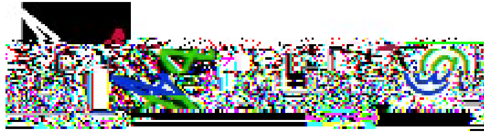

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The Changing Nature and Uses of Media Literacy

Professor Sonia Livingstone, Media@lse, London School of Economics and Political Science

THE CHANGING NATURE AND USES OF MEDIA LITERACY

Sonia Livingstone[1]

Abstract

The more that information and communication technologies become central to modern society, the more it is imperative to identify, and to manage the development of the skills and abilities required to use them. Within both academic and policy discourses, the concept of media literacy is being extended from its traditional focus on print and audiovisual media to encompass the internet and other new media. Hence, even though

Debating media literacy

The concept of media literacy, like that of literacy itself, has long proved contentious. The hugely-significant skills of reading and writing[2] have been augmented by the also-significant skill of 'reading' audiovisual material from the mid-twentieth century onwards. Today, as we witness a further major shift in information and communication technology (ICT), a new form of literacy is emerging, uneasily termed computer literacy, internet literacy or cyber-literacy. Most Western countries are making considerable efforts to develop specifically computer- and internet-based literacies among the population. As Hartley (2002: 136) observes, 'a literate workforce is a pre-condition for industrialised production, and the reproduction of a literate workforce requires large-scale state intervention to disseminate the appropriate type, content and level of literacy for this purpose'.

This new form of literacy, if it is indeed 'new', and if it is appropriately labelled 'literacy', is the focus of much discussion and, it seems, confusion in three distinct but interrelated domains:

- Among the public, as they find new skills required of them at work, in education and at home, the idea of computer literacy is much discussed, even if it is not labelled as such (Livingstone, 2002). What skills are required? How are new ICTs to be used? What new opportunities arise and how can they be maximised? What must one know to avoid dangers? How, where and by whom should children be taught? What are the implications for older, print-based literacy skills?
- In parallel with these everyday struggles, policy makers are debating the regulatory framework required to generate an ICT-literate population. While print literacy has long been a central target for education policy, the hitherto more marginal status of media literacy is now coming to the fore, following the convergence of print, audiovisual and computer-based media. In the UK, the

2 Luke (1989) carefully traces the spread of literacy in Europe from the first printing press in the mid fifteenth century, accessible only to the privileged few through to 'institutionalised mass literacy' by the eighteenth century, a development which required not only the spread of printed texts but also 'the birth of the school', the standardisation of written language, the construction of our now-familiar category of 'childhood' and the displacement of oral culture. Adopting a Foucauldian approach to the history of the idea of childhood in Europe, she argues that 'print, literacy, and education must be viewed as historically concomitant phenomena' (p.9), within which 'the child was an intrinsic component – an important object of attention – of these discourses since it was seen that the possibility for reform lay with the proper training of children' (p.44; c.f. Foucault, 1991). Kress likewise emphasises the relation between literacy and power: 'writing has been the most valued means of communication over the last few centuries – the one that has regulated access to social power in Western societies' (Kress, 1998: 59).

Communications Bill (2003) places an unprecedented responsibility on the new, converged media regulator 'to promote media literacy' in the population.[3]

- Within the academy, questions of literacy are once more central to the research agenda, drawing together a multidisciplinary mix of specialists in literacy (from linguistics, history), culture (cultural studies, anthropology, sociology), media education (media studies, education), human-computer-interaction (computer science, psychology), and new technologies (information science, social studies of technology) (c.f. Gurak, 2001; Kellner, 2002; Kubey, 1997; Poster, 2001; Tyner, 1998; and Warnick, 2002).

The more that ICT skills become vital to participation in modern society – in the workforce, the public sphere, social relations, education, culture – the more it is imperative to identify clearly the issues at stake. Is the literacy required for today's communication and information environment an extension of, or a radical break with, past traditions of knowledge and learning? Are we dealing with one or many literacies? History tells us that even the narrow and common-sense meaning of the term - 'being able to read and write' – masks a complex history of contestation over the power and authority to access, interpret and produce printed texts (Luke, 1989). Scope for contestation is magnified as the materiality of symbolic texts increasingly relies on audiovisual or computer-based technologies, inviting analysis of 'reading television' (Fiske and Hartley, 1978), 'reading the romance' (Radway, 1984), or the new skills of reading hypertext and other virtual environments. Many have argued further for a - perhaps metaphorical - extension of literacy to include reading culture (Hirsch, 1987) or even 'reading the world' (Freire and Macedo, 1987).

At this point, the term 'literacy' may need some defence. It is opaque. It is contested. It seems to apply to a past world of authoritative printed books[4] and it stigmatises

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clumsy – already we have computer literacy, cyber-literacy, internet literacy, network literacy, digital literacy, information literacy. It is unclear how these relate to, whether by contrast or through continuities with, such earlier concepts as print literacy, audiovisual literacy, critical literacy, visual literacy, oral literacy, cultural literacy or social literacy.[5]

Rather than become entangled in terminological disputes, and in order to facilitate dialogue between the academy and policy makers, this article will use the term 'media literacy' to cover the *use* of material either broadcast or published on electronic communications networks, though my focus will be on challenges posed

Bearing these themes in mind, this article addresses three central questions currently facing the public, policy-makers and academy: What is media literacy? How is media literacy changing? What are the uses of literacy?

Defining media literacy

When a single term is used across diverse domains, confusions are bound to arise.

laissez-faire attitude on the part of parents may support a more confident, even creative, use of the internet, although perhaps lacking in the guidance which ensures effective learning.[12] There is much to be learned here from television literacy, where it is clear that the social context in front of the screen (parental involvement, concurrent conversation, critical observation, etc) frames and directs the nature of the engagement with, and the potential learning from, what is shown on the screen (Buckingham, 2000; Livingstone, 1998; Silverstone, 1994; Singer and Singer, 2001).

Analysis

texts than *Star Trek*, *EastEnders* or *Elvis*, might be more readily recognised as literate, even literary (Jenkins, 1992).

The ability to analyse symbolic texts lies at the core of literacy, and so specification of the skills required for analysis has been the focus of media education curricula. Buckingham (1998), building on Bazalgette's (1999) work, outlines a six-fold scheme which teaches students to address questions of media agency (communicative purpose, institutional and production context, political economy), media categories (genres, forms, channels), media technologies (production process, access and use), media languages (codes and conventions), media audiences (modes of address, reception and consumption), and media representations (relation between text and reality). As an initial specification of the analytic competence required also for effective use of the new media, this is a valuable framework. However, when faced with newer media we must recognise that our analytic repertoire was established in relation to print, requiring considerable work even to extend it to encompass audiovisual media. Hence, in relation to both *MacBeth* and *The Simpsons*, children are taught to use literary terms to analyse texts – genre, narrative, authorial voice, modality, literary merit, etc.

But these reflect the legacy of a print-based literacy, and are far from timeless or universal forms of analysis. Some significant challenges arise in extending this scheme to new media. On the world wide web, it is even difficult to determine features most basic to any printed text – author, publisher, date of publication; and without an author, how does one judge authenticity? More generally, designers, technologists, educationalists, commercial producers, and academics lack an agreed language for characterising the emerging and shifting representations of the world wide web, let alone those of games, MUDs, IRC, etc. Methodologically, the lack of the equivalent of a shelf of books or video tapes, means that new media researchers must characterise the tex16.l.0-7.2(i)1d-5.9(e)5c7p(e)-6designe

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basis of critical literacy must alter, while teaching users to question the authority, objectivity or quality of mediated knowledge becomes ever more crucial.

Being able to evaluate content is thus no simple skill – though being taught to identify the

of, the commercial basis of the web – of branding, walled gardens, the commercial interests which structure search directories, etc? The desired nature and extent of critical literacy has yet to be thoroughly debated in policy contexts, and distinctions must be drawn between aesthetic, political/ideological and economic bases for evaluation.[19] More problematic still, as media literacy programmes work to identify online markers of expertise and trustworthiness, organisations of all kinds are ready to modify their website style and design so as to incorporate these and other features, thereby enhancing the credibility judgments of users.

Content creation

Not all definitions of media literacy include the requirement to create, to produce symbolic texts. Most often, people have access only to media products rather than the production process, being primarily receivers rather than senders of messages. Indeed, the history of print literacy shows that, while teaching the population to read was highly contentious, teaching people to write came much later, following yet a further struggle between the elitist interests of the establishment and the democratising trends of the enlightenment (Kintgen, et al, 1988). In audiovisual media education, a parallel struggle has been apparent, although often argued in terms of pedagogic effectiveness: children, it is claimed, attain a deeper understanding of the conventions and merits of professionally produced material if they have gained experience in content production themselves (Sefton-Green, 1999; Hobbs, 1998). To facilitate such direct experience, the media education movement has developed valuable links with community and alternative media organisations, adding both a creative and a politically radical flavour. This argument, for giving the tools for communication to the 'voiceless', has recently converged with the language of human rights, media education furthering the rights of self-expression and cultural participation.

The internet sets some challenges for a normative view of content production. In relation to the world wide web, a crucial opportunity is opened by now that one and the same technology can be used for both sending and receiving, with desktop publishing software (along with easy-to-use web creation software, digital cameras and webcams) putting professional expertise into the hands of everyone. However, while to adults the internet primarily means the world wide web, for children it means

19 Such debates will be fraught, reflecting the bifurcation between enlightenment (or administrative) and critical schools of thought (Lazarsfeld, 1941). Intriguingly, the view that media literacy should have an explicit political and ideological agenda has been endorsed across the political spectrum (Hobbs, 1998). A liberal pluralist view holds that media literacy can promote critical understanding, empowering individuals without promoting any one political agenda. The progressive position is that media literacy can be used to promote the particular values of social tolerance, public interest, local culture, etc. More radically, media literacy has been seen as a means of questioning textual authority, social hierarchy and dominant ideology. On the other hand, conservatives see media education as a preferable alternative to heavy-handed government regulation of the media industry.

frustrations produced by the computer interface will be eliminated (Isaacs and Walendowski, 2002).[22]

Such issues have greater salience for new technologies than for old. For the centuries during which literacy meant print literacy, the dependence of literacy on a specific medium was in many respects taken for granted, and we tend not to consider the particular ways in which the character of printed text shapes the abilities required to decode it. Nonetheless, being able to read and write requires a familiarity with a set of para-textual conventions whose historical and cultural specificity should be recognised. For example, the author (together with a biography or institutional affiliation), the publisher and the date of publication are all set out clearly at the beginning, and these are decoded in terms of cultural value, authority, being up to date, etc. The layout, including balance between words and images, sequencing of segments or chapters, use of contents page, subheadings, bibliography and index, must be interpreted appropriately. These textual conventions are paralleled by the literacy skills of readers. Psychological research on reading reveals the dependence of the interpretative strategies of the reader on the structure of the text – influencing visual scanning of the page, checking back and forth or across headings and following the narrative or logical structure of text segments (Coltheart, 1987).

In the audiovisual domain, television audience reception research also reveals parallels between the conventions of television programmes and viewers' decoding strategies. The soap opera viewer, for example, builds up an understanding of the characters, puzzles over the secrets, eagerly anticipates the cliff-hanger, guesses the outcome of a subplot, recalls when appropriate the significant events from past episodes, etc, all in accordance with the conventions of the genre (Livingstone, 1998).

From print to screen

The skills and conventions required to engage with the internet may or may not be new. As commentators are divided over whether or not the internet offers a radically new information and communication environment. Hence it remains an open question as to whether the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and create communication content is common to or different for the book, for television, for the internet?

If one takes the view that using computers simply requires a minimal technical proficiency (keyboard skills, clicking on hyperlinks), and that the internet offers 'old wine in new bottles' (as familiar contents are made accessible online), then literacy would neither be dependent on, or changed by, the technological shift from page to screen. Media literacy programmes to enable the population to access, analyse, evaluate and create content would therefore need little amendment as internet access spreads. But if, through its mediating role, ICT is seen to transform knowledge and culture, then this minimal conception of literacy is only the beginning of the story, and the challenges ahead will extend beyond the promotion of technical proficiency to reconsidering some deeply-entrenched notions of thinking, learning and authority.[23]

Technology enters this story as a key but ambiguous player. The future character of the internet is being shaped by today's social uses, these centring on a struggle for

Hypertext, for example, challenges print's long-established prioritisation of linear directionality, for hypertext 'offers different pathways to users… The extent of hypertext is unknowable because it lacks clear boundaries and is often multi-authored' (Snyder, 1998b: 126–7). What this means for users is that, although until now 'the conventions of reading, like those of writing, have grown out of the structure of sentences flowing into paragraphs, paragraphs flowing into pages, pages followed by other pages' (Burbules, 1998: 106), on the world wide web relations among elements are based primarily on bricolage[25] or juxtaposition rather than a linear logic: hence, 'hypertext seems to *add* dimensions of writing, and to that extent may encourage new practices of reading as well: ones that might prove more hospitable to alternative, non-traditional points of view and more inclusive of cultural difference' (Burbules, 1998: 107).

Kress (1998) analyses the turn to the visual in new media, arguing that not only are images becoming more dominant as a form of representation but that writing is undergoing a transformation in the direction of the visual, ever less organised according to syntactic hierarchy, arranged instead according to a rival logic of surface visual display.[26] Even the bewilderment which parents (but rarely children) may feel about the computer games their children play or when faced with a new computer and no comprehensible rule-book for getting started is seen as testifying to this 'literacy gap': today's children, it is argued, 'understand things in multiple, contingent, spatial structures rather than in serial and chronological orders' (Johnson-Eilola, 1998: 202-3).[27] Taken together, these are some of the changes Turkle (1995) analyses when she develops an overarching contrast between the aesthetics of the culture of calculation and the culture of simulation (see also Poster, 2001, on changing modes of information).

Learning depends on the relation between learners, forms of knowledge, and the structures and practices of the education system. It follows, from the above arguments, that not only might the internet facilitate new forms of representation and hence a new literacy, but this in turn might be opening up new ways of learning and

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25 Hartley (2002) contrasts bricolage with engineering, where the former 'requires pre-planning, submission to various laws of physics and the organisation of materials and resources prior to the act of assembly, bricolage refers to the creation of objects with materials to hand, re-using existing artifacts and incorporating bits and pieces'.

26 Images are no longer simply the illustrative accompaniment to the 'real' information conveyed through writing; rather images increasingly replace the narrative mode of expression with the mode of display, focusing attention, showing part-whole or other forms of organisation, communicating through font, colour, arrangement on the page, and so forth (Kress, 1998).

27 Hence, Johnson-Eilola (1998: 190) concludes that 'far from being isolated, neutral objects, computer interfaces play out a range of assumptions, authorisations, and challenges to literacy practices'. He pursues this theme by analysing some of the ways of thinking and communicating encouraged

so a new model of education.[28] For Tyner (1998: 8), 'the literacy of schooling, based on a hierarchical access to print literacy, is increasingly at odds with the kinds of constructivist practices necessary to accommodate the more diverse, interactive, and less linear media forms made available by digital technologies'. Similarly, Snyder (1998: 135) suggests that 'if teachers are prepared to transfer to students much of the responsibility for accessing, sequencing and deriving meaning from information, hypertext can provide an environment in which exploratory or discovery learning may flourish'. And Kellner (2002: 90) argues that 'in a period of dramatic technological and social change, education needs to cultivate a variety of new types of literacies to make education relevant to the demands of a new millennium'.

While it may be that the learning process is changing, it is much less clear that the content is also changing. Website design commonly encodes what Hall (1980) called the preferred or ideologically dominant reading (through such rhetorical strategies as frequently asked questions, recently asked questions, top ten lists, fact of the week, our favourites). Rarely does the world wide web invite children to judge for themselves the truth or value of the information it offers, moreover they rarely suggest any criteria with which to conduct an evaluation. And notwithstanding the vast array of online information from which to select, current use of the internet in schools continues to favour 'right answer' learning, (Loveless and Ellis, 2001). In short, both online, through the re-imposition of hierarchical print-based models of authoritative information, and offline, through the attempt to perpetuate tried-and-tested traditions of teaching, learning and assessment, there is a considerable counter-force holding back the socially and technologically-inspired moves towards a radical break in the history of literacy.

Hence, it could be argued that many of the literacy requirements now associated with the internet might, instead, be continuous with the literacies of past decades, even centuries. Much that is claimed to be intrinsically new to the internet – heterogeneity of sources, competing authorities, non-linear or visual forms of representation and so forth – has surely long applied to libraries, encyclopaedias, textbooks etc. And the dismay of parents and teachers in contemplating the activities of the younger generation is hardly the sign of a radical break with the past. On this more critical view, then, irrespective of how the technologies themselves are changing, the social uses of information technologies work to reproduce and reinforce traditional literacy

28 Studies of how children learn ICT skills suggest that children 'just do it', figuring it out intuitively through trial and error, testing out hunches, 'just mucking around', and by drawing where needed on informal 'teachers' (relatives, friends) (Smith and Curtin, 1998; Turkle, 1995). However, it remains hard to judge whether we are witnessing a broad shift away from learning information to learning how to find information 'just-in-time', from formal to informal learning environments and from learning through rules ('by the book') to 'learning by doing' (Johnson-Eilola, 1998).

never has been a personal attribute or ideologically inert “skill” simply to be “acquired” by individual persons... It is ideologically and politically charged – it can be used as a means

begin to see why the uses of literacy are rather less clear or consensual than the definition of literacy.[30]

A literate society is surely a society of knowledgeable, critical, engaged people who will demand channels for participating in and influencing cultural, political and social institutions – perhaps as part of a rational-critical public sphere, perhaps more conflictually. How can this be managed? And is it the case that 'authority about what is most worthwhile culturally and the means to get it have slipped away from the traditional gate-keepers and cultural transmitters – schools, teachers, universities, books, libraries' (Smith and Curtin, 1998: 225)?

At present in the UK, media literacy is of central concern to several government departments, necessarily so given the breadth of domains in which literacy matters. Yet as a result literacy becomes an issue vulnerable to any failures to 'join up' policy across departments. Hence, the Department of Trade and Industry is concerned to ensure both a technologically-sophisticated workforce and a demanding, responsive and flexible market of consumers; the Department of Education and Skills is charged with educating the population to the level of literacy or literacies deemed necessary by society; while it is the Department of Media, Culture and Sport which has the explicit remit of promoting media literacy. Add to this mix the Office of the E-envoy, hoping to use ICT improve citizenship participation and democracy (or, perhaps, to reduce the costs of information and service delivery), and the Home Office's concern with illegal media contents and services – addressed in part through public safety and awareness campaigns (e.g. The Task Force on Child Protection, 2003) and the challenge of developing and implementing policy for a media-literate population will be apparent. The costs of failure, however, will be equally spread, resulting in a new form of social exclusion – the so-called digital divide – which will also have cross-departmental consequences.

One key strategy, however, is to devolve responsibility for accessing and using media from the state to individual members of the public.[31] What was once – in the UK and other public service cultures - a matter of state regulation (restricting children's access to 'adult' content, ensuring clear demarcation between advertising and programmes and regulating sponsorship, rules for impartiality in the news,

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30 Interestingly, Hobbs (1998) seven great debates in media literacy fall more or less into debates over the uses of literacy and debates over the implementation of media literacy through the education system. Although the implementation of media policy is beyond the scope of this paper, policy to promote media literacy must include

specification of the contents of the schedule) is increasingly a matter of media literacy (parents apply appropriate technical or social controls over their children, viewers must become media literate in understanding commercial underpinning of programming, viewers must become discerning in distinguishing objective news from biased news, viewers must become selective and informed so they know how to find the programming they want). While this is defended primarily in relation to new media (and the supposed difficulty, or undesirability, of regulating these by national governments), one might speculate that once the public has become literate in these senses – self-governing in its media use – regulation can also be lifted from more traditional, nationally-based, public service media.[32]

In relation to new media, the same factors that make the media environment difficult to regulate nationally – as it becomes more complex, diversified, commercialised and globalised, including more potentially harmful contents – also make it difficult to regulate domestically, within the home. Such a strategy may be promoted as individual empowerment but clearly it enables the state to roll back its own responsibilithm2.3(ibil2(t)-6- t)-6.8(h)10.3(oug)-11.4(h)-0.5( )10.8(m)-6.2(any)8.7(or)-6.2(dinar)-6.2(y)8
programme, one must ask about the regulatory safeguards for those who, for whatever reason, fail to achieve a certain standard of media literacy.

Towards an agenda for promoting media literacy

Definitions are not required simply for clarity in the face of confusion. How media literacy is defined has consequences for the framing of a debate, the research agenda and policy initiatives. This paper has argued that, in theoretical terms, literacy concerns the historicallyiand culturally conditioned relationship among three processes: (i) the symboliciand material representation of knowledge, culture and 2(t)-alues;2.3(ibi()-6.2(ii))-6.2(t)-6.8(he dif)-6.8(f)-17.7(usion of)-17.7(int)-6.8(e)-0.5(r)-6.2(p)10.3(r)-
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have seen, this *relationship*

setting those who see literacy as democratising, empowering of ordinary people against those who see it as elitist, divisive, a source of inequality.

However, there is a considerable gap between a historically and culturally sensitive theory of media literacy and a practical, working definition which policy makers might implement. To the extent that practice falls short of theory, problems with policy will persist: no discussion of media literacy can escape the legacy of long-standing debates regarding knowledge, culture, equality, participation and value. Today's anxieties over the digital divide represent the latest steps in a long-standing struggle

broadly positive vision of media users - intrinsically motivated, striving after meaning, ready to learn and explore and socially connected, albeit impeded by various material and symbolic barriers. Further, research has usefully sought to embed thoroughly this account of the individual skills and competencies implicated in access, analysis, evaluation and content creation within the social contexts of use – domestic, workplace, educational, etc. This can offer clues as to where, when and why any general principles of media literacy will apply variably, depending on the individual, the medium, the domestic or educational context, the cultural setting and so forth.

One may be tempted to regard these four components of media literacy as a developmental sequence, ordered in terms of acquisition and complexity: access precedes and is simpler than analysis; analysis precedes evaluation; evaluation must surely precede and guide the creation of new content. But as curriculum designers know, this is too simple. Each component process supports advances in others: learning to create content helps one to analyse that produced professionally by others; skills in analysis and evaluation open the doors to new uses of the internet, expanding access;[34] and so forth. We must anticipate a non-linear, dynamic learning process across these components of media literacy.

In developing this skills-based approach to media literacy, I have sought to adapt what we know of print and audiovisual media literacy in order to identify how we might think about new forms of literacy in today's changing media environment. This has served to map out the research tasks and the issues for debate for research and policy communities alike.

Particularly, research is now needed to map what it is people are becoming literate in - the characteristics of the new media environment in terms of text, technology and cultural form for the representation of knowledge, the framing of entertainment and the conduct of communication. This must include a normative dimension – in relation to which aspects of the internet does one wish to promote media literacy and use, which are of lower priority, and for which should literacy help users avoid? In tandem with this mapping exercise, research is needed to investigate the actual skills and practices of new media users. What literacies are people developing, formally or informally, and how should these best be promoted, taught and evaluated?[35] A top-

34 There is some scope for discussion in how to draw the line between access and analysis. Having watched children (and their parents) type url's into search boxes, fail to bookmark favourite sites, misspell keywords in searching, ignore pop-ups offering to update software, and so forth, it is clear that an inadequate analysis of the nature of the world wide web can impede access to information (Livingstone and Bovill, 2001).

35 As present, research suggests that current levels of media literacy among the population are uneven (people are more or less skilled in different areas), inconsistent (people may apply their critical interpretative skills variably) and differential (some are more skilled than others). Add to this the tendency to over-claim (by individuals and, on occasion, the academy) how 'media savvy' people are, and it will be evident that attempts to measure levels of media literacy will be fraught (Livingstone and Thumim, 2003).

down definition of media literacy, developed from print and audiovisual media, while a useful guide for research and policy, should not pre-empt learning from users themselves.[36]

Interestingly, it seems that the arguments for access and analysis are less contentious (though no easier to implement) than are those for evaluation and content creation. Two as-yet-unresolved debates concern these aspects of media literacy. It is thus a priority to debate the role of critical literacy and critical evaluation in relation to shifting notions of quality, authority and standards. This must include specifying and legitimating appropriate bases of criticism – aesthetic, political, ideological and/or economic – and their relation to the values of those providing ICT resources and teaching literacy. Secondly, the importance of content creation to media literacy requires a stronger defence, for it is too easily dropped from less ambitious definitions of media literacy. Anchoring content creation within media literacy may in turn require further research to establish the relation between the reception and production of content in the new media environment, including clarification of the benefits – to learning, cultural expression and civic participation – and consideration of the best means of delivering these benefits.

These debates – over evaluation or critical literacy and over content creation - are surely the most crucial to the democratic agenda behindu t. and o2.7(-7(W)-36iv)8.9(i3Io)-11(v)4r

concerned the focus on the individual, raising questions of policy regarding the social and institutional uses of literacy, and it is on this that I shall end.

This issue is, for those of us in the UK debating the current Communications Bill, pertinently illustrated by the policy question, what does 'promoting media literacy' mean?[38] When hopes are expressed that media literacy will increase 'discernment' among media users, does this refer to a Leavisite fear of media harms, or to a policy for the future of public service (i.e. as chosen by discerning viewers rather than guaranteed by the state) (Jowell, 2003)? Is it, more narrowly, a matter of lubricating the media market by ensuring that consumers are sufficiently aware of the different products? Or does it reflect a recognition that media now carry the key information and culture of our society, making media literacy essential for citizenship? In other words, does empowering the viewers and users of today's diverse media mean anything beyond becoming a more selective consumer? If so, what? If not, why not?

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38 Consider the UK's Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2001) rationale for its welcome endorsement of critical viewing skills: the purpose of thinking critically about media, it argues, is so as 'to take greater responsibility for viewing choices and the use of electronic media', in order to achieve 'the most beneficial ends for both individual and

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