is it to be a Redneck? What does that even mean?

[students talk at once]

M/Student: What are some of those things from [radio station Country 120] that they used to say?

M/Student: Larry the Cable Guy.

F/Student: They use fishing line to use as dental floss.

Taunya: Is that how they're using fishing line? <laugh> (Feb 22, 2012)

The term “redneck” has had a varied history of use throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, believed to refer to a Caucasian person who works outdoors, thus having a perpetual sunburn on their neck (OED, 2014). Although it can be used synonymously with other derogatory terms, like yokel, rube, hillbilly, and hick, the word redneck has become a cultural phenomenon popularized in recent decades by comedian Jeff Foxworthy. His revitalization of the term redneck began with his debut, three times platinum comedy album *You Might Be A Redneck If...*(1993). The structure for the titular set “You might be a redneck if” follows the proposition with comical scenarios: “... your bicycle has a gun rack”; “... if you’ve ever clogged your vacuum with a small animal”; or “...you’ve ever run a business from a pay phone” (Foxworthy, 1993). The comedy of these scenarios lies in Country people’s (self-acknowledged) love for hunting, association with wildlife, and lack of money, and paints Country people essentially as lovable losers and fodder for comedy.

Foxworthy’s career, and the development of a Redneck brand, was further invigorated by his six-year “The Blue Collar Comedy Tour” (2000–2006), which spawned three films, a satellite radio station, and the career of fellow Redneck comedian Larry the Cable Guy. Larry, a persona adopted by Daniel Whitney, has also had commercial success, with three gold comedy albums, multiple films, and an ongoing special on the History channel “Only in America with Larry the Cable Guy” (2011–present). Both he and Foxworthy sell lines of branded products for the imagined Country person, including their albums, books, apparel, hunting

paraphernalia, lighters and knives.



Figure 5. Larry the Cable Guy's website.

Unlike Foxworthy, whose appearance doesn't overtly or stylistically read as Redneck, Larry the Cable Guy is known for his sleeveless plaid shirt, jeans, and camouflage baseball cap emblazoned with his catch-phrase "Git-R-Done." In addition to his aesthetic markers, Daniel Whitney adopted a southern accent as part of his Redneck persona: "The only reason I'm ever in character as Larry The Cable Guy is because that's what I'm hired to do. ... Sometimes there'll be an accent when I need to have an accent and be funny. Then other times, when I'm in a serious conversation, I'll drop the accent" (Murray, 2011). Whitney's adoption of a Country aesthetic, paired with a folksy accent reminiscent of the Southern USA, confirms that Country is not only a place and a culture, but can also be an object or product.

It is important to note that Country clichés are rarely written and mass distributed by people living in rural communities. William (1973) argues rural depictions are typically envisioned by urban outsiders: "It is what [pastoral] poems are: not country life, but social compliment; the familiar hyperboles of the

aristocracy and its attendants” (p. 33). The city is where knowledge and its mediation (poems, texts, images) are found(ed); it is where the rural is depicted.

In an interview with the AV Club, Whitney defends his intentional accent by suggesting he is merely replicating a familiar person; one who simply sounds *different*:

Some people say we're making fun of these types. Well, that's funny, because this is how I grew up. ... We do things differently. We say things differently. I've got friends that make great points and are smart as whips. I will put them up against anybody, intellectually. It's just that they go about saying things differently with their accent, which I find hilarious. (Murray, 2011)

In this moment, Whitney is signaling a possible association between enunciation and intelligence, or rurality and literacy: where a Southern or Country accent could be believed to connote a lack of education. Or as Douglas Reichert Powell suggests, “Hillbillies are an extension of the pre-discursive landscape that is their home” (Powell, 2012, p. 108). Just as The Country is envisioned as a tabula rasa, so too are Country inhabitants imagined as lacking civilized refinements and intelligences.

This difference suggested by Whitney is echoed in Jason Aldean's (2011) song, “Dirt Road Anthem,” and consequently by the students of Group Two. When asking the students a Close-up Zoom question about the text, their answer touched on this social idea of Country as different:

- Taunya: What's the Justin Aldean video about?
<students laugh>
Taunya: Is there a story?
F/Student: In Jason Aldean, it was like ...
M/Student: “We do it different around here” (March 6, 2012)

Whitney, Aldean and the students in Media Club acknowledge Country life by a sense of being different. In his conceptualization of heterotopias, Foucault (1985) asserts that they are those social spaces set aside for deviation, or spaces in which deviant individuals are placed (p. 25). While Foucault made much of his career describing particularly extreme heterotopias of deviation, such as hospitals and prisons, I argue The Country is a heterotopia. And as a place of divergence, Country becomes the fodder for comedy, as with Whitney's work, or the backdrop for memory and history, according to Aldean. In each expression, Country people and their landscape, The Country, are conceptualized as being different.

Theorist bell hooks (2009) suggests Country people, which in her example are the people living in the Kentucky Appalachians, do experience a different relationship to the larger society. She argues independence and autonomy are an integral part of the Country experience:

folks living in the [Appalachian] hills believed that freedom meant self-determination. One might live with less, live in a makeshift shack and yet feel empowered because the habits of being informing daily life were made according to one's own values and beliefs. In the hills individuals felt they had governance over their lives. They made their own rules. Away from the country, in the city, rules were made by unknown others and were imposed and enforced. (p. 8)

During the one-on-one interviews, students gave me a closer glimpse into their extra-curricular and home lives. Many of these students were involved in individual and independent pursuits in their free time: their outdoor activities varied from sports, such as soccer (Timothy), basketball (Jade), hockey (Allen), driving an All Terrain Vehicle (or ATV) and dirt biking (Travis), and bicycling

(Meg; Timothy); to leisure, like “shoot[ing] guns” (George) and “building stuff” (Travis); to chores, including cutting wood (George; Riley), “pick[ing] rocks” (Riley), and cutting the grass (Riley; Timothy). In particular, a few of these activities may differ from their urban counterparts, such as dirt biking (Off Road Vehicles), shooting guns and cutting wood. These particular activities would require a significant amount of space to operate; and each Ontario municipality is entrusted to regulate firearm usage and discharge¹³. And although these students are well within the age requirements to use ATVs¹⁴ and shoot firearms¹⁵, these activities are a testament to the types of activities a Country kid can be entrusted to be responsible for in their own backyard.

Four of these students had experience living in both community centers and remote locations with significant acreage. During our interviews, I asked them to offer a comparison of their experiences living closer and further from a populated area. Each of these students suggested that remote living offered more autonomy, though some saw this as independence and others as isolation:

Taunya: What is it like living where you live right now?

Travis: Well, you can do, like, a lot more stuff. Like, there’s a lot more trails you can ride on and like, there’s more back road you can ride your bike ... bicycles on. (April 23, 2012)

Meg: Well, in [the city] you’d stay inside more but [here] sometimes I can go outside and, like, ride my bike everywhere. And in [the city] you

¹³ http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_01m25_e.htm

¹⁴ Ontario regulation requires children be supervised under the age of twelve, and on private land, to use an ATV (http://www.gorideontario.com/en/atv/travel_tips/things_to_know)

¹⁵ In Ontario children must be at least twelve years to obtain a minor’s gun license, although “without a minor’s license, the minor may still use firearms of any class, providing they are under the direct and immediate supervision of someone who is licensed to possess that class of firearm” (<http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cfp-pcaf/fs-fd/minor-mineur-eng.htm>).

can't really ride your bike everywhere without your parents, sort of thing.

[...]

Taunya: Can you tell me a little bit more about the differences that you've experienced?

Meg: Well, you can't really ... friends hardly ever come over because they live kind of separate from you. So you can't really play video games together, or do stuff. And so you're kind of more separate and everything. (April 21, 2012)

Riley: In town, there's more things to. Out in the country, there's everything like four-wheeling [and] all that stuff, but in town you can't do that. But there's other things you can do, like hang out with friends more, because you live closer, and just like go walk around and stuff like that. So I don't know what I like better really. I like them both. (April 21, 2012)

Lexi: I think I'm a little bit more outside here than I was [living in town]. But just by a little bit because it's, I don't know, I like being outdoors but, yeah, it's just sometimes it gets boring. Cause I've seen it all now and I have nowhere else [new] to go so it's--

Taunya: Do you find that you get into [town] very often?

Lexi: No, I don't. (April 21, 2012)

While the students' preferences for location varied, their experiences of leisure time in the country were consistent; living in the country was both independent and isolating, with time spent alone doing outdoor activities. Living in a community was more social and supervised, with a mix between indoor and some outdoor activities. Indeed, the students' idea of Country experience as different follows bell hooks: they note the pleasure of independence, where youth are entrusted with relative autonomy. And yet, while students saw Country life as uniquely different from mainstream or city life, they were not approving of deviations from a Country norm or diverse expressions of identity within their sphere.

When trying to define Country, both Media Club groups were eager to identify clothing and objects that were *not* Country style. When asked a Close-up Zoom question to compare the aesthetic styles in the Bieber and Aldean music videos, the students of Group Two treated Country as self-explanatory against non-Country markers.

Taunya: They dress different? Okay how do they dress?
F/Student: One is like country and one's like...
F/Student: Hat backwards, gangster...skater shoes
F/Student: Skater shoes, pants on the ground.
F/Student: <laughing> Pants on the ground.
Taunya: You can't wear gangster shoes in the country?
M/Student: If you do...
F/Student: That looks weird.
M/Student: They'd get all dirty real fast.
F/Student: It looks awkward. It's like...
Taunya: Oh they'll dirty up fast?
F/Student: And they're like, "Oo my shoes, they're dirty!" (Mar 6, 2012)

The students identify a "gangster" style as being "weird" and "awkward" in a Country setting. Group One agreed, the people "with their pants on their knees, and hat turned sideways" and "rocking out the big headphones" (February 22, 2012) were comical when juxtaposed with the backdrop of the countryside. Not only is the fashion different (e.g. cowboy hats vs. swiveled baseball hats), but also it is unsustainable: dirt, inevitable in Country living, would tarnish any pristine gangster or skater shoe. This may be seen as both a reading of race, and a reading of class. Bieber, mentored by Black pop icon Usher, has adopted a hip-hop persona, including clothing and mannerisms.¹⁶ Against this display of upper-class hip-hop appropriation, the students position themselves as anti-gangster. This positioning also has racial implications, in that the term "gangster"

¹⁶ Bieber's influential stylist and former assistant to Usher, Ryan Good, was informally referred to as his "swagger coach": <http://hollywoodlife.com/2011/03/03/justin-bieber-stylist-swagger-coach-ryan-good/>

originated with Black rap music and racialized bodies. And while Bieber, a white man, has opted into the urban, rap aesthetic, these students see it as unfamiliar to their lived experience and therefore outside of the authentic rural experience.

As part of Foucault's (1985) concept of place, he writes that a heterotopia "presuppose[s] a system of opening and closing" where entry is simultaneously compulsory and may also require certain permissions and gestures (p. 26). In the opinion of these students, "gangster" kids are comical in The Country; their gestures and presentations are read as alien. Despite being a place imagined by Aldean and Larry the Cable guy as different, certain *types* of different can also be excluded—voluntarily or involuntarily—from a Country community by not being the right kind of different. The students both anticipate that Bieber wouldn't want to fit into The Country, and simply wouldn't fit because he isn't Country. In asking the students about Bieber's biography and hypothetical preferences, I am

Zooming out to the level of social Panorama:

Taunya: Why wouldn't he come here to a small town?

F/Student: Because he's too cool for a small town. He's too cool now; he hangs out with Ludacris.

M/Student: Because he's not from here. He's from Stratford.

Taunya: He's from Stratford. So he can't come to Cedarwood?

F/Student: He can, but he wouldn't.

M/Student: Like he's probably hanging out with like Sean Kingston.

M/Student: Like he's cool for us.

M/Student: Cause he's all like...

F/Student: Have you seen the way he walks?

M/Student: Yeah.

F/Student: It's so annoying; it's just like... it's so odd. (February 22, 2012)

Again, while Bieber is in fact from Stratford, a rural Ontario town much like

Cedarwood, he "wouldn't" fit in for two reasons: his presentation, or "the way he walks"; and his "too cool" status, by his potential association with celebrity Black

rappers like Ludacris and Sean Kingston. However, their mention of Ludacris is particularly interesting in that it should have complicated the students' allocation of Jason Aldean as Country. Ludacris, who performs a verse in Bieber's "Baby," functioned as proof that Bieber wasn't Country. At the same time, Jason Aldean has a version of "Dirt Road Anthem" featuring Ludacris. I noted this fact later on, drawing their attention to the social Panoramic through which the song functions, anticipating that it might be a surprise for the students:

Taunya: So the country guy, he sings with Ludacris on stage. Is that surprising?
M/Student: Yes, kind of.
F/Student: Kind of.
M/Student: Let's watch it again.
Taunya: I don't know if we have time.
M/Student: We can just do one.
F/Student: Can we please? (February 22, 2012).

The brief suggestion that students in Group One are "kind of" surprised by Aldean's association with Ludacris is quickly made irrelevant by their request to play the "Dirt Road Anthem" video again. Aldean retains his Country cachet. Furthermore, their mild surprise could have been for my benefit, as naive questioner. Group Two not only anticipated my question, but also knew of and enjoyed the Aldean/Ludacris duet:

Taunya: So Ludacris is in that first video with Justin Bieber, right?
Students: Yeah.
Taunya: Did you know that Ludacris does...
F/Student: A version with Jason Aldean?
Taunya: Jason Aldean concerts.
M/Student: Yeah.
F/Student: Mm-hm.
F/Student: There's a 'Dirt Road Anthem' I have with Ludacris in it. And it doesn't sound weird, like you'd think.
F/Student: When he sings it sounds like... If I didn't know that it was him...

F/Student: This country one [in Media Club], it sounded like it was country. But [the one with Ludacris] sounded like it was like a rap country.
F/Student: A rap version of country.
F/Student: That's what mine sounds like. It doesn't sound bad.
Taunya: Is that cool? Like do you like that?
F/Student: I like it. (February 22, 2012)

Unlike Bieber, whose gangster style is “weird” and whose association with Ludacris contributes to his being “too cool” for Country, Aldean’s pairing with Ludacris “doesn’t sound weird” and he ultimately retained his position as a valid Country singer. The students make exception for Aldean as a hybrid “rap country” artist, whereby his Country style is connected to an assumed, though tenuous, connection to The Country.

The students struggled to articulate particularly what it means to be Country. Although they wanted to echo Aldean and Whitney, who saw Country people as “doin’ it different,” these men are outside of the intimate rural experience, selling Country as a product. The students didn’t wear the Country iconography in school, but they were also wary of styles outside of their realm of experience, like “gangster” and “skater.” Interestingly the majority of their readings about what defines Country were drawn from Panoramic questions, Zoomed out to the social settings of the texts; they kept looking to the social world to delineate the borders of what counts as Country. However, in the age of globalization, their attempts proved close to impossible to create absolute boundaries.

Global Village, Rural Field: (The) Country as Connected, Disconnected

Foucault (1984) asserts that a heterotopia is a space of unnatural juxtaposition where elements from differing times and places are partnered *as if*

they were naturally compatible: “Heterotopia has the power of juxtaposing in a single real place different spaces and location that are incompatible with each other” (p. 354). The students of Media Club offered hints at several different ways of seeing the Country: as nowhere; as where they are; as a culture and style; as a time; as a place of divergence; as a safe place. The final and perhaps most important to their understanding of their socio-geography is that they’re part of the Global Village.

In an interview on the CBC, Marshall McLuhan announced that the electronic world was in a process of “re-tribalizing” as one village space: “the world is like a continually sounding tribal drum, where everyone gets the message, all the time” (YouTube, 2009). McLuhan’s concept of a connected global society has become a dominant way to understand contemporary media relations. The concept of the Global Village is animated by the students’ requests for Media Club. Most of the texts students requested were devoid of Country and rural imagery. Of the twenty-eight different media texts they chose, only four explicitly used rurality as central to their message: Jason Aldean’s (2011) song “Dirt Road Anthem”; Justin Moore’s (2011) song “If Heaven Wasn’t So Far Away”; the movie *The Village* (2005); and the Facebook game *FarmVille* (2009). The latter three texts I did not use in Media Club for logistical reasons, such as time constraints and technological accessibility. One of the most geographically foreign texts requested by students was a Japanese manga. However, for some students, the unique aesthetic of Japanese animation, or anime, was familiar from childhood:

Taunya: ... is this the first time you've seen [animated] guys who look like this?
F/Student: All the time.
M/Student: Well, when I was like younger.
F/Student: Yeah.
M/Student: And you watched some TV shows.
Taunya: Like what?
M/Student: Beyblade.
Taunya: What is that?
M/Student: Beyblade, like they had the same kind of ...
Taunya: I've never heard of that.
M/Student: Oh, it's... What it was is? It was these people, and they had their Beyblades, and then they like let them rip or whatever and then they...
M/Student: They battle. (March 7, 2012)

The concept of the Global Village becomes further significant when Country kids are accessing international content without necessarily being aware of it:

Taunya: Now what about – has anybody played a video game from Japan?
F/Student: Yes.
Taunya: Has anyone played Mario?
F/Student: Yeah.
Taunya: That's Japanese.
F/Student: Really?
F/Student: That's pretty scary.
F/Student: I have a Nintendo 64.
F/Student: So do I. (March 21, 2012)

The students were surprised to realize the idea of the global within their local context. With digital and broadband access, and the globalization of media industries, watching media can often result in what Henry Jenkins (2006) calls “pop cosmopolitanism” whereby through media we may dabble in international and exotic cultural artifacts (p. 156-158). Sitting in Cedarwood Ontario, we seamlessly juxtaposed texts made in, and diegetically set in, several distinct places: Justin Bieber’s (2010) “Baby” was written and produced in Atlanta, Georgia (New York Times Blog, 2010), and set at Universal CityWalk in

Hollywood, California (Rap-up.com, 2010); *The Outsiders* (1983) was based on the titular book by S. E. Hinton (1967) written and set in Tulsa, Oklahoma (Smith, 2005), and was filmed in several locations throughout Oklahoma (IMDB, n.d.); +*Anima: Volume 1* (2002), written by Natsumi Mukai and originally published by MediaWorks Inc. in Tokyo, Japan (adapted by Karen Ahlstrom for TOKYOPOP in Los Angeles California), is set in “an alternate-reality fantasy world” (AnimeNewsNetwork, n.d.). For many of these students, a pop cosmopolitan sampling of media texts is as close as they will physically get to foreign locations.

To go back to the student’s comment, “That’s pretty scary,” I feel it is important to note the undertones of a potentially racist reaction to the idea of a domesticated foreign medium. In the same discussion, after confirming the graphic novel was originally written and published in Japan, I asked the students about their interest in visiting the country, a Selfie-based question:

Taunya: Does anybody want to go to Japan?
F/Student: No.
F/Student: Oh yeah.
F/Student: I think it would be creepy, way too many people.
F/Student: Yeah, that’s the only thing. There’s so many people there that it’s like...
F/Student: I think it would be scary because it’s so crowded.
Taunya: You really think so? You think just like here, just some people...
F/Student: No, I don’t think it’s like here because like I think a lot of people...
F/Student: A lot of people know how to fight there.
F/Student: Yeah.
Taunya: But don’t people know how to fight here?
F/Student: Well, not like them. They’re like quiet. They like, sneak up. Sneaking up. (March 21, 2012)

While a minority of students responded with interest in visiting Japan, other students noted concern over the density population and assumed that “a lot of people know how to fight” sneakily in Japan. Intentional or not, this comment

signals a racist ignorance. This language reflects a long-standing stereotype in media images and mainstream (Caucasian) culture; Erica Chito Childs (2009) describes the way that images of “the sneaky Asian eunuch or devious ruler” come to frame “historical realities, the way history is told, as well as who and how contemporary stories are told” (p. 28). This is to say, no matter how innocent comments about sneaky Japanese “Others” may be, they carry the weight of a historical frame that has racialized and villainized Japanese people in North American images and discourses.

The majority of the students were geographically restricted, and relied almost entirely on multi-media texts to relay understandings about other people. Even locally they were geographically immobile: as minors, they did not have driver’s licenses and their families rarely travelled. Aside from one student noting that she was born in, and visits the UK every few years, an informal survey of where the students had travelled to resulted in driving-distance locations: Toronto, Ottawa, Quebec City (on a school trip), and a select few had been to Florida. Throughout Media Club meetings, many students acknowledged wanting to travel, and this desire was confirmed in my interviews: “The only thing I want to do is travel because I have never been anywhere in my life. I have only been here in my whole life. I travelled to—the only places I’ve travelled to is Toronto, Quebec and [local city] and those places” (Timothy, April 24, 2012). These students have had few lived experiences outside of their town, province, and country. As such, media becomes even more of a crucial vantage for access to international cultures and ideas: through the window of their screens, images and

ideas from across the world come into their purview. And yet, in many respects, their media access may also be limited.

Media access and resources in rural spaces continuously lag behind those of urban spaces. The students of media club mentioned uneven internet access at home: some students internet was faster or slower depending on what room they were in (March 7, 2012), some had dial-up (March 7, 2012), and some had no internet at all (March 21, 2012).

The logic of a capitalist market is at odds with the public good of equal access, in that rural areas have low population density and therefore weak “demand”: “Companies tend to focus their investments in urban areas where there are high income consumers and high residential densities to maximize profits” (LaRose et al., 2007, p. 360). Ricardo Ramirez (2001) opines, “The very areas that stand to gain the most from telecommunications are the last ones to be serviced by the market” (p.316). Indeed, one repercussion of a lack of rural media access is that people there are not imagined to play an active part in the sites of media production and creative industries. As aforementioned, representations of rural spaces and experiences are interpreted and represented from urban vantages. Another potential repercussion is that students’ access to diverse ideas and representations may also be compromised. While media education in school could offer these rural students an opportunity for much needed access to diverse media, often their use of media is limited. Media studies can allow students access to diverse media texts, and a method like

Zoom Reading can draw attention to the particularities of places, and understandings of locatedness.

Michael Corbett (2007) writes, “An important part of the identity configuration of the ‘educable child’ is that this child is not ‘stuck’ in place; rather she or he is active, calculating, mobile and focused on abstract and increasingly virtual spaces opened up by education” (p. 773). For these rural students, who are admittedly “stuck” in their immediate geographies, media texts offer an imperfect window to the larger global village and a distorted mirror for their own rural field of vision. And yet, however imperfect, place is an integral discussion in reading any text, literary and otherwise mediated.

Zoom Reading and Questions of Place

Joe Kinchloe & William Pinar (1991) draw from literary theory suggesting, “Place is the life force of fiction, serving as the crossroads of circumstance, the playing field on which drama evolves” (p. 4). Likewise a curriculum that does not provide the opportunity to explore place “serves to trivialize knowledge, fragmenting it into bits and pieces of memorizable waste while obscuring the political effects of such a process” (p. 5). Zoom Reading in Media Club allowed for varied and complex discussions around place: the geography, the culture, and interconnectedness to the rest of the world.

I prompted the students’ discussions about *The Country* as a unique geography by asking Close-up questions about the texts as well as some Panoramic and Selfie questions. In thinking through the specific settings of the texts, the students divulged ideas about their own setting. The students’ focus

shifted to Country as a culture with Panoramic questions, as they focused on the social ground through which the multi-media texts were produced and through which they make sense. Some Close-up and Selfie questions allowed for an intimate examination of the students' relationships to the idea of Country: they pointed to people in the world who were like them and not like them in order to try articulating their views of their own culture. Finally, Selfie questions that were focused on their personal histories and experiences in relation to the texts led students to think about the ways they are connected and disconnected from the world around them.

Currently, Ontario's Language curriculum seems torn about this relationship between learning and place. Part of the Media Literacy introduction in Ontario's revised Language curriculum states that in order to "develop their media literacy skills, students should have the opportunity to view, analyze and discuss a wide variety of media texts *and relate them to their own experiences*" [emphasis added] (Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8: Language [Revised], 2006, p. 5). However, the only time geography and place is considered in the curriculum is in relation to pioneer times, where students are asked to write a paragraph "explaining how physical geography and natural resources affected the development of early settler communities" (p. 71). Here the concept of geography is significant only before modernity, as something in Canada's past. However, it is clear through my experience in Media Club that place is a fundamental ground through which students read and make meaning of texts. Through Zoom Reading, they were able to imagine and problematize a complex vision of where they are,

and who they are. In the next chapter, I will use Zoom Reading to get a sense of *when* they are: or how their age affects the meanings they make through the texts.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE DESIRE FOR AND FEAR OF NEWNESS: ADOLESCENTS AND MEDIA

In this chapter I will consider the ways Zoom Reading allowed students in Media Club to explore critical and imaginative meanings in the media texts in order to grapple with their coming-of-age. I discuss how Media Club was framed with a certain anxiety around how to deal with the participants because of their age. However, Zoom Reading provided a framework where, through their readings, students considered their age—both actual and imagined—as fluid and complex.

In planning my qualitative research, I elected to study a young demographic to work through the possibilities for Zoom Reading. Specifically, I decided to work with intermediate students in grade eight, who were between the ages of twelve and thirteen. Although I had not previously worked with students of this age in a formal, educational setting (my history as an educator begins and ends in post-secondary settings), I believed this age would be the ideal demographic. For one, I believed they would be capable of engaging in focused and complex conversations about media due to their maturity level. I assumed that by age twelve they would have experienced a broad range of media (compared to primary or junior students). However, they were not yet completely autonomous students: in Ontario, grade eight is the final grade before entering high school, at which point students gain considerable independence. In grade eight at CSS, students are not allowed off school property without written consent from a guardian, and they are still a few years away from obtaining driver's licenses. Therefore I believed this age demographic would be an interesting mix

of mature and capable media scholars who were also not yet independent; I believed their worldviews would be primarily informed by family, their daily communities (through school, sports and socially), and media. These are the age-based expectations that served the design of Media Club.

Conducting the Media Club brought to the foreground the complexities of working with youth and media in contemporary education. As aforementioned (see Chapter Three), the ethics requirement that the CSS principal review each text before Media Club made me acutely aware that youth must only access certain, appropriate media in school. Thus the education system—the policy makers, administration, and educators—enforces a separation between youth and the world by significantly restricting their media access. I believe this is a major tension in media education for two reasons: 1) youth are already part of the media-saturated world; 2) youth relate to and want to engage with the world, which includes relating to media.

In this chapter, as I move to more complex analysis of my findings, I begin by exploring the broad relationship between youth and media and consider the taxonomy of adolescence as key to understanding the demographic of students in Media Club. Drawing upon the work of Nancy Lesko (2001) and Michel Foucault (1975, 1976), I explore adolescence as a socially constructed category. Next, I consider the ways in which adolescence as a discourse played out in Media Club: in the way education constructs an idea of adolescents, and in the way adolescents attempted to construct themselves in response to media texts viewed there. To explore this, I outline my struggles within the school and with

students when attempting to use contemporary and relevant media in Media Club. Finally, I conclude with the challenge and importance of allowing productive and risky conversations about youth using Zoom Reading.

In analyzing the concepts of adolescence and newness in media using Zoom Reading, I will zero-in on some particular texts we read in Media Club. Of particular interest are Jason Aldean's (2011) music video for "Dirt Road Anthem," Justin Bieber's (2010) music video for "Baby," the *Family Guy* (2000) episode "Let's Go to the Hop," the video game *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (2010), and the video game *Dance Central 2* (2011). At different points in each of these texts, Media Club yielded interesting data about the way youth were conceived of and conceived of themselves—as objects of potential media harm, and as subjects who desired particular media. First, however, there is the matter of the context: the regulations on Media Club and the social environment of contemporary schooling that framed my understanding of how the students experience their age in the classroom.

Creating "Youth": The Problem of Adolescence/Adolescents as a Problem

"Youth" exists as an idea that is independent of the experiences and identities of young people who embody the category of the "adolescent." Nancy Lesko's (2001) work on adolescence explores the way in which adolescence is constructed as a "natural" category. She writes that, when considering adolescence, "age [becomes] a shorthand, a code that evokes what amounts to an 'epidemic of signification'" (p.4). She argues that adolescence is a discursive tool that is evoked for a variety of purposes including as a tool for health and/or

body diagnosis, as a way of organizing bodies in schools, as an orientation to law and legal issues, and as a way of understanding and explaining social and behavioral attributes of young adults.

In *The History of Sexuality: Volume One*, Michael Foucault (1976) outlines “biopower,” or power over/through bodies; a power practiced through discourses (such as discourses around adolescence) that is conceived of as a “normal” part of life by society. This is to say, each of us enforces the rules of biopower through our everyday practices and speech acts: in the home, in places of work, and across social organizations. Specifically, educational practices exemplify the type of control over bodies that Foucault describes in biopower.

Schools are institutions where both students and educators are policed and cultivated. In *Discipline and Punish* (1975) Foucault concedes that biopower was “at work in secondary education at a very early date, later in primary schools” (p. 138). Therefore, schools are sites that produce and reproduce power over material and social bodies. For example, Foucault describes the way in which students’ bodies are corralled and manipulated by the shape and physical layout of school buildings and classrooms, such as the division between educator and students’ spaces and the daily timetables that regulate the ways in which bodies move in schools. Borrowing from Foucault, Lesko (2001) argues there is power in dissecting the ebbs and flows of youths’ social compliance: “I suggest that a dominant aspect of the discourse on adolescence is its location [...] within a time framework that compels us to attend to progress, precocity, arrest, or decline” (p. 113). Here she is arguing that by virtue of existing at a certain time in their

human development, adolescents are seen by society as fair game to persistently investigate and measure. Foucault (1975) posits that this manipulation of the student body is “not only so that they may do what one wishes, but with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, docile bodies” (p. 138). That is, schools assist in promoting compliant, malleable youth. Schools educate kids into understanding their place in time and in society.

Despite being nearly adult, adolescence is a demographic silenced by the subject of adult reminiscences and conversely made the object of social constraints:

‘Coming of age’ makes adolescence into a powerful and uncontrollable force, like the arrival of spring that swells tree buds... These terms appear to give adolescence importance but really confer greater authority to *the author* of the homily [emphasis added]. Scientists and educators who proclaim the potentials and problems of the not-yet-of-age are positionally superior. (Lesko, 2001, p. 3)

Adolescence is a demographic that is envisioned as adults-in-becoming, which secures them as not yet enough—not old, knowledgeable, or capable enough to function independently in society. Further, this reinforces the illusion that “adults” are completed humans, no longer learning or maturing. Adolescents’ actions and opinions are used as exemplary proof for the potential, or downfall, of the future of society. Lesko writes, “For example, moral panics around youth regularly call up a sense of ‘past future’—that the future will be diminished, dragged down by teenagers’ failures to act in civilized or responsible ways” (p. 110). And making youth responsible for the future takes the onus off of the current generation of

decision-making adults who actively shape the social, political, and environmental conditions of the future those youth will take up. Adolescents are both hyper-scrutinized as being too much and written off as not being enough.

At the center of the anxiety around adolescence is the fact of natality, or, as Hanna Arendt (1958) puts it, “The fact that we have all come into the world by being born and that this world is constantly renewed by birth” (p. 193). What is at odds in natality is that the world is based on the enduring collision of the new and old: new humans both threaten the traditions of a pre-existing “old world,” and are relied upon to save and continue those traditions (by virtue of new human beings’ relative ability to live longer than current human beings).

Education has become the concern of politics in America, claims Arendt, where curricula and policies are debated and decided in political arenas, with the implicit/explicit goal of the “Americanization of the immigrants’ children” (p. 172). As a tool of socialization, American youth are educated about and through an “extraordinary enthusiasm for what is new” (p. 173). And along with this “pathos of the new” (p. 173), Arendt suggests that youth become unduly autonomous. They have come to prematurely receive the respect of adults (and educators) as individuals already made, rather than becoming, with their own ethos, desires, and societies. By imagining that there is a “world of children,” progressive education caters to the whims and interests of youth and abandons attempts to cultivate youths’ understanding of history. More importantly, a wall is imagined that divides youth and adults, where youth are disbarred from engaging in or understanding the actual world, or the world of adults, as if it were alien and

dangerous to them. Arendt's argument against a "world of children" is particularly poignant in light of Lesko and Foucault, who note that there is power in conceiving of youth and adolescents as different from adults: by imagining that they are unique and Other bodies, it becomes easier to justify the physical and psychological scrutiny that adults apply to youth, which makes them subsequently easier to control and manipulate.

This practice of infantilizing youth through imagining a "world of children" has been threatened by the omnipresence of media texts in society. Whereas, prior to the mobile age, youth may have had to share time using a singular medium, such as a television or family computer, contemporary digital technologies offer a convergence of media types (television, film, video games, internet browsing) in one mobile device (smart-phone, tablet). In the twenty-first century there are longer dedicated media times and media places: media access has become a fluid extension of our everyday moments. As such, youths' media access has become more difficult to monitor.

In contrast, I became aware through the process of this project that the students' online access was heavily curtailed at school. During our Media Club wrap-up session, the students expressed that they should be granted broader access to materials, including access to media online. I asked them a Selfie question to assess their thoughts about media studies in schools:

Taunya: How could Media in school be better, like as part of classrooms?
Student: Some of the stuff, they don't let us like watch. Because in the computer lab then, we can't get on YouTube or we couldn't get on YouTube.
Student: We—the firewall's down, so—
Student: We can get on it.

Taunya: That's good. Do you use it? Like is it useful?
Student: Actually, I found it.
Student: Yeah, and then me and Jorah figured out that Facebook worked.
Student: You can do that, but you'll get in trouble (Mar 28, 2012).

Students' access to social media—including YouTube and Facebook—was restricted on school computers until just prior to our conversation. The revelation that students could access these platforms seemed to happen upon student investigation. They “found” and “figured out” that they could access YouTube and Facebook, rather than being alerted by a teacher that they were now permitted access to the websites. The students in Group Two confirmed that, although the sites were technically accessible, teachers tended to stigmatize students who used them. Students talked about whether or not they could access Facebook, explaining:

Student: Yeah, we can now.
Taunya: Oh, you can now?
Student: Yeah, but we're not allowed to.
Student: We used to get into the teacher's accounts and get on it.
Student: Yeah, last year.
Student: [Login] Supply [Password] supply.
Student: It doesn't work anymore (April 5, 2012).

I read this conversation as a key tension that exists in schools around adolescents and media access. Despite access control restrictions and editing for appropriateness, students will find a way to access Facebook in the school. Any attempt at limiting students' access to social media is doomed to fail, insofar as media technologies are already woven into their daily lives. Ultimately these attempts to divide students' school-worlds and their life-worlds—or as Arendt would say, the “world of the child,” and that of the adult—will end in failure. Youth already live in the adult world, because there is only one world. Instead of

avoiding the world available through media in school, I was attempting to understand students' life-worlds through the media texts they selected. In the following, I shift from thinking about the context of Media Club to the way the texts selected by the students interacted with this idea of age.

In/Appropriate Media: Choosing & Using Media in Education

Prior to working with the students at Cedarwood Secondary School (CSS), I anticipated they would want to view something they related to. Despite my desire to use media texts relevant to students' lives in Media Club, I found balancing what they wanted, or "cool" media, with appropriate texts to be a constant challenge. In the following section, I look at the clash between what students wanted and what the confines of the school required.

My goal in setting up the project was to have students chose the media texts that we would view together. However, as noted previously, my process for selecting texts for Media Club was affected by the school board's ethics requirements, which insisted that all media texts be screened and approved by Cedarwood's principal before being allowed in Media Club. This was a challenging request given the principal's over-extended schedule: she was in charge of two neighboring public schools. It was also a challenge to my credibility as a researcher, educator, and adult. Unlike teachers or the occasional guest presenters who visited the school, any media texts that I hoped to screen required the oversight and approval of the principal, who was considered to be an appropriate authority figure and expert judge of media texts. The unspoken message seemed to be that despite my education and experience as an

educator, I was regarded as an outsider and a potential threat to the students' safety. I was dangerous in so far that I might bring in "inappropriate" media texts.

For the duration of Media Club, the only editing note the principal gave was that I had missed cutting out a use of "damn" in an episode of *Family Guy* (2000). Although she didn't request it, I was able to edit it out during recess, before screening it for the first group. In passing, at the end of the day, she mentioned not to worry about the aforementioned "damn." She said she had spoken to one of the grade eight teachers who insinuated it was an innocuous word for that age group (March 6, 2012). At that moment, I realized both the principal and I might be trying to maintain a system of decency that neither of us knew the rules for (of course, there are no actual rules).

During my study I was not directed to board or school-based guidelines outlining "age appropriate" media content (I cannot find any guidelines to this day), and I did not have an explicit conversation with the principal about content limitations. Instead I relied on a combination of my judgment and the website commonsensemedia.org, which I happened upon while trying to find parental reviews for media content. Prior to Media Club, I read each text, took notes, and then compared my understanding of the texts with the reviews on the Common Sense Media website. Common Sense Media is a not-for-profit organization, designed for parents and educators to read and post reviews about media texts (film, television, video games, books). These reviews are based on how appropriate adults think a text is for a certain ages of children by using a colour-coded scale and how the text rates on a scale of zero to five in categories such

as “Positive messages,” “Productive role models,” “Ease of play,” “Violence & scariness,” “Language,” “Consumerism,” and “Drinking, drugs & smoking” (commonsensemedia.org, September 30, 2014). On the site, I was keenly attentive to individual parent’s comments rather than the official review. The website is founded and led by CEO James Steyer, a faculty member at Stanford University and author of *The Other Parent: The inside story of the media’s effect on our children* (2003). He purports that his book examines youths’ “exposure to sex, coarseness, violence and commercialism long before children are ready to understand them [sic] and offers real-world solutions that encourage a more active parental and citizen role” (Amazon.com). Although the website is proof of Steyer’s commitment to offering “real-world solutions” for parents who want to understand the media their children consume, the official reviews were much more conservative than the “real-world” parents’ reviews. For instance, the video game *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (2010) is rated “Not for Kids” with the short tagline, “Superb but violent shooter is definitely for adults only.” Although the site’s review matched the “Mature” rating by the Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB), the aggregate average of 185 parents reviews suggests that the game is appropriate for twelve year olds, which was the same aggregate average given by the 487 kid reviews. The top three voted reviews by parents read, “Black Ops ... not as violent as you think it is,” “Parents may Overreact because they assume [sic],” and “Perfect for 11 and up!” (commonsensemedia.org, Sept 30 2014). It is through these reviews that I learned *Call of Duty: Black Ops* has a

setting in the menu that allows users to turn off “Blood, gore and language.” I emphasized this setting when previewing the game with the principal.

Knowing that the game was rated “M” for “Mature” and that the students could not even purchase it in a store without accompaniment by a parent, I was most nervous about whether the principal would allow this game in Media Club. On the other hand, *Call of Duty* (CoD) was the most requested and talked about text during Media Club. Despite the fact that the principal admitted that she had never played *CoD*, and despite watching the wrong half of the split screen during game play (her player was on the bottom of the screen and she was exclaiming at actions happening to the top-screen player), the principal was quick to engage with and vocalize happy frustration when playing the game. At the conclusion of our fifteen-minute session, the principal concluded, “I can see why people like this,” and she approved the game for use in Media Club (Field notes, March 26 2012).

Unlike the principal, many of the students had played the game before and had been playing first-person-shooter games for some time. When pressed about the rating system, the students recognized why it was in place but also suggested it hadn’t stopped them from playing it at a non-recommended age:

Taunya: This game is rated M, right?
F/Student: Mature.
Taunya: M for mature. Why?
F/Student: Because they’re showing...
M/Student: Blood.
F/Student: Because there’s killing and...
M/Student: There’s cursing.
M/Student: There’s blood.
F/Student: Violence.
F/Student: Guns.

Taunya: Weapons, right. So if it's rated M for mature, who is it not for?
M/Student: Kids.
Student: People under 17.
Taunya: How old would you guys let—like how old of a kid would you let play the game?
F/Student: 10.
M/Student: Eight.
M/Student: Three.
[...]
F/Student: My brother plays it and he's four years old.
M/Student: I started when I was five.
M/Student: Six. (April 3, 2012)

The students bluntly acknowledged that *CoD* and other first-person-shooter video games are violent, gory, and often have vulgar language. However, the students did not think it was reasonable for gamers to meet the minimum age requirement in order to play, which is seventeen. Many of the students' reported that their parents and relatives purchased mature games for them and some said that they often played *CoD* with siblings, cousins, and parents. For example, one student said, "My dad gets mad because I beat him" (March 27, 2012). If students and parents agree that video games like *CoD* are reasonable for youth younger than seventeen, I wondered why the M rating exists.

Taunya: Than why have it rated M?
M/Student: I don't know.
M/Student: Because it's recommended...
Taunya: What is that?
M/Student: People will be oversensitive sometimes the way games ...
Taunya: People are sensitive? What do people think about this game?
F/Student: I don't know.
F/Student: It's too violent.
M/Student: It's awesome.
M/Student: They keep making them. (April 3, 2012)

The students were torn in their assessment of why *CoD*, and games like it, are given restrictive ratings: one student noted the game as "too violent" and other

students felt it was “awesome” and the recommendations are “oversensitive.”

The last student’s comment was accurate in noting that despite the battle between kids’ best interests and kids’ actual interests, first-person-shooter video games are a multi-billion dollar industry, and money talks. In 2011, *Call of Duty: Black Ops* was announced as the industry’s “best selling game of all time,” although it has been dethroned by several games since then.

One thing the students made unequivocally clear is that they did not see *Call of Duty: Black Ops* as a tool conditioning them to be future soldiers. Using a Panoramic Zoom, which asks the students to situate the game in a specific social context (a world with war), I asked them to think about first-person-shooter video games as potential training sites.

- Taunya: Does anybody think that this game or any first-person-shooter games would be good preparation for being in an actual battle?
- F/Student: No.
- M/Student: Training like this and going into war? No. No, definitely not.
- F/Student: Yeah, you’d need like actual hands on, not just [inaudible] lives.
- M/Student: Because you only get one life in real life.
- M/Student: This Call of Duty, you can like hang up, and then in the real like war, you can’t do that.
- M/Student: It could kind of prepare you mentally.
- M/Student: The little things like in this game, reloading, you don’t even have to worry about it. It just reloads after you fire off the bullets – it just reloads for you. But then in real life, you actually have to reload and get out and it takes way more time than –
- M/Student: And it wouldn’t tell you to reload. (April 3, 2012).

Although one student thought about *Call of Duty* as potentially preparing a player mentally for active combat, the majority of students felt there were significant gaps between playing a game and participating in a war. From the material fact

of potentially needing to re-load a weapon to the significant fact of mortality, students saw *Call of Duty* as an unrealistic game.

They also understood the text as more than just a superficial “shoot-‘em-up” pastime; *Call of Duty* is a text that offers a developed narrative through which readers can make meanings and connections. In my questioning I pushed the students to consider the game in relation to the word “ethics,” which I explained as “what you ought to do” (April 3, 2012). I asked them to think about the ethics of war in *Call of Duty* with a Panoramic Zoom. The students rose to the challenge:

Taunya: What ethics can we learn from Call of Duty?

M/Student: That communism is wrong.

F/Student: What should you learn from Call of Duty?

Taunya: Yeah, like what do we learn about being good and bad from Call of Duty?

F/Student: That it’s dangerous to have a gun.

M/Student: It’s a history lesson sort of.

M/Student: Yeah, it is.

M/Student: History just repeats itself.

F/Student: I don’t see a history.

F/Student: And we were talking about war.

F/Student: It’s mostly about like wars that have happened before, in the past.

M/Student: And like tactics that they used to use and stuff like that. (April 3, 2012).

The first student’s comment, “that communism is wrong” can be connected to the fact that *Call of Duty: Black Ops* is an historical game set during the Cold War of the 1960s. The main, playable protagonist is Alex Mason, a CIA agent who is sent around the world—Kazakhstan, Laos, Cuba, Hong Kong, and the Arctic Circle—to defuse the Cold War on behalf of the United States of America. The

protagonist takes part in historic conflicts, such as the Tet Offensive and the Bay of Pigs, the scenarios adhering to the specific tactics, weaponry, and enemies of the time (Alex is regularly set against Communist regimes). The students who were familiar with the game read *Call of Duty* as “a history lesson” about what “tactics and what they used to use” in the “wars that have happened before.” In the Media Club wrap up, two students separately commented that *Call of Duty* would make a great in-class text to teach about history:

M/Student: I'd do Call of Duty for history. (March 28, 2012)

M/Student: Oh, Call of Duty for learning about like history, war and history and stuff like that (April 5, 2012).

As explained in the Methodology (Chapter Three), we did not play the *campaign mode* in Media Club to have a first hand look at the details of the “history” students championed. Campaign mode is restricted to one player and takes about ten hours of game play to complete. In order to have more students playing in the short time we had, we played split-screen multiplayer in what was essentially a game of tag. I have not finished the game in campaign mode, but in what I have played, the game attempts a historical fiction. Players take part in historic battles while the game repeatedly insists that there is a whole other side to history: political alliances, secret agents, and undercover missions. *Call of Duty: Black Ops* is set up as a historical fiction that challenges the status quo. The video trailer, released before the video game, asks gamers to reconsider history through CoD: “Just because they write it down and call it history doesn't make it the truth. We live in a world where seeing is not believing, where only a

few know what really happened. We live in a world where everything you know is wrong” (YouTube, 2010). This is to say that, while *Call of Duty: Black Ops* is certainly an imperfect history lesson, the thrust of the narrative, as a salacious historical fiction, seems to be about asking questions of our histories.

Some students were surprised to find there was more to *Call of Duty: Black Ops* than mindless shooting. One of the students whom I interviewed admitted that she enjoyed playing *Call of Duty* so much in class, she bought a copy to play at home.

Meg: Well, I’ve just started, like, playing *Call of Duty* and I bought the game because I really liked it in Media Club.

Taunya: Oh, interesting. So you hadn’t played that game before [Media Club]?

Meg: No.

Taunya: Did you have any, like, perceptions about the game or ...

Meg: Well, I thought it’d be, like, really, really hard and I wouldn’t be able to beat any levels.

Taunya: And how are you finding it?

Meg: It’s pretty average, like, normal difficulty. And I thought it’d be like way more boring. (April 19, 2012).

By being exposed to *Call of Duty* in Media Club, Meg noted her misconceptions about the text and was investing more time in exploring it. And although it was a difficult text to bring to the Club, insofar as I had to find the version of *Call of Duty* which allowed parental controls and also ensure I had enough time for the principal of CSS to play it, it offered some unexpectedly positive feedback and stimulated some of our more mature conversations around ethics and history.

Conversely, the students had very little to say about texts that were, in my view, too young for them. A student selected the YouTube video “I’m Elmo and I Know It,” and I decided to put it into the Media Club curriculum. In discussion with

the teachers, I learned that they had seen that text before, and the principal did not feel the need to screen it. It was deemed a safe-for-school text already.

When it came time to read it in Media Club, the students in both groups resisted.

Taunya: The other video I was going to show you...

M/Student: Elmo.

Taunya: We'll watch Elmo and...

F/Student: No, no.

F/Student: We've seen it so many times. (March 7, 2012)

M/Student: We got showed it in French class.

Taunya: Oh so everybody's seen it? Well we'll just watch it again and see what happens.

[Watch video]

Taunya: What do you think?

F/Student: He names all the songs [after himself].

Taunya: What's that?

F/Student: It's Elmo's song. (March 21, 2012).

With the first group, I followed the students' lead and didn't screen it. With Group

Two, I wanted to see what the students' reading of the text was, so I proceeded.

At the end of playing the text, the students were visibly bored. One of the students offered a reading that Elmo had multiple songs, and they were all named after him (a popular song on *Sesame Street* is "Elmo's Song"). This was the extent of our conversation. Whereas the other music videos—Bieber and Aldean—offered such generative discussions, the students refused this video text, citing that they had seen it too many times in classes before. A YouTube video based on a young children's show, this text had been approved by educators at the school and repeatedly used as a text for these grade eight students. And, although it was requested by one of the students, the general consensus was that the students were over it.

The divide between what's in the interest of (safe for) youth and what is of youth's interests recalls literature about media education throughout the twentieth century. In each decade, North American scholars, educators, and specialists debate the effects of various types of media on children even as each generation of youth are drawn to and entertained by contemporary and established media texts. The group of students at CSS wanted to be challenged by new texts.

New Media as Cool: Working with What Youth Want

Throughout our conversations, the students repeated that new media texts were almost always better than older texts and media relevancy was integral to being hip youth. This sentiment of “newness” as a superior quality for media arose in our conversations about the dance-based Kinect video game. In Group One, several students contrasted their enjoyment in playing *Dance Central 2* (2011) with a school board-wide event called “Celebration of Dance.” The Celebration of Dance is a board initiative that included thirty-five schools and over 5000 students in 2012. Using video and written instruction, students in individual classrooms learned pre-recorded dances with the intention to unite disparate students, teachers, and community participants (parent volunteers, support staff, local police) in an afternoon of dance. Not only is the “Celebration of Dance” intended to be a “fun, active and inclusive” day of “physical literacy, character and success,” it is also regarded as a way to achieve the goal of Daily Physical Activity (DPA) set by the board. The students voiced mixed reviews of the event itself. While a female student asserted that the activity is “so fun,” in contrast two male students argued that it was “boring ‘cause you do the same

thing every time ... the same dances every year” and “the songs suck so you don’t want to dance to them” (Feb 24, 2012). In this case the “oldness” of a media text had connotations of repetition and tradition (“every year”), in tandem with outmoded songs. At the Selfie Zoom level of questioning, I asked them what songs they felt would better inspire them to dance:

Taunya: So, what would be better songs?

M/Student: New songs.

M/Student: New songs.

M/Student: [That students] Like the songs ... like the songs, so that they actually will dance to it. (Feb 24, 2012).

Echoing this assertion, a female student in Group Two confirmed that good music was new music, saying, “It’s usually the newer songs” and “It’s music you’d want to dance ... or you’re supposed to dance to” (Mar 2, 2012). Not only are youth attracted to new music, but also it is possible that youth are attracted to contemporary music because of its newness. For instance, through a Selfie question I wanted to understand the association between age and new music.

The students felt a person’s age is associated with music type:

Taunya: That’s fair. So, but the newness, new music is usually better than old music?

F/Student: True.

M/Student: For different ages, yeah.

M/Student: I think. (Feb 24, 2012)

One student, George, clarified that some adults were more knowledgeable about new music than others. He explained, “My dad listens to like old music and I don’t really like it, but he listens to it every single time. My mom listens to new music so that’s why I always ride with my mom” (Feb 24, 2012). George’s comment suggests that “old dogs can learn new tricks,” as the adage goes: his

mom was “in the know” and they shared a love for new music. Although the students associate new music with youth, George suggests that some adults can also appreciate new, and what they considered to be better, youth-appropriate music.

The students were also quick to associate newness to value in the case of comparing singers Justin Bieber and Jason Aldean. When I announced to Group Two that we would watch Justin Bieber’s (2010) “Baby,” Media Club erupted with chatter. Unprovoked, the students in the background were recorded deriding the age of the song:

F/Student: Who knows this song?
F/Student: Are you gonna sing it? <laughs>
M/Student: This song is so old. (Mar 6, 2012)

This pair of female students looked for comrades to sing along to Bieber, while a male student audibly shut down the song (and sing-along) as being passé.

Similarly, during Group One’s discussion about the video, a student confirmed that Bieber was no longer deemed relevant. In a vague Close-up question about the music video texts, the students made a more Panoramic, social judgment about the singers:

Taunya: What’s similar and what’s different with these two guys?
F/Student: [Jason Aldean] is better, Justin Bieber is so two years ago; everyone likes Jason Aldean more (Feb 22, 2012).

Released in January of 2010, Justin Bieber’s song was two years old at the time of the conversation. In comparison, Jason Aldean’s “Dirt Road Anthem” was released in 2011. So, despite being outdated at the time of the conversation, Aldean’s song and video was deemed more recent and subsequently better.

The connection between new human beings (adolescents) and new media is interesting in that both can function as technologies for society. Nancy Lesko (2001) argues that, prompted by the rise of industrial cities, nation-building, immigration, and economic tumult in the nineteenth century, the category “youth” was used as a trope for a changing landscape, as a standard or measurement of the progress or failure of culture, and as a *technology*: “At the same time adolescence was a social fact produced through a set of practices [...] In this light, adolescence can be glimpsed as a *technology* to produce certain kinds of persons within particular social arrangements” (p. 50). Lesko’s Foucauldian use of the term technology implies that youth are categorically productive and more importantly produced, as a taxonomy, which allows “authorities ... to shape, normalize and make productive use of human beings” (p. 17). In this light, the connection between the category of youth and media becomes clear as a social technology. Lesko writes:

At the turn of the century, daily experiences with inventions such as the telephone, the high-speed rotary press, and the cinema sparked debate about time and more precisely about the past, the present and the future. Adolescence entered into this dialogue about time, humanity and productivity because adolescence was defined as always becoming. (p. 110)

The fact of newness—the newness of youth as humans in “becoming,” and the newness of twentieth and twenty-first century media technologies—makes the pairing of new media (texts) and youth seem both natural and concerning. While they make logical companions as social categories because both media technologies and youth are new to the world, they also both have the onerous task of showing society where it is going. Working with youth and media can

seem precarious in that the (perceived) future is at stake in each: should either youth (the future of the world) or media (the backbone of the Global Village) be corrupted or corrupting, society's future is at the mercy of their capabilities.

Social Age and Uncomfortable Conversations

Beyond a taxonomical expedient, students' age affects the scope of their experiences. The eighth graders who participated in the Media Club have only existed in the world for twelve and thirteen years. I noticed that the students in the Media Club also had different knowledges and perspectives depending on their experiences and studies, which suggests that some students were more mature than others. In other words and not surprisingly, the literal age of the students did not necessarily define their social abilities, interests, or knowledge.

Anne Solberg (1990) evokes the useful concept of social age, which extends the concept of age as a technology to age as a set of material and social practices. For instance, in her mixed-methods studies conducted with Norwegian families, she found that the statistical increase of adolescents taking up domestic labour (prompted by mothers entering the workforce) was associated with a perceived increase in their social age. She explains, "In negotiating the use of domestic space, children increase their social age. [...] The relatively autonomous life led by many children has had, I would suggest, an impact on many parents' conceptions of their children's age and of their dependency" (p. 137). On the other hand, adolescent social age is not always perceived uniformly. While they might be understood to be mature and responsible family members at

home, the practices of school policy may impede their abilities to express and maintain their social age.

Connecting and identifying with certain media texts can allow adolescents to exert their social age. In Media Club, this identification played out through students' preoccupation with the ages in the texts: what age-group the text was intended for, what year the text was made (or how old it was), and the ages of the people on screen. By identifying with some media texts and rejecting others, the students were striving to identify themselves as not children.

One of the ways students shared their distaste with a text in Media Club was to say it was for "babies." For example, students played with the title of the video "Baby" to deride Justin Bieber's credibility, associating him with immaturity and childishness. When asked to compare Bieber and Aldean's songs and images, the students assert that Aldean's is about looking back on his teenage memories while Bieber is still living his adolescence. To clarify students' reading of the text through a Close-up question, I asked:

Taunya: So he's [Aldean's] older, so he's singing about his like childhood memories, and Bieber?

F/Student: He's still a kid. A baby.

F/Student: Baby, baby, baby, yeah.

F/Student: *He's a baby, baby, baby Oh!* <singing> (Mar 6, 2012)

By appropriating Bieber's lyrics as a way to infantilize him, these students may also have been attempting to distance themselves from kid-like associations. The students rejected Bieber and pledged their allegiances to Aldean. When asked who the intended audience was for Jason Aldean's music—a Panoramic Zoom—the students answered enthusiastically:

Student: Me.
F/Student: More like teenagers and adults.
M/Student: People who like country music.
Student: Older people.
Taunya: People who like country music, older adults, who else?
F/Student: Uh, Teenagers.
F/Student: I said teenagers like five times.
Student: Older teens (Mar 6, 2012).

For the students, the comparison between Bieber and Aldean was simple: Bieber was a “baby,” and Aldean was an adult; Aldean’s music and genre were typically appreciated by adults, and perhaps therefore by the students too. It seemed to infer then that anyone admitting to liking Bieber could be considered childish by extension of merely liking his music.

As a text for adults, Aldean’s song included mature social themes. In a conversation about Aldean’s music video, the students keenly spotted and joked amongst themselves about plastic Solo cups as a symbol for alcohol and under-age drinking. In asking a Close-up question to follow up on the students’ readings of both videos through the theme of love, I asked:

Taunya: Are both of [the videos] about love?
F/Student: One’s memories.
Taunya: One’s memories?
F/Student: Well, he [Aldean] could have had like a love because it shows like around a fire and... a couple guys like...
M/Student: Are you sure they had juice in them?
M/Student: One of them’s about little babies.
Taunya: What’s that?
M/Student: They got juice in them <laugh>
Taunya: One’s for like younger kids?
M/Student: Yeah and one’s for more like older...children. Teenagers.
M/Student: Little babies. (March 6, 2012)

At the same time that I followed up on a student’s answer, in which she attempts to connect Aldean’s video to the concept of memory, another group of students

were connecting the imagery of the plastic Solo-brand cups used in Aldean's video with this lyric about alcohol: "I'm chillin on a dirt road / Laid back, swerving like I'm George Jones / Smoke rollin' out the window, an ice-cold beer sittin' in the console" (Aldean, 2011).



Figure 6. Youth laughing and drinking in Jason Aldean's (2011) "Dirt Road Anthem".

Although largely inaudible on my recording, the students appear to contrast Aldean's video, where teenagers are repeatedly depicted at a campfire party laughing and drinking out of plastic Solo cups, with Bieber's video, which wouldn't have such imagery because his target audience is "babies." Although these students spoke in the background the first time, one student publically reiterated their position on Bieber and the plastic cups when I asked what else was characteristic of Bieber's video through a Close-up Zoom:

Taunya: Dance? Anything else.

M/Student: On the Justin Bieber video, he wouldn't have like those cups, 'cause I'm sure they don't have juice in them. He would have juice in them.

<students laughing>

Taunya: So there's like, there's expectations of what they would each be drinking?

M/Student: Non-alcoholic beer, or...

Taunya: No that's okay...

F/Student: Justin Bieber's not gonna wear cowboy boots (Mar 6, 2012).

This student is identifying that a) the Aldean video is implying underage alcohol consumption through the use of the plastic cups and b) Bieber's video did not take up this type of imagery, despite the rows of alcohol bottles lining the bar at the bowling alley in the video "Baby." Even if Bieber did have solo cups in his video, students joked that his cups would have juice or non-alcoholic beer. Despite my gentle encouragement to keep talking, the student did not want to elaborate further and we moved back to a more traditionally "classroom-appropriate" conversation about clothing.

The students proclaimed Aldean as an adult in many ways, but alcohol consumption is culturally significant for these students. Douglass Reichert Powell (2007) acknowledges "the key elements of redneck countercultural practices [are] fires, guns, [and] alcoholic beverages" (p. 77). To make this rural trifecta, Aldean's video was only missing a gun. As a researcher, I was surprised that students picked up on the red cups; it's not something I found to be prominent when I watched the video. As a former resident of the town, I was not the least bit surprised by their reading. I participated in a culture where youth began drinking at house parties with their parents (and their uncles, and their neighbors, and their cousins) around fourteen to sixteen years of age. In my experience, it is not uncommon for (underage) youth and adults to share the same, purportedly adult, social gatherings in a small town. However, there is an interesting tension at work in the students' reading. Aldean's text was praised for being new, *and* it was

cool because it was for older youth and adults. In a sense, these youth desired newness in their media/medium, but the text itself should not remind them that they're still new humans in an adult world. Later that same day, the youth replaced talk about (underage) drinking with (illicit) drug use.

The *Family Guy* (2000) episode "Let's Go To The Hop," parodies the trope of drug awareness campaigns in youth programming. During the discussion of the text, I asked the group to think about how the metaphor of toads fits well in the narrative about drug use. Here, I was attempting to evoke a Close-up question, which turned personal.

Taunya: Fair enough. And how are... Like how are drugs like toads? Like why would they choose toads?

M/Student: Cause of their side effects...

Taunya: Their what?

M/Student: Side effects, like licking the toad would give you warts, and like drugs, I don't know what it would give you...

Taunya: Do drugs have no side effects?

M/Student: I don't know, I don't do them.

M/Student: Good answer, Mark.

M/Student: Ask Hailey. <she gives a furious look at him> Just joking.

Taunya: So drugs like... So toads as drugs are like a good metaphor? Do you guys know what a metaphor is?

M/Student: Yeah.

Taunya: A metaphor is something that stands... Are you guys cool?

M/Student: Yeah. (Mar 6, 2012)

The discussion of drugs in the text seemed to reveal a moment where one student was outing another for using drugs. It was not clear whether the female student was upset about being the butt of the joke in a public way, or embarrassed by the implication in a classroom setting, or angry for effectively being told on by the male student in front of her peers. I did not stop to find out; I continued back to the text.

In the context of my research, I fundamentally got what I wanted from this conversation: I wanted to understand how the students read the texts through multiple vantages—close-up on the text, a medium focus, as part of a social panorama, and from visceral or personal experience. My question was taken to the realm of the personal when I had hoped to get their reading of the text Close-up.

However, as an educator, this moment can also be read as a pedagogic dilemma. When the conversation became difficult—too personal, too raw, too embarrassing—I changed the subject back to the text. It was apparent that drinking and drug use are already issues in the students' lives. In an interview, one student participant suggested, "Like, [I] don't want to exactly say it, but there's apparently drugs that go on here" (Apr 24, 2012). I did not ascertain whether this student gained this assumption from those few, aforementioned moments in Media Club or from her own experiences out of school. Regardless, the student's assumption that students around her were using drugs and alcohol reiterated the sense that I was beginning to get from our conversations in Media Club. Clearly, viewing the media texts containing teenage drinking and drug use in Media Club was not the students' first exposure to underage drinking and illegal drugs. How can an educator discuss difficult topics, relevant to students but potentially dangerous or uncomfortable in the confines of a classroom?

Arendt (1958) suggests adults and educators should resume their rightful authority with youth. For her this is not a lawful authority; she attempts to divorce

socialization and “skills” building from education. Rather, she views the teacher’s authority as a *responsibility* to the world and to youth:

Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from the ruin, which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable. And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands the chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world. (p. 193)

Here Arendt equates love with an educator’s responsibility to represent the complexity of the world to students, rather than offering a sanitized version of the world and leaving difficult topics for students to navigate alone. This powerful statement asks educators to revoke the false respect for youth that comes from treating them as separate and autonomous from adults by instead asking educators to respect them as human beings in “a state of becoming” (p. 182), who share stakes in a common world. To do so, educators must represent that world in all its complexities to give youth the best chance for creating a new world informed by the wisdom of the old.

The relationship between youth, media, and education is complex, with a history of educators concerned about media’s effects on students, and a parallel history of students concerned with the affective potential of media. It is clear that the school is a key site for biopower (Foucault, 1965) through which the bodies of adolescents are tagged and tracked, in the service of the social anxiety around natality (Arendt, 1958) and our uncertain future (Lesko, 2003). However, the students I encountered at CSS were not “a Future” but people in the world,

invested in their society and themselves in part by making meaning in contemporary media texts.

On their own, the students of Media Club did not necessarily have an independently complex reading of the world. Our anxieties about their age coloured many of their readings of the media: who counts as a baby, who resembles an adult, and what media was “cool.” The complexity of their readings lies in the fact that none of us was outside of the control of biopower: the school board set boundaries for the principal and my project (perhaps based on some anticipated societal expectations); the teachers informed the principal of their classroom practices; the students informed me of their expectations; the students regularly policed each other’s readings and social slippages. We were each watching ourselves and watching others in service of an education that was serving no one completely. I have hope that, echoing Arendt’s call to responsibility, we can find some spaces for ourselves and students by recognizing and insisting that students are part of a common world, and that this world—in all its complexity—must be part of schooling.

Though some of this chapter set the stage for my experience of the way students’ social age was imagined in the setting of the school, the students also spoke back through the texts. They taught me a little about what they found to be age-appropriate texts, and Panoramic questions helped them connect the texts to the ethics, history of, and implications armed combat and war. Through Selfie Zoom questions, the students made interesting connections between the perceived coolness of media and its relative newness. Finally, they imagined and

tested the limits of their social age through a Close-up Zoom on texts about drinking and drug use.

Through Media Club and in using Zoom Reading, I was able to access some of the complexity of the students' worlds. However, as a qualitative researcher running a Media Club to exercise Zoom Reading, I found myself conflicted with a pedagogical dilemma: how much should I intervene in the students' readings? To what extent was I over-determining the conversations around the texts, and at what points should I offer my own readings (of the texts or of the students)?

CHAPTER SIX

ZOOM READING AND THE QUESTION (OF) PEDAGOGY

In this chapter I will reflect on one of the central things I learned in doing this study: a particular pedagogy that could be productive for teaching multi-media literacy. When I designed Zoom Reading and the methodological outline for this research, I focused on how I would gather qualitative data in Media Club. I did not think about myself as an educator in Media Club, or how I might employ Zoom Reading pedagogically. My pedagogical dilemma—about how much I should intervene in the students’ readings of the multi-media texts—, as much as I am a researcher, I am also invested in being an educator.

Outside of conducting Media Club sessions, and to this day, I am an educator by trade. As an educator, I have always been inspired by dialogic pedagogies. In *Media Education*, David Buckingham (2003) encourages pedagogues to create a dialogue in media classrooms in order to balance the voices and experiences of students alongside the (historically informed) knowledge of the educator. Buckingham explains, “The point [of media education]... is not to ban the idea of value judgment, but to deepen and complicate our discussion about it” (p. 146). Through a dialogue, neither student nor educator is satiated by finite judgments: sharing and negotiating knowledges makes meaning.

This dialectical pedagogy influenced the way I conceived of Zoom Reading: I wanted multi-media education to encourage dialogue through multiple vantages, simultaneously. However, attempting to focus this research on

collecting the students' readings of the text inspired new thinking about multi-media pedagogy for me. In this chapter, I begin by reviewing the questioning, dialectic pedagogies of Plato (1941) and Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon (2010). I conclude with a turn to Jaques Rancière's (1990) concepts of *ignorance* as a potential match for Zoom Reading.

Media Pedagogue as Researcher: Asking Questions

I approached my exchanges in the classroom almost strictly through the methodology of asking questions. This alone is not a new concept for pedagogy. In *The Republic* written by Plato in 380 BC, Socrates famously uses questioning, dubbed 'the Socratic method' as a superior educational practice. In one of his question-based dialogues with a student, Socrates states that "education is not what it is said to be by some, who profess to put knowledge into a soul which does not possess it, as if they could put sight into blind eyes" (Plato, 1941, p. 232). He argues that any educator who claims to succeed in forcing knowledge upon their students is mistaken. Instead, the goal of education is to encourage "the soul of every man [who possesses] the power of learning the truth and the organ to see it with" by ensuring "that instead of looking in the wrong direction, [the soul] is turned the way it ought to be" (ibid). Just as Socrates guides his students by questioning their logic, he advocates for a pedagogy that guides rather than enforces learning upon students.

Extending Socrates' idea of asking questions in the classroom, Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon (2010) insists that educators must ask questions that provoke a desire for students to go deeper than answering with a fact or a

personal opinion. She asserts that any worthwhile pedagogy invests time in prompting interpretive analyses from students. In her book, *The Art of Turning the Soul* (2010) she outlines a case study of three English classroom educators who, with her help, implement three types of questions that are useful for pedagogical dialogue: factual, evaluative, and interpretive questions.

According to Haroutunian-Gordon, factual questions “may be answered by pointing to a particular place in the text and resolving it definitively” (p. 5). These types of questions best focus on trivia related to plot, characters, or setting; she does not give much merit to factual questions. Next, she suggests evaluative questions are the type that calls for students’ judgments or beliefs about the text. For Haroutunian-Gordon, these questions are a double-edged sword, in that:

...there are times when leaving exploration of the text aside so as to learn about the participants’ experiences, values, or personal reasoning (which is based on experience, values, or fantasy) is very suitable. ... On the other hand ... if the group moves from one question to another without fully resolving any of them, it is hard to feel that the discussion has made progress, whether in understanding the text or articulating and evaluating personal beliefs (pp. 40-41).

By asking students evaluative questions, she believes teachers are asking students to rely on their own histories, which emerge through their specific perspectives. The possibility of coming to a resolution between students’ answers may then become impossible in that there is no underlying measurement against which to prove or disprove individual statements. She is wary that through evaluative answers, everyone’s opinion is theoretically valid according to his/her own framework of experiences and knowledge.

Instead, Haroutunian-Gordon strongly advocates for the use of interpretive questions to inspire meaningful pedagogical encounters. She describes these types of questions as those “which will take a [student] back into the text in order to discover more meaning in it” (6). Based on Plato’s assertion that educators should merely aim to guide students’ “souls” and get them “turned the way that [they] ought to be” (Plato, 1941, p. 232), she suggests educators use interpretive questions (or questions that inspire interpretive answers) to get students to focus on ambiguity in a text, and then ask students to propose possible solutions for that ambiguity. She believes students will then set about studying the text in order to consider an answer that cannot be disproven by any other facts or moments within the text. Haroutunian-Gordon (2010) submits that,

The movement of understanding is constantly from the whole to the part and back to the whole. Our task is to extend in concentric circles the unity of the understood meaning. The harmony of all the details with the whole is the criterion of correct understanding. (p. 55)

Haroutunian-Gordon’s method posits that, by circling students through specific, interpretive questions, they might zero in on a sound reading. Overall, her return to and interpretation of the Socratic method inspired me to think about the questioning in my project. I have coded my classroom data for this section using the framework laid-out by Haroutunian-Gordon: attempting to locate the factual, evaluative, and interpretive questions. I consider: what types of questions did I rely on and to what effect? In the following, I consider the types of questions I asked in line with Haroutunian-Gordon’s approach.

Questioning in Media Club

If I were to judge my pedagogy based on the quantity of interpretive questions I asked, my questions fell short of Haroutunian-Gordon's pedagogy. After eight weeks of Media Club meetings and posing hundreds of questions, just sixteen percent of the questions that I asked were interpretive, forty-one percent were factual, and forty-three percent were evaluative. According to Haroutunian-Gordon, our conversations were not a rich inquiry into the ambiguities of the texts since the students and I were basing our answers on their thoughts of the text rather than investigating points of ambiguity in the text. By relying on predominantly evaluative assessments, each student's response was based on unique histories of experience and knowledge. However, as an ethnographically influenced qualitative researcher, I was keenly interested in who these students were: How did they present themselves through their readings of the texts? How did Zoom Reading allow for imaginative and critically informed readings? My use of evaluative questions reflects this interest.

Overall, in this project I wanted to learn about what the students read into the texts, and how they reacted to Zoom Reading. In order to explore this interest, I used a lot of "factual" questions, according to Haroutunian-Gordon's outline. For example, during the music video discussion, I asked the Close-up question "What are the two different settings?" (Mar 6, 2012). I used this question to begin the conversation comparing the two music videos by beginning with a fact:

M/Student: One's in the city, one's in the country

M/Student : It looks like a bowling alley. (Mar 6, 2012)

I prompted for clarification and the conversation began to reveal different students' interpretations of what that meant.

Taunya: City and a country. How do you know ... that Bieber is in the city?
M/Student: Like just by the lights...
F/Student: Cause it's like bright and it's like bowling...
F/Student: Cause you don't find a bowling alley with like all that in Cedarwood.
F/Student: All those lights and in the middle of nowhere.
F/Student: You wouldn't find that in the middle of a field.
F/Student: Yeah, you'd find that [pointing at Jason Aldean] in the country and then the bowling alley in the city. (Mar 6, 2012)

By answering my factual question and the subsequent clarification of my question, the students signal their understandings of city and rural infrastructure and the ways they imagine the difference between rural and city landscapes.

Despite having a bowling alley in Cedarwood, the students pointed out that there were differences between big city and small town bowling alleys. For example, one student said, "You don't find a bowling alley with like *all that*" in Cedarwood. That is, Cedarwood has a bowling alley without amenities such as a laser show, mid-century atomic-inspired lighting, flat screen TVs, an arcade, and a fully stocked bar, which is more akin to a bowling alley one might find located on a street bathed in the florescent light of the Universal Citywalk at Universal Studios in Hollywood CA.¹⁷ They depict the city as bright, and the country as "nowhere."

Although this series of exchanges arose from a simple factual question, the students' answers were loaded with interpretations about the city and the country (these differences are taken up in Chapter Five). As with my qualitative research endeavor, I encountered many shades of grey in using Haroutunian-Gordon's attempts to create a formula for questioning.

¹⁷ Bieber's music video "Baby" was filmed at Jillian's Billiards in Universal City CA: jilliansbilliards.com

Factual questions, as Haroutunian-Gordon (2010) explains, are questions that can be easily resolved by the text, such as questions about the plot, character, or an object. These types of competency questions are familiar and often used by teachers for the purposes of testing student knowledge about a text—particularly in English and the arts. Factual questions are often used to prove that students have read an assigned book and these types of test questions are thought to be definitive and easy to grade. In my experience of coding factual questions, I found the questions were very often interpretive or evaluative depending on the way they were taken up by the students.

After the second round of playing *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (2010) (CoD) with Group Two, I was learning the intricacies and tactics of being effective at the game, as were many of the students who were also unfamiliar with it. I began the discussion by asking a Close-up question about the text: “What is the difference between guns? Like, what is the difference between the guns you’re going to equip yourself with?” (April 3, 2012). This is a factual question, in that if a student were to refer to the statistics of each weapon within the game, there would be one set of right answers. The MP5K is a fully automatic gun with a 30 bullet magazine and can do 40% damage within 20 meters of the target; the DRAGUNOV is a semi-automatic sniper rifle with a 10 bullet magazine and does 70% damage within 100 meters of the target, etc. However, the stats of each gun also have implications for the gamer’s style of play. Students responded to my question with the following answers:

F/Student: Because the gun—I had stuff that only shot like one bullet every once in awhile—

M/Student: Yeah, semi-automatic, fully-automatic and power.

F/Student: Yeah.

F/Student: They're faster, or slower, or...

M/Student: Okay, you can have guns where you want to go and shoot someone that's like 500 metres away. Or you can go into a room and kill them from like three metres away.

Taunya: Okay, and so the distance that you want to be, you change [your gun] again.

M/Student: Or like what your style of killing is, like how you like to do it I guess. (April 3, 2012)

On the one hand, the factual answer to “What is the difference between guns?” could be satisfied with the student’s response “semi-automatic, fully-automatic and power” (April 3, 2012). Yet, on the other hand, the more interpretive response is that the different guns affect and depend on “your style of killing” (April 3, 2012). The first response is based on the descriptive text or words offered to gamers as they choose their guns and the second is based on the text in practice or the game itself as it is experienced by the gamers. This is to say, I struggle with Haroutunian-Gordon’s assertion that there are such things as purely factual questions.

Although Haroutunian-Gordon’s question-based pedagogy believes good questioning should result in interpretive analyses, I found a valuable strength in resisting the impulse to (pretend to) know where students might go with their readings. That is, there is potential in offering your ignorance as an educator.

The Ignorant Media Educator

Jacques Rancière (1991) argues that in order for an inquiry to be truly collaborative, education needs ignorant pedagogues. An explicator-pedagogue, or an educator who feels compelled to fill all questions with explication, might

attempt to bridge the distance between a text and students' understandings through lectures and lessons. However Rancière argues that this distance between the meanings in the text, and the perceived inability of students to locate meaning are myths, causing stultification for—or rendering stupid—the learner (1991). Put another way, the pedagogue secures their own intelligence through the act of explication, which simultaneously insists upon a deficit in the students' intelligence. The teacher produces a student in the act of demonstrating her intelligence to them.

To avoid this power dynamic, Rancière suggests that pedagogues can instead offer students a will to learn: “A person, and a child in particular, may need a master when his own will is not strong enough to set him on track and keep him there” (p. 13). That is, during a truly collaborative inquiry, students follow and depend on their own intellects while obeying the will of the pedagogue not to quit in the pursuit of knowing more. Bingham & Biesta (2010) note that Rancière's concept of education is “not to suggest that there is no learning to be done, that there are no lessons to be learned from history and social analysis. But this learning should not be seen as dependent upon explication” (p. 58).

In some ways, I approached my Media Club with a pedagogy that echoes Rancière's theory of ignorance. Based on the students' requests, I curated a list of media texts with the intention to learn about and build on the students' knowledge of the texts. I did not have planned learning goals but I armed myself with questions¹⁸. I was not, however, an exemplary pedagogue for adopting this

¹⁸ Of course, our hopes and assumptions are often implicit in the types of questions we ask as researcher or educators, despite our best intentions.

approach (or, arguably, a pedagogue at all). As a researcher in Media Club, I struggled to encourage the students to keep reading without a lot of directing or redirecting them to new readings or new ideas. However, Rancière's approach to ignorance might be a next step for Zoom Reading, by first accepting that there are no guarantees in what students will read into a text, and then by helping them complicate and deepen their readings.

There are two reasons why I believe Rancière's approach to pedagogy can be useful for Media Education more broadly and for Zoom Reading specifically. First, media studies, as a school subject, could be housed in any number of different disciplines: in history, science, or art. However, since it is housed in English and Language Arts curriculum in Ontario, multi-media texts deserve the same opportunity as literature to be a resource for students to explore, imagine, and consider personal and historical meanings. Media studies could benefit from a pedagogy that begins with the assumption that each contributor's intelligence is valuable, and that the pedagogue's role includes refining debates, curating texts, and introducing students to historical and social contexts to ground their understandings.

The second reason I believe Rancière's pedagogy is important for reading multi-media texts relates specifically to Zoom Reading. Although Zoom Reading originates from the perspective that there are four useful aspects of media to take up—the text, the medium, the social context, and the self—it does not hierarchize these elements of the reading (echoing Stuart Hall (1980), all meanings happen simultaneously across a field of possibility). Zoom Reading insists that students

and educators make sense of the texts and themselves, the media platform and the world. By positioning students at the head of the inquiry, this approach to pedagogy encourages personal, relevant and deeply meaningful readings.

Media studies can produce an equal playing field of the classroom, where educators must acknowledge students as knowledgeable actors, existing in the same world as they do. Through Rancière's pedagogy, the classroom can begin with students' readings and become a cooperative inquiry into a shared world.

In tandem with my qualitative study, I gained a new perspective on Zoom Reading as a social study: at Close-up, Zoom Reading asks us to look at texts' social worlds; at the Medium and Panoramic level, Zoom Reading helps us consider the social world in which texts and technologies are distributed and can make sense; at the Selfie level, it helps us see ourselves as social actors. Media are mere vehicles to represent and re-present versions of ourselves, and multi-media texts require a study that allows for the multiple and conflicting complexities of our ever-changing social spheres, and our ever-changing selves. As such, I believe Zoom Reading will function best when paired with an ignorant, inquiry-based pedagogy that resists conceiving of educators' knowledge as finite, and students as the only ones becoming.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ZOOM READING AND THE FUTURE OF MEDIA LITERACY

To conclude my study, I will reflect on what I learned about the possibilities in Zoom Reading in Media Club; what I have come to understand about myself as a researcher and educator; and the new questions and curiosities this project has inspired.

This study was an investigation of my original approach to reading multi-media that I call Zoom Reading. Using it, I hoped to offer students a complex and generous way to study texts delivered through any medium. To explore how Zoom Reading might work in action, I conducted a qualitative research study through an informal Media Club of grade eight volunteers in a rural Ontario school. However, this was not a pilot project: I did not share my method with the students, nor did I have any specific pedagogical goals for Zoom Reading. I went into Media Club as a researcher hoping to collect data about the opportunities Zoom Reading could offer.

I began this research by finding a key discrepancy between the Reading and Media Literacy strands: in the former students were allowed to read imaginatively and passionately; in the latter, they were asked to think critically. I propose Zoom Reading might offer a multi-media approach that combines imagination with critical thinking. As such I outline Zoom Reading as a four dimensional approach to balance multiple lenses for reading: a Close-Up; on the Medium; the social Panorama; and the Selfie.

To historically ground my project, I trace moments in the genesis of media education between 1930 to current day. Drawing from historical writings by educators, I look at specific and broader assumptions about the relationships between media and youth that inform each decade's approach to media education. Finally, I examine the contemporary context of thinking about media education informing the Reading and Media Literacy strands, and Zoom Reading.

Inspired by ethnography and cultural studies – which is to say, with an eye to the culture of the research participants – I outline my methodology for this research as a qualitative study with youth in a school. For data collection I use group interviews, field notes, a blog and individual interviews, and I take a thematic approach to my data analysis. I feel that the ethics requirements of this study both shaped my methodology and the ways I approached the students – as minors in a school, where they and I needed qualified supervision.

In my first substantive chapter, I consider the thematic of place, which I perceive as significant to the ways students read the multi-media texts. To ground my thinking, I analyze the students' responses to place through Foucault's (1984) concept of Heterotopia – a real and imagined place – and William's (1975) cultural theories of the country. Using Zoom Reading's Close-up questions the students carved out The Country as a unique socio-geography, which was simultaneously nowhere significant and (therefore) safe. The students' focus shifted to thinking about Country culture through Panoramic questions, and they attempt to associate relate themselves to people in the world who were like them, and distance themselves from those they saw as unlike them. In both

cases I find they struggle to identify themselves as unique, differing from a broader urban-centric culture. Finally, Selfie questions led students to think about the ways they are connected and disconnected from the world around them. This last Zoom level complicated their attempts to support a binary between inside The Country and outside; while the multi-media texts served as a touch-point for claiming they were culturally different, they realized non-Country cultures were part of their experiences and identities.

In my second substantive analysis, I look at the thematic of age: the students' social and actual age, and the importance of timeliness in multi-media texts for youth. Using Nancy Lesko's (2001) theory of adolescence, I outline the conditions of contemporary schools that view adolescents as perpetually at risk; I claim that media texts seem to exacerbate this anxiety. In the classroom, the students judged the value of texts based on their relevancy and whether they were viewed as age appropriate – as they saw their own age. Through Selfie Zoom questions the students made interesting observations about new media as being cool by virtue of it being new. Reflective of the students' ability to a Mature text with complexity, Panoramic questions helped the students connect some of texts to the ethics and reality of armed combat in war. And finally they imagined and asserted their social age by reading Close-up of texts about drinking and drug use. Ultimately some of these readings led to uncomfortable conversations, where the students and I tried (and failed) to navigate real-world topics.

To reflect on my use of Zoom Reading, I realize the Medium Zoom did not seem to take center stage in the discussions in this document. This is not to say

our conversations specific to the medium were uninteresting; at times in Media Club students thought about the Kinect as a new way of teaching, and debated whether they preferred reading books or watching movies about the same story. However, the Medium Zoom questions during our discussions around the thematics of place and age did not generate significant insights or debates.

Overall, Zoom Reading allowed us to go beyond the surface of the texts as mere commercial products or straightforward narratives. The music videos were not just performances of songs; we read them as intimately symbolic of age, memory, culture, and geography. We critiqued *Call of Duty: Black Ops*' rating, and thought of it as a historical fiction for considering war. Propted by *Dance Central 2* (2011) we analyzed a relationship between music's newness and its relevance for youth. Through the Japanese manga, the complexities of gender arose, as well as the uncanny familiarity of texts from other/Other cultures. And while our conversations could have served as an excellent launching point to go deeper still—investigating and complicating students' initial assumptions—Zoom Reading aided in pushing past a simplistic initial reading of the texts. These critiques did not take precedence over the students' pleasure, but rather attempted to connect and balance their imaginative readings with the complex social and political conditions of the text.

In executing this project, I sometimes struggled between the identities of researcher and educator. My qualitative research project was informed by cultural studies and ethnography and as such, I hoped to make sense of the youth and culture(s) at CSS to understand the students' relationship with texts.

And yet, as the lone adult in Media Club (and even once, by accident, in the students' classroom), I had the opportunity of offering them a particular and explicit educational experience. Many times I was caught between these roles and, when I faced genuine moments where I could use Zoom Reading to teach students to examine their own readings – such as the incident with Husky's gender, and the “sneaky” Japanese comment – I changed directions. In these moments I failed to maintain scientific objectivity as a researcher by interjecting to change direction (not that objectivity was my goal, per se) and failed to intervene in their learning process by offering them a way to re-examine their assertions through another lens of Zoom Reading. Furthermore, I made the choice as a researcher not share the method of Zoom Reading with students in Media Club. I made this decision based on the concern that students' attention would shift to pleasing me (as an researcher/educator) rather than exploring their personal and imaginative readings of the texts freely. The drawback of not sharing the method of Zoom Reading is that I did not get a full sense of students' grasp of the approach: by giving them the language of Zoom Reading, students might have surprised me with connections and complexities in their reading that were only hinted at in Media Club. Although Media Club was meant to explore Zoom Reading, I was the only one in the room exploring it.

Upon reflection these methodological challenges significantly affected my experience collecting data in Media Club. And although I entered the space without pedagogical aims, I learned a great deal about a suitable pedagogy for Zoom Reading. Through this study and with subsequent reflection I am confident

that when Zoom Reading is paired with an ignorant pedagogy, students' readings could be deeply imaginative, critical, and complex investigations into their investments in texts as symptomatic of who and where they are.

The "ignorant" pedagogue (Rancière, 1991) asks the student to form and reform questions about texts, and bring their attention to resources and difficult questions that suit the path the learner is already on. Similar to the thrust of Roland Barthes' (1970) *The Death of the Author*, wherein he proclaims that the Author-God cannot retain sole authority of meaning in the text, I view Rancière's approach to pedagogy as a "Death of the Educator" where the authority of teaching and knowledge is not the property of the educator (or even student-authorities!). Rancière's lesson for me, in light of this research, is that educator can simply begin with inquiry: building and sharing the curriculum; and sharing and building our understandings of texts together. However, while Rancière's pedagogue Jacotot asked students to return to the text to prove and disprove their knowledge, as a researcher I did not likewise conduct Media Club. Each week I moved to new readings and new texts, without building or returning to any central ideas. In the future, I plan to use Zoom Reading along with Rancière's ignorant pedagogue with the intention of students building and returning to question their readings. Through Media Club, I established the opinion that texts can be debated, interpreted, and (mis)understood by any of us, and educators can encourage students to ask questions and sit with difficult texts to ultimately ask questions – of themselves and of the world. By conducting a shared inquiry,

guided by the will and provocations of the educator, I see Zoom Reading reaching its full potential through an ignorant pedagogy.

To conclude this project, I would like to return to the fact of its inception: “Media Literacy” has become a mandatory component of the English and Language Arts curricula in Ontario from Kindergarten to Grade Twelve. In my years of studying media education as an academic pursuit, I have repeatedly wondered if English and Language Arts are generous homes for a required media study in education. I wonder, what does a department of English (founded on a history of literature-based studies) do to/for the possibilities of multi-media literacies? Epistemologically, are media being suffocated by the historical traditions in English?

For instance, in reflecting on this research project I was struck by re-reading a moment when we were setting up the Xbox Kinect game: “we pushed all desks and chairs to the edges of the classroom to ensure the two dance performers could easily be “read” by the Xbox sensor in front of the SMARTBoard” (p. 91). In this moment, the medium is reading our bodies as we simultaneously read the text. Acting out a figurative M.C. Escher moment, increasingly our texts are reading us reading: our ads and suggested readings on websites are increasingly customized and based on our browsing history; mobile games are driven by in-app purchases encouraging us to buy upgrades just when we are struggling to pass the next level; Netflix offers us three new movies based on the film we just watched. More than ever, our relationship to our texts is symbiotic, and I wonder if the discipline of English – with a rich history in reading

words – can offer a generative home for thinking about these kinds of dynamic texts.

Conversely, I am curious about the ways that media might be changing the fields of English and Language Arts. What can media texts do to/for the possibilities of reading literature in English departments? How might readers reconceived of their relationship with print in light of new ontologies afforded by media 2.0? While we will have to wait to see how interactive and immersive media will affect the ways we conceptualize narratives and literacies in the future of educational paradigms, I have no doubts that our curricula and pedagogies can do better to address students' complex media landscapes right now. And for a more multi-dimensional and imaginative media approach, I will use Zoom Reading.

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Appendix A

Media Club Request Form

1

- Title: _____
- Type of Media: _____

2

- Title: _____
- Type of Media: _____

3

- Title: _____
- Type of Media: _____