Making a Scene:
Producing Media Literacy Narratives in Canada

by

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Abstract

In a highly mediated world, understanding how we communicate becomes an essential skill of citizenship. In Canadian secondary schools this is often taught as media literacy, either as a new stand-alone subject or integrated within the existing curriculum. As a school subject media literacy is particularly difficult to define and document because it continually changes to keep pace with technological innovation. Combining aspects of genealogy and scene-based analysis helps attend to the spatial and temporal formations of media literacy, thus bringing principles of circulation, exchange, and ephemerality into view.

The first part of this dissertation considers the construction of media literacy as a secondary school subject in Canada. I problematize the dominance of a single historical narrative, where Ontario has come to stand in for the rest of the country, by tracing that narrative’s genealogical threads any by considering how it has travelled both nationally and internationally. I argue that a multitude of narratives have been obscured by this singular version of events.

In the second part of the dissertation I study one such alternative narrative in British Columbia, using the sensitizing concept of “scene” to better understand how school subjects are produced. The various places, actors, organizations and activities producing a media literacy scene in BC do not neatly fit into the dominant national narrative. I discuss some of the ways in which school subjects have been studies, and then advance a model of scene-based analysis as a more flexible, generative research framework for studying social phenomena.
I argue that media literacy is more than just a collection of canonical theories and methods. Its specific formation is contingent upon and shaped by forces both inside and outside of institutional learning, influenced by national and transnational trends, as well as locally specific conditions and relations.
Acknowledgments

The worst thing you can ask a graduate student is how their dissertation is coming along, because it reminds them that the silly thing still isn’t finished. I have been very fortunate to have friends, family, and colleagues who kept asking me this question.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

The paradoxical task of placing ourselves into history is that we may, collectively through our actions in the present, poke holes in the causality that organizes the constructions of our ‘selves.’ And, in that process, there is the possibility of opening new systems for our collective and individual lives. (Popkewitz 2001:175)

Sometimes our most prevalent clichés are simply truths we would rather ignore. To say that we live in mediated times, for example, is both to point to the obvious conditions of 21st century life and to remind ourselves that such common knowledge remains remarkable. Surrounded as we are by media forms, both ancient and contemporary, the tasks of recognizing and understanding media’s influence over our lives are essential in every age, and to every generation. The umbrella term “media studies” may be used to take up the issues of technological innovations, their social uses, as well as the regulations and policies shaping our access to and interactions with them. Translating and interpreting these issues for classroom instruction – turning them into a school subject – have been at the core of media studies for decades, as the primary goal of studying media seems to be educating young people about the media and its possible influences. Media studies have, over the past 30 years, generated a new school subject, “media literacy,” turning social science and humanities research into classroom pedagogy, one set of film clips at a time.

Beyond mere instrumentalist claims (e.g. the notion that media skills are required to work in a new “knowledge economy”), and beyond the reactionary stance of the media inoculation model (which imagines literacy as a method of protecting young people from the media’s negative

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1 The subject has been given various names over the years, including media literacy, media studies, or simply media. In Canada, the term media literacy is most common.
influence), is there a coherent framework for understanding media literacy that can inform pedagogical practice, both inside schools and within the broader educational community? Given media’s extraordinary influence on our lives, such a framework might begin by recognizing media as an intrinsic element of citizenship – as an essential mode of engaging with and understanding broader ideas of identity, pleasure, and meaning making. “Media” has become such an inclusive term that it now transcends the realm of commercial/broadcast communication: understanding contemporary media is as much about food, clothing, art, beauty, and happiness as it is about TV, Hollywood films, Facebook, and journalism. Our lives are becoming increasingly connected to new technologies around us, making it more and more difficult to consider media as a category that is somehow distinct from our bodies, identities, and social relations. As such, there is a need for new approaches to studying media, as well as new forms of media literacy/literacies.

Central to the development of new media literacies is the recognition of the multiple channels, languages, and tools used for contemporary communication. When the dominant communication technology was the printed word, we used the same tool to learn history in school as we did to conduct business in the corporate world, to share our intimate secrets with a loved one, or to better understand the events of the day through newspapers and books. Developing the skill of print literacy was therefore an essential component of public education, as this skill was just as critical to employment training as it was to citizenship, personal growth, and cultural expression. Today, it is difficult to identify one single dominant communication technology: have film, television, computers, or cellphones replaced print literacy, or is it some combination of these multiple media forms? In a world of electronic media (what Marshall McLuhan called the Global Village), there might not be one single tool that plays the role formerly played by the written/printed word. For this reason, it is worth thinking of our world as one where multiple
literacies need to be taught and learned. These multiple literacies, spanning a wide range of
technological devices and practices, can be grouped together as a whole and considered simply
as media literacy. Being literate in the 21st century may involve competencies that resemble
older, more familiar patterns of reading/writing, but the day-to-day uses of such literacies
continue to change. As our relationship to media continues to transform and mutate, traditional
notions of literacy should be seen as the necessarily incomplete ideas they have always been,
highly relevant in an age of new media, yet worth re-visiting and re-examining in any era. How
this multiple/media literacy gets understood, taught and learned in schools, however, has been
and continues to be a fairly complex affair. In Canada and around the world, thinking about
modern media and the practices of becoming literate with media have varied a great deal. How
we happen to frame the concepts of “the media,” as well as “literacy” itself, will necessarily
shape the school subject (media literacy) and the broader cultural conversations around the
subject’s most pressing issues.

This dissertation argues for a greater understanding of media literacy’s many genealogical
roots/routes in Canada by considering the dominance of one particular historical narrative over
others, and by offering a case study of the subject in British Columbia. Analyzing the multiple
and overlapping histories of media literacy – both nationally and globally – I illustrate the ways
in which a tremendous spectrum of activity and thought risks being obscured, and often
marginalized, by hegemonic narratives currently circulating through formal sites of education
and research. Better understanding of how some practices get labeled as media literacy, and why,
and by whom, will hopefully allow educators to draw upon a much greater variety of resources
and ideas when engaging with their students.
As a set of questions and concerns, media literacy has existed in Canada (in one form or another) for several decades. Each generation seems to find its own need to bring media literacy to the forefront, highlighting the urgency of “taking the media seriously”. At present, education researchers working in the field of media are being asked to comment on everything from cyber-bullying to sexting, from the changing nature of privacy to debates around violent video games. Although the rhetoric of Web 2.0 is often thinly veiled advertising copy for those who stand to profit from social media use, Canadians in the 21st century do access the Internet from a growing number of platforms, and for a growing number of purposes. From education and health care, to artistic expression and democratic activism, we are weaving more and more media tools and techniques into the fabric of ordinary experience. For this reason, becoming “literate” in the technological languages defining our lives is a necessary task, as the alternative – remaining illiterate and thus unable to make sense of our surroundings – places significant limits on what we can do and who we can become in society. This helps to explain the central importance of literacy/literacies within public education, where young people’s development involves both specific practical skills (learning how to read and write) and broad long-term goals (teaching them why reading and writing are important). As Hoechsmann and Sefton-Green argue, even though “there is a tendency to over state (sic) the case and imagine that young people didn’t do any writing before the advent of blogging or podcasting,” there is certainly no doubt that “access to the means of production and, even more importantly, to control of distribution, and the fracturing of the mass audience into niche markets, has created an intense period of media-making and communication by hitherto excluded and marginalised young people” (2006:188). Thinking about media environments is a necessary task for teachers, it is argued, because the young learners in our classrooms are seen to be occupying and exploring these mediated spaces at all levels of their existence. Moreover, as Sefton-Green writes, “we tend to regard young
people as vulnerable subjects,” and as a result a great deal of education research has focused on “showing how young people can be susceptible to media culture” (2006:282). He goes on to argue, however, that “a salient point of difference between research on child and adult audiences is attention to how the young media consumer or user is positioned as a learner,” and as such, “the power relationship between texts and audience is constructed in pedagogic terms” (2006:282). We all inhabit the technological media environments of the 21st century, yet somehow only young people are seen as vulnerable to, shaped by, and inexorably intertwined with modern media. Teaching media literacy is therefore something that we (adults) should do, and learning about the media is what they (young people) simply must do.

At a certain point in the past 30 years, the project of media literacy took on additional urgency, both in the general cultural conversations around “the media,” and in education circles more specifically. Certain media forms had been popular among young people for decades, but at a particular moment in the 1980s there was suddenly grave concern about what these young people might be learning from such technologies. Writing on the history of knowledge and disciplines, Popkewitz (2001) gives an interesting example of how “things” can suddenly become “data,” noting that the pyramids in Egypt did not become objects of European inquiry until the late 18th century; until they became “facts,” they were merely “stones in the desert”. It is worth considering, in a similar manner, when and why “media” became a subject of inquiry in Western education. Tools of human communication – channels and languages that mediate the flow of information – have existed for a very long time. So what happened in the 1980s, in Canada and elsewhere, to suddenly turn these everyday technologies into objects requiring critical study and teaching? One possible explanation is that it wasn’t until the 1980s that educators truly believed that young learners had become competent with these media forms, matching and even surpassing the teacher’s own knowledge with these tools. When we all simply went to the movie
theatre together, there was no great urgency to teach critical film literacy; as kids and teenagers became more voracious consumers, producers, and targets of television messages, a discourse emerged among some educators to discuss (and fret over) these increasingly sophisticated media users. But in the 1980s, the world was being populated with youth that would come to be known as “digital natives” – young people born and raised in the 20th century media environment, fluent in media language, familiar with the terrain, able to move freely through the dense information forests springing up around us (Prensky 2001).

The idea of the digital native is not without its critics, in part because it tends to position parents and teachers as digital “immigrants”: this is their territory, and we are merely the new arrivals trying to make sense of it. The digital native discourse also assumes that young learners are somehow ideally suited to investigating media environments, as if they are natural inhabitants of these spaces. Consumption and production, of course, are not the same as thoughtful introspection and structural critique. What young people do with media – in the classroom and elsewhere – is undoubtedly a useful element in learning about media, but it may not, in and of itself, constitute the same forms of learning that exist in formal education. Rather than seeing all media use as the inevitable and most important first step toward critical engagement with media, some scholars argue that we should begin by considering how and where media use occurs. As Sefton-Green, Nixon and Erstad argue, “young people gain most of their experience and knowledge in relation to digital technologies outside the formal institutions of knowledge building” (2009:121 italics in original). But why would this necessarily be true of students, and not of teachers, administrators, parents, scholars, etc.? Formal, institutional sites of education are one space – among many – where digital media are discussed in society. This is partly because teachers and students are eager to discuss something meaningful in their own private lives, but it is also because various voices in society have suggested or even demanded that digital literacies
get taken up in these spaces. As I outline in subsequent chapters, the entire range of educational spaces in society is worth studying, as informal sites have often been symbiotically tied to formal sites of teaching and learning. Nevertheless, formal classroom learning and the specific school subjects that constitute curricula remain important elements in a broader discourse of media literacy, and not merely because they are the spaces where teachers interact with the so-called digital natives. The specific tools used by young people continue to change, but the larger, long-term scope of public education is not in and of itself rewritten each time young learners get their hands on a new technology.

The newness of contemporary communication technologies demands an expanded concept of literacy, but scholarship in the area of media literacy also draws attention to critical debates and oversights concerning more traditional understandings of literacy as a concept. Rather than imagining literacy as a type of competency – something that a learner can have or acquire – a number of scholars argue that literacy is better understood as an ongoing process, a discursive becoming or negotiation within language (Gee 1990; Knobel 1999). While such a redefinition of literacy is especially appealing for those working with contemporary electronic communication media, it is equally useful when considering print literacy, as it emphasizes the learner’s own subjective position within educational processes. Similar to the Freirian tradition of radical and critical pedagogy (Freire 1970; Kincheloe 2004), some educators and scholars view media literacy as a challenge to more traditional models of teaching and learning, allowing for and even encouraging marked shifts in power in the classroom. There is no reason to assume that all teachers come into the classroom with an advanced fluency in a relatively young technical language, nor is there reason to view traditionally formal modes of expression (essay writing, for example) as evidence of greater competency with a more advanced literacy. So long as literacy is understood as a bankable, measurable quantity, or as a particular knowledge that must be taught
and learned, new forms of media literacy may bring with them the unquestioned baggage of a highly conservative, often oppressive pedagogical mode. Taking media literacy seriously therefore offers the chance to disrupt and challenge such uncritical pedagogies by bringing attention to theories and knowledges that might otherwise remain marginal within education.

As many formal institutions and spaces of education continue to function within a conservative paradigm of literacy, media literacy initiatives have a hard time finding receptive hosts in some jurisdictions. Scholars studying education’s ideological nature have argued that, on the whole, formal sites of institutional schooling tend to be fairly resistant to sudden change (Apple 2004; Giroux 1988). This relative conservatism within schooling is both its strength and its weakness; it is as slow to embrace good ideas, as it is to embrace bad ones. Successful efforts to include media literacy in official curriculum documents in Canada have tended to use this institutional slowness to their advantage (Lee 1997; Namita 2010). Rather than introducing new school subjects, advocacy groups such as Ontario’s Association for Media Literacy (AML) and the British Columbia Association of Media Educators (BCAME) have worked within existing curricular categories, making small but important advances incrementally. While some critics worry that these concessions to an institution’s conservatism are counter-productive to the very outcomes sought by media literacy (Jhally and Lewis 1998, for example), others recognize the strategic necessity of working from within education, rather than trying to overhaul it from the outside (New London Group 1996).

One of the effects of the incremental advocacy initiatives within education has been the emergence of a sustained institutional narrative regarding media literacy and how it has entered formal pedagogical discourse. Where media literacy has been included within curriculum, for example, there is a trail of official documents to record how and when media literacy gained a
kind of institutional legitimacy. There are curriculum documents themselves, and the related
documents dealing with learning outcomes and assessment measures; there are professional
organizations within school boards (English and Social Studies, in particular) that look to take up
media literacy in their own local contexts; there are newsletters and web portals maintained by
advocacy groups, whose members may work in both formal and informal sites of teaching; there
are summer seminars and additional qualification courses for in-service teachers. Coupled with
the online archives now available to any citizen with a computer, the histories of individual
school subjects are more public than ever. Subjects such as media literacy exist in public
archives, as well as in classroom practices and research documents. The term “media literacy,”
then, refers to both the specific school subject (institutional, legitimized, and documented) and
the broader discourse of the discipline or field within a kind of public educational imaginary (our
collective understanding of a concept, including the debates summarized above), not unlike the
terms Math and English. A media literacy teacher has an understanding of the term, as does the
parent concerned with their child’s use of social media tools. To research what media literacy is
and how it emerged as a school subject in Canada, it is therefore necessary to trace the
institutional narrative found in education’s archive, and to study the histories of media literacy as
discourse. Writing about the history of English within education, for example, Robert Morgan
argues that subjects are their histories, and that while a specific school subject may seem to be a
clear, self-defining body of knowledge, it is actually “a residue of some of its historical
appearances, a condensation of various discourses only partially grasped when their historicity,
their material conditions of actualization have been severed” (1987:47). The efforts of
individuals and advocacy groups are more than mere footnotes in the history of media literacy as
a movement: they are the genealogical threads forming the history of media literacy as a subject.
It is therefore unsurprising that the educational jurisdictions around the world where media literacy has developed within institutional confines are the jurisdictions with the most well documented histories of the subject itself. Where media literacy remains relatively marginalized in the school curriculum, we should expect incomplete and threadbare narratives. While the idea of media literacy (and, importantly, the pedagogical practices of media literacy) may thrive in these spaces, the official archive will be unable to generate a consistent and sustained narrative. It is precisely this gap that I believe demands greater attention from education research, as it signals an overlooked area of inquiry within the histories of school subjects. Subjects and their histories, while inextricably bound up with one another, are not confined to ministry archives; they exist in individual classrooms and community halls; they circulate in schoolyards and cafeterias, in teachers’ lounges and university seminars; they evolve and shift at film festivals and public lectures, hockey games and political debates. Education’s institutional archive can provide such a glut of historical data as to obscure these alternative histories. The result is that it may be far easier to study the most well documented examples, which produces more records for the archive, and thus further legitimates the institutional authority generating these documents.

In the case of media literacy and its history in Canada, an Ontario narrative has become the national narrative, as evidenced by the interchangeability of the two within education research. Authors around the world point to Canada as a global leader in the field of media literacy, yet the focus is consistently on a single province (Pungente 1989; Bazalgette 1997; Lee 1997; Hart 1998; McKendy 1998; Considine 2002; Taylor 2002; Lealand 2009). In her introduction to a special issue of the Canadian Journal of Educational Communication, an issue entirely focused on media education, Kennedy describes Ontario as the “national leader” in media literacy, adding that the province is a “recognized leader internationally” (1993:2). In terms of visibility within the official curriculum, Ontario is undoubtedly a great success story: media literacy has
featured prominently in the English curriculum since the late 1980s. In the introduction to her 2010 doctoral dissertation, Yoko Namita claims that media literacy is now in a “second phase in countries like Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia,” adding that “The Canadian experience of media education or integrating media literacy into K-12 school curriculum across the country is sustained in a national narrative” (2010:3). Citing both John Pungente (1996) and the Media Awareness Network, she claims that “In Canada, the definition of media literacy presented by the Ontario Ministry is widely accepted” (2010:8). The Ontario media literacy curriculum documents have even been used overseas, including a 1992 translation into Japanese (Lee 1997, Pungente 1993).

This widely held belief in Ontario as pioneer and leader has subsequently generated two decades’ worth of institutional evidence that media literacy is thriving in Ontario schools, creating an archival perpetual motion machine, wherein scholarly research contributes to ministry documents, which, in turn confirms the scholars’ suspicion that a subject is being taken seriously. A starting point for my own doctoral research was the realization that in countless books and articles, I was reading the same handful of historical anecdotes, ministry reports, and pedagogical framings of how “the media” works. Rather than dismissing this Ontario media literacy narrative, I wondered why faculties of education, professional teaching organizations, and government ministries produced this particular version/vision of media literacy as the Canadian story. How had this narrative been shaped by both cultural factors unique to Canada, as well as by global political and economic discourses prevalent in recent decades? And what are the effects of privileging this narrative as the only story worth telling? Understanding the conditions that produced a singular history of a subject requires that we seek out alternative histories, forgotten paths and practices within the dominant narrative, as well as theoretical
frameworks that create the space for multiple histories to coexist in an institution such as public education.

Within media education research in Canada, the hegemony of the Ontario narrative has been reinforced, in part, by the somewhat limited scope of media literacy research. I believe the paucity of studies across disciplines, school subjects, or provincial/regional boundaries, has greatly constrained our ability to consider media literacy in a broader context. McKendy’s (1998) M.Ed. thesis advocates for additional media literacy work in BC, but uses existing resources (and the scholarly histories informing them) from Ontario exclusively. Similarly, both Namita (2010) and Lee’s (1997) doctoral dissertations do an excellent job of chronicling the history of media literacy in Ontario (and the AML’s advocacy role, in particular), without really considering the subject’s history elsewhere. While Namita’s case study in British Columbia examines the subject’s status among teachers, the genealogical strands she examines are nearly identical to those found in Lee’s study of the Ontario curriculum. Curiously, both dissertations characterize media literacy as peripheral, misunderstood, and struggling for attention or even survival within education. This ongoing belief that media literacy is an outsider subject is certainly reflected, in many ways, in the daily functioning of public school boards and faculties of education, but I do question whether it is accurate to say that media literacy itself remains largely invisible within a broader public imaginary. After researching across provinces and cities, and comparing media literacy in multiple educational spaces, I no longer see a subject on the margins (in any real sense of the word). I see a set of theories and practices, thematically connected and coherent, being both used and re-imagined in classrooms (and outside of them) all across the country.

It is possible that media literacy gets taken up as a marginal school subject because of its newness within education, or because it continues to thrive in countries and regions which
perceive themselves as marginal when contrasted with large, influential neighbours. In Canada, we may position and define ourselves relative to both the United States and Great Britain, and/or we may position our own local sense of place to various centres of power and influence (Toronto, in particular). Mapping alternative histories does not make the Ontario history any less relevant or exceptional, but it does generate a greater body of knowledge, theory, and practice, creating a richer history of media literacy that is more inclusive in scale and scope. As more provincial ministries and individual school boards take media literacy seriously, the resources available to them – and upon which they can develop their own media literacy programs – should reflect the range of practices and policies that currently exists in Canada. By over-emphasizing one particular genealogical strand in the history of Canadian media literacy, and indeed allowing it to stand in as the Canadian narrative, education scholars may overlook significant and innovative contributions to the field from other sources and sites. This dissertation will interrupt the idea of a singular narrative in the history of Canadian media literacy, and argue for an alternative mode of conceptualizing, studying, and discussing school subjects.

1.1 Canadian Media Literacy: Genealogies of a Young Subject

While histories of Canadian media literacy in specific jurisdictions have already been written, including Lee’s (1997) and Namita’s (2010) dissertations, I believe a genealogical analysis of the subject is necessary to uncover alternate practices, forgotten initiatives, and new possibilities. Since one particular historical narrative (that of the AML in Ontario) has effectively become the only history, critical historical research is needed to interrogate the production and circulation of this narrative. Drawing on Foucauldian methods (particularly the complementary uses of archaeology and genealogy for historical analysis), in the first part of this dissertation I consider how media literacy has been produced as a unique subject in Canadian education, and how it exceeds both the school subject labelled “media literacy” and the very boundaries of formal
schooling itself. Using genealogical lines of inquiry to examine a subject’s history, I am attempting what Foucault would consider the “problematisation” of media literacy in Canada today. Problematisation, as Green and Cormack write, is “a process which involves the hitching together of different concerns into a problem requiring attention to which various programmes of reform are articulated” (2008:260 italics in original). In Foucauldian methodologies then, “doing” genealogical work begins with an emphasis on “a particular problem,” and then proceeds to understand this problem “in its historical dimension”; it asks “how this problem turned out to be the way we perceive it today” (Tamboukou 1999:213). The particular problem I’m addressing in the first part of this dissertation is the incomplete history of media literacy in Canada, and its ongoing effect on how the subject gets taken up within faculties of education, how it circulates through teaching organizations and community groups, and how it gets taught to young people. What is it about media that presents itself as a problem for education in the first place, and why has literacy been positioned as a solution to this problem? Each educational discipline has its own history: some are relatively young, while others span several centuries. Researching the genealogy of a school subject is not necessarily a critique of current practices or policies, but it can be a generative tool for understanding what is taught today, and thus imagining what might be taught tomorrow. Genealogical methods ask: what are the historical dimensions of media literacy in Canada, and how is the production of the subject relevant for educators and researchers today?

Without diminishing the efforts of those involved in the dominant Canadian narrative, I want to problematize the production of this history. Well before I began fieldwork for my case study, I suspected that alternate constructions and understandings of media literacy must exist across Canada: the common discourse appearing in the literature was too similar, too local, too grounded in highly specific pedagogical practice. Therefore, rather than simply documenting the
broader history of Canadian media literacy, I researched media literacy’s history in one particular place (Vancouver, BC) in order to cast light on the multiple strands of what might otherwise appear to be a unified discursive formation. I hope to show some of the implications for those who teach media literacy in schools: by recognizing a far greater spectrum of activity, the school subject as a whole is enlarged and enriched. My goal in conducting this research has also been to challenge some of the ways in which education researchers understand and study school subjects themselves. Documented histories of knowledge are essential to the field of education – they tell teachers what is and what is not pedagogically relevant at a given time, and they orient researchers toward new lines of inquiry. Understanding what is meant by terms such as Math, Science, and Literature requires a familiarity with canonical texts, theories and practices, on the one hand, as well as an understanding of how fields of knowledge themselves are produced on the other. Foucault is therefore a popular choice for education researchers, including myself. Without directly addressing the field of education itself at any considerable length, he provides a set of methodological tools and techniques ideally suited to the study of knowledge. This research therefore begins as a genealogical survey of a young school subject in Canadian education, in order to illustrate how all subjects are produced by their histories. This dissertation offers a detailed study of one subject in one Canadian city, but more importantly it is a call for a better understanding of how and where teaching and learning take place in society.

In the age of the so-called digital native, it has become a cliché to speak of young people as media literate or media savvy; as media users, creators, consumers, and producers; as potential victims or targets of surveillance online. For this genealogy of Canadian media literacy, I start from the basic assumption that young people, just like the rest of us, are using various new media technologies in their daily lives, and that this basic fact alone merits some form of attention and scholarship. What interests me far more than the banal fact of media use is the way in which
overlapping discourses around youth media use have come to form a subject, variously known as media literacy or media education. (The turf war over labeling and branding this subject will be addressed in the next chapter; for now, it suffices to say that the points of intersection between the two labels are far more illustrative than the ongoing argument over which label is to be used in any particular instance.) Everyday media use (by teachers and by learners) is often produced by (and within the context of) a school subject known in Canada as media literacy, but it has also contributed to the production of this subject itself. What is it about young people and media that compelled parents, researchers, educators, and elected officials across Canada and around the world to champion a wholly new school subject? How has this subject emerged in recent history, and why does it vary from one jurisdiction to another? Doing critical research in education means considering how teaching and learning produce both individuals and communities; considering the various ways in which young people construct identity and meaning from a range of sources around them; better understanding education as it is today, and imagining what it could be in the future. This kind of critical research, argue LeCompte and Preissle, “seeks to illuminate how the distribution of power, privileges, resources, status, authority, leadership, and decision making affects society, culture, technology, and science itself”; more importantly, they write, “it seeks to identify contradictions between actual and perceived conditions of material life, using them as leverage for initiating change in existing power asymmetries” (1993:26).

Media literacy is more than just a label for a block of time in the classroom: it is a site of citizenship, creative expression, and identity formation. Researching media literacy compels me to recognize and provide space for criticality, within my own practice and for those around me. As I describe below, this process has led me to select a handful of specific methodologies that are well suited to this study, and indeed to this field.
1.2 Go West: Seeking Scenes in the Lower Mainland

Across Canada, media literacy has emerged and developed in a variety of educational spaces, including but certainly not limited to English classrooms in the public school system. Hochsmann and Poyntz (2008), for example, consider the role of community organizations and arts collectives in Montreal and Vancouver’s media literacy histories. These spaces combine media and education in dynamic and sometimes unconventional ways, challenging scholars to broaden their research scope and look beyond traditional understandings of the classroom, the teacher, and the student. Media skills are being taught in a multitude of spaces, and the same young people deemed illiterate within sites of formal education may develop highly advanced literacies from online worlds, graphic novels, and other forms of new media (Steinkuehler 2008; Bitz 2009; Sabeti 2011). Whether in English or Social Studies classrooms, in the computer lab, the library, or the art studio, teachers and students are engaging with media, learning to consume and produce in a variety of thoughtful manners. The Ontario narrative, which has foregrounded more traditional, institutional spaces of teaching, helps to turn media literacy into a kind of universal project, accessible to all young people, but only through particular frameworks. Alternative models, such as those found in Quebec, Alberta, and British Columbia, often focus their energies on specific youth populations, such as working-class poor, First Nations and LGBT teens. While some provinces are also following the Ontario model in seeking the formal inclusion of media literacy in public school curricula, the local, regional origins of media literacy vary greatly across Canada, resulting in a far broader range of theories, definitions, questions and practices than can be found in Ontario’s narrative of media literacy history.

In developing the research questions for this dissertation work, I therefore sought a Canadian case study that differed from the Ontario model. I wanted to find a province or territory that was developing its own media literacy curriculum, ideally in partnership with a host subject other
than English. This methodological approach allowed me to map the more informal spaces contributing to a media literacy narrative, and to compare two sets of curriculum documents, to note similarities and differences that may emerge from regional and cultural specificity. Quite simply, I wanted to better understand the ways in which the history of media literacy practice in one city or province contributes to and constructs dominant narratives within education as a whole, from the drafting of curriculum documents, to the emergence of media-centred community and professional organizations, to classroom practice itself. Within the dominant narrative of Ontario media literacy, key figures and their influence are not only central to curriculum development, but to the more widespread culture of media literacy itself. Educators such as Barry Duncan helped to shape and define media literacy in the minds of teachers, students, researchers, activists, artists, and administrators, both within Ontario and around the world. By tracing media literacy’s history in another province, I intended to shed light on alternative processes involved in creating and cultivating a field of knowledge within education. As a generative tool for research, this kind of specific case study allowed me to hold one set of ideas and historical events next to another, to identify and map differences, and ultimately to generate new frameworks for understanding media literacy in Canada.

For this and other reasons I outline in subsequent chapters, I selected the Lower Mainland of British Columbia as the primary research site for my dissertation work. Vancouver is an ideal city for studying alternative histories of Canadian media literacy, as it is home to a large and vibrant community of filmmakers and media professionals. This presence of skilled labour and production infrastructure has allowed a number of community and not-for-profit organizations to include media studies in their mandates. The creative capacity in these networks and organizations, combined with the energies of various political and social movements founded and sustained in the Lower Mainland, produces a distinctive foundation for any number of media
literacy initiatives. As I argue in more detail below, the structures and conditions of collaboration made possible in Vancouver may not be wholly unique (either within Canada or internationally), but they serve to illustrate a critical shortcoming in traditional approaches to studying school subjects and their histories. Early on in my research programme, I considered a number of Canadian cities, looking for distance from (and ideally a complex relationship to) the Toronto region, coupled with a sufficiently large population and education system to allow for historical, in-depth study. Vancouver’s identity as a left leaning, relatively progressive urban centre is certainly contestable (and indeed highly contested), but it is undoubtedly home to a uniquely West-Coast culture of resistance, protest, artistic ingenuity, and political activism. Finally, my own experience with the city (I completed my MA in Communication at Simon Fraser University) has provided me with a group of useful contacts, both academic and otherwise. These pre-existing relationships have proven invaluable in conducting research over the past few years, providing a foundation for participant and network selection for this current study.

Considering BC’s Lower Mainland as a particular case study also helped me to define certain categorical boundaries and limits for researching and writing this dissertation. First, it necessarily generated a spatial/jurisdictional boundary within which I could focus my attention, preventing me from taking on too much or wandering too far astray in a single project. Second, and more broadly, this approach provided a particular set of tools for conducting the actual research; as Yin writes, “the case study as a research strategy comprises an all-encompassing method – with the logic of design incorporating specific approaches to data collection and to data analysis” (1994:13). Third and finally, using Vancouver and the Lower Mainland as a case study allowed me to focus additional attention on the newness of the processes generating media literacy as a school subject in Canadian education. As a young city, positioned on the geographic margins yet wholly within the networked, cosmopolitan centre of Canadian culture, Vancouver illustrates the
ways in which subjects – be they institutional, individual, or other – are always in the process of inventing and re-inventing themselves. I believe that in order to better understand the process of curriculum development, dissemination, and final use, it has been useful to focus on a specific case within education, and in particular to focus on a relatively young example of the larger phenomenon in question. Studying media literacy within Vancouver therefore allowed me to explore some of the broader processes of subject formation, without losing sight of my core research questions, which consider the ways in which media literacy in particular has developed and traveled across Canadian education.

An important consequence of considering Vancouver’s media literacy history is that it has ultimately helped me to challenge the more dominant narrative found in Ontario. While explicit comparisons of the two regions and their histories of media literacy may be of interest for particular points of inquiry, the intent of my case study is not to simply contrast two narratives in order to spot similarities and differences. Rather than treating the differences between two provincial histories of media literacy as a matter of value, success, or failure, I further consider the ways in which one history continues to shape the development of the other, in order to illustrate the ways in which a more dominant narrative has, on occasion, inserted itself into the unique narrative of BC’s Lower Mainland. Initial interviews with key informants in British Columbia, for example, brought to light the practice of inviting experts from Toronto to participate in major media literacy events, such as the summer series run in conjunction with the BC Teachers’ Federation. The perceived leadership of Ontario media educators has led educators in BC to look elsewhere for expertise and authority with respect to media literacy, mirroring what Jean-Claude Couture calls the “culture of insufficiency” at work in education – contradictory forces pulling educators in many directions at once, always producing a feeling of inadequacy and guilt (1997:152). Addressing this issue, one prominent media educator in BC
simply remarks, “that was sort of a sore point” (Blake, interview with Kari Dehli and the author, 2011).

For summer series organizers working within (yet struggling against) a history of one-off events in BC, I suspect there is an appeal in attracting a marquee speaker – someone recognizable from Canadian or international literature on teaching media literacy. At the same time, experienced and highly qualified media educators from across the Lower Mainland are denied the opportunity to act as recognizable figures within their own community. The impression one gets is that the experts are elsewhere – even the seasoned media literacy veterans in BC are still learning, by comparison. This elevates the teachers, administrators, and activists in Ontario to guru status (problematic in its own right) while downplaying the very real efforts of their BC counterparts. Discussing these visitors from out East, at least two interview subjects showed a clear frustration with the subsequent impact felt in and around Vancouver. As one of these subjects observes, the summer institutes created a “weird tension” between the provinces, which persists even today (Poyntz, interview with Kari Dehli and the author, 2011). According to Neil Andersen of the AML, however, the lure of the “exotic” may bring more people into a field like media literacy. In an interview with Alice Lee, Andersen argued that bringing in guest speakers such as Len Masterman helped to make “the domestic production of media education look more important and glamorous” (Lee 1997:231). While the interview subjects recognize, to varying degrees, the expertise of these Ontario educators and the value of bringing them to Vancouver, they consider the history of the “outsider” to be part of the BC narrative itself: the advancement of media literacy in the Lower Mainland is inextricably linked, in some ways more than others, to media literacy in Ontario.
Whereas histories of the Ontario media literacy narrative look to the sustained efforts of particular organizations and actors (the AML, Barry Duncan and John Pungente, for example), the history of media literacy in BC’s Lower Mainland unfolds as a kind of non-linear, rhizomatic affiliation of disparate people and places. Lacking both the temporal and spatial permanence that may be found in more conventional notions of community, group, and even the more recent uses of the term network, media literacy in and around Vancouver requires a more elastic framing metaphor. Rather than developing projects of media literacy within institutional spaces of education (and the types of sustained partnerships they engender), Vancouver’s media literacy history may be better understood through Will Straw’s concept of a “scene”. Straw uses this term to identify “particular clusters of social and cultural activity without specifying the nature of the boundaries which circumscribe them,” noting how scenes “may be distinguished according to their location […], the genre of cultural production which gives them coherence […], or the loosely defined social activity around which they take shape” (2004:412). In many of the same ways that a musical scene may be found in one or more nightclubs, or in the specific cultural venues of an individual neighbourhood, or centred on a small group of influential artists and promoters, I argue that a media literacy scene has developed in Vancouver.

Using this conceptual framework not only helped to identify key figures and informants for my research, it also illustrates certain structural limitations in the various histories of media literacy in better-documented jurisdictions such as Ontario. Straw’s multiple (1991; 2002; 2004) re-framings of the scene concept provide a useful vocabulary when considering the alternative and over-looked practices that I believe warrant additional attention in education research. While Foucault’s particular uses of the terms archaeology and genealogy provide a useful methodological framework for the historical aspects of my project as a whole, I believe this third foundational (and sensitizing) concept – Straw’s use of the concept “scene” – adds an important
structuring clarity to the research I have conducted. Straw (1991) first used scene to capture the wide range of cultural exchanges that produce and sustain popular music at both a local and global level: specific musical scenes, such as Punk or Heavy Metal, are generated through the activities of fans, the spaces of particular nightclubs, and the existing cultural pathways (record shops, college radio stations, etc.) found in cities around the world. Rather than simply studying the major texts of a musical genre – songs, albums, concerts – Straw proposed a research model focused on the circulation of creative energy essential to music itself. Blurring the conventional boundaries between music producers and music consumers, Straw argues that everyone participating in a music scene is essential to its production.

As Straw uses the term, “scene” functions as a useful research tool, specifically what Herbert Blumer (1954) calls a “sensitizing concept”; these are the foundational concepts that work to structure and frame empirical research, “sensitizing” the researcher to particular activities and phenomena they may encounter in the field. As I develop the term in chapter four, “scene” refers to a set of practices, people, places, ideas, and actions; scenes are both the unseen pathways through which creative cultural energies circulate in everyday life, and the conceptual map we form to make these pathways meaningful. As a sensitizing concept underpinning research, “scene” orients me to and makes me aware of the great multitude of actors and objects producing Canadian media literacy. From this case study of a particular scene, one which may not fit the more traditional definition of the term as it originated within cultural studies, I argue that scene-based analysis is a methodology that both complements and expands upon Foucauldian genealogy. Thinking about the sensitizing concepts that guide our research, and learning to see scenes in everyday life, researchers may shift their gaze from the products of culture to the social forces that make culture meaningful. It is this use of the term “scene” that makes it such a powerful, generative research tool across a range of disciplines: the point is not simply to focus
our gaze on a scene (a unit of analysis in and of itself, found primarily in the more traditional cultural realms of music, dance, art, etc.), but to approach a wider range of cultural activities—including education—through the *lens* of “scene”. In this way, a scene is best understood not as a methodological tool *per se*, but rather as one of Blumer’s “sensitizing concepts,” underpinning the research process at all stages.

“Scene” is not the only such concept available for a research project such as mine. Similar terms, such as network, subculture, tribe, or ecology would seem to serve a similar function: they help focus the researcher’s gaze on the social implications of a particular phenomenon. Likewise, education research—drawing on the Birmingham tradition of Paul Willis and others—has considered the idea of “critical interactionism,” which combines “micro-sociological” analysis with structuralist interpretation (Wilson 2006:11). What makes “scene” a unique research concept, however, is the way in which it functions as a meso-level object of analysis, existing in the space between the experiential and the structural, without necessarily succumbing to its own ontological weight in the way that “network” has over the past two decades. Where “network” has, metonymically, come to stand in for the whole of social behaviour in an Internet age, “scene” remains local, grounded, and often hidden from plain view. Networks tend to evoke semi-stable connections and categories, while scenes unfold and unravel all around us, often without visible infrastructure or institutional legitimation. Thinking about how scenes function in actual places (unlike the virtual or highly mediated spaces of many contemporary networks) can provide researchers with a valuable insight into how social activities are produced, where, and by whom. That said, scenes can and do include online practices and places; as I argue in chapter four, scenes sensitize the researcher to a more inclusive and expansive understanding of *space*, complicating our understanding of virtuality and materiality. There are physical *places* (bedrooms, classrooms, community halls, etc.) where one encounters various virtual *spaces*
“scene” provides a productive way of considering all of these elements at once, without necessarily sorting the world into actors and networks. Where “network” sees technologies and users, “scene” encourages a rich sociology of action, while maintaining a vital humanistic core.

This sensitizing concept is therefore an excellent match for the specific research actions demanded by Foucauldian genealogy. Not only do scenes tend to generate a unique archive of texts and artefacts (concert posters, fanzines, and YouTube mash-ups, in the case of a music scene), they are constituted and sustained by specific practices: in their daily events and activities, scenes reveal the ephemeral connections and contingent forces that make cultural life possible. Researching the media literacy scene in Vancouver, for instance, it quickly became clear that traditional, institutional sites of education are only one small part of the bigger picture. For this research, “the archive” is not simply a collection of curriculum documents produced by provincial ministries of education or other formal educational institutions. Rather, it is the (mostly forgotten) professional development summer series held at the BCTF offices in the early 2000s; it is the workshop programmes developed by staff at the Pacific Cinémateque (established, in part, to maintain certain funding streams in a time of government cutbacks); it is the video library of the Access to Media Education Society, which introduces young people to the creative possibilities of visual storytelling; it is the brief annual confluence of alternative creative energies found at Media Democracy Day. While these sites may feature as footnotes in a more traditional history of Canadian media literacy, a scene-based genealogical analysis of the school subject foregrounds them, in order to upset the conventional wisdom that media literacy is what occurs in schools, between teachers and students. Rather than privileging particular nodal figures in the analysis of a network, studying scenes provides the genealogist with a rich,
generative tool for researching how education is experienced and practiced in ordinary, everyday contexts.

An additional benefit of scene-based analysis, and its particular orientation toward space and time, is that in thinking through methodological questions of data collection within a scene, I am compelled to research how media literacy has been produced relationally, and not linearly. Straw’s work on scenes provides a theoretical foundation for considering the social spaces and relations producing meaningful practice and interaction, but it does not fully provide a methodological vocabulary for conducting research. Identifying and documenting the activities constituting a scene remains a murky endeavor. A number of established research practices are of use, however, providing much needed structure to the study I have conducted. Key informant interviews, for example, were selected by a process of network selection, which LeCompte and Preissle describe as a strategy “in which each successive participant or group is named by a preceding group or individual,” with the researcher collecting “a selection of respondent groups or individuals on the basis of participant referrals.” They add that this strategy is particularly useful “in situations where the individuals investigated are scattered throughout populations and form no naturally bounded, common groups” (1993:73-4). This absence of “natural” boundaries characterizing the media literacy scene in Vancouver highlights the methodological usefulness of scene-based analysis. An awareness of (and sensitivity toward) the spatial and temporal conditions producing a scene can help researchers to identify and uncover the pathways and relationships which make the scene meaningful, both to participants and to those of us attempting to study social phenomena. Participant referrals not only connected me with additional interview subjects, they also allowed me to better map the lines of circulation and exchange which constitute media literacy as a subject. As a clearer illustration of the structures
underlying and producing media literacy in Vancouver, this emerging network of key informants has been essential to data collection, and to better understanding what this data might mean.

The key informant interviews in this project are not, however, meant to reflect any kind of representative sample of media educators in BC. Rather, their insights help me to better map the pathways of cultural activity that give rise to media literacy in and around the province. My goal in conducting interviews was not simply to illustrate one particular set of activities and practices, but rather to better grasp some of the overarching social phenomena producing the specific instances available to me at this time and in this place. I am not trying to generalize about teachers in BC, nor about media educators as a group. Instead, I am looking at the social and cultural practices that exist across a range of sites, in order to understand how each specific site of media literacy is both produced by, and helps to produce, the larger discourse of media literacy in BC. Interviews in this study are meant to help me learn more about practices, and the ways of doing media literacy, rather than just about the interview subjects (as experts, or as “ordinary” teachers) themselves. The scene-based analysis I develop here treats interviews in a manner not methodologically dissimilar from that found in Dorothy Smith’s institutional ethnographies. As DeVault and McCoy describe Smith’s approach, researchers should “aim not for categorical descriptions, but for analyses that trace how the people living in these different circumstances are drawn into a common set of organizational processes” (2006:32). They go on to argue that research interviews are more than just glimpses into individual perspectives and activities. Researchers should use interview accounts “not as windows on the informants’ inner experience,” but rather as a way of revealing what Smith (1996) calls the “relations of ruling” that work to “shape local experiences” (ibid.:15). As I explore in chapters four and six, it is precisely this shaping of local experiences that interests me when considering historical narratives of media literacy. The key informants involved in this research have helped me
uncover both instances of such shaping, as well as some of the patterns that signal the influence of larger social forces and figures.

Analyzing the data generated from this research, therefore, demands an approach that is fundamentally inductive; as Merriam writes, inductive analysis is helpful when there is “a lack of theory,” or when “existing theory fails to adequately explain a phenomenon,” as it allows the researcher to “build toward a theory from observations and intuitive understandings gained in the field” (1998:7). The inductive nature of scene-based analysis is one of its greatest strengths. Such an approach to coding and analysis begins by identifying clusters of data that can provide an initial set of categories. As I started to think of media literacy in BC as a kind of scene, I realized that I was looking at a variety of spaces in and around Vancouver. Rather than seeing a single historical narrative unfolding across different eras or “waves,” I saw an interconnected map of a city, where some crossroads and intersections were well trodden, while others remained mostly unexplored. I looked at the two major research universities in Vancouver as nexuses of both academic and artistic knowledge. I saw that the idea of “informal” educational spaces is far more complex and nuanced than it may seem – often the only thing two informal educational spaces have in common is that they are not schools. Using these categories to code the bulk of my data set then allowed me to further refine the coding process, generating a second set of clusters and categories. Some documents and events were explicitly intended to develop a school subject, media literacy, while others had a primary focus on social justice, policy change, youth expression, etc. A number of youth organizations in BC work with film and video (as opposed to other media forms that may be at the heart of contemporary media literacy programs in schools), but the institutional characteristics of different organizations greatly impacts the kinds of work they are able to pursue. As I argue in chapter six, funding structures can shape mission statements; the availability of technical equipment and expertise can privilege certain types of
production work (narrative, documentary, public service announcement, etc.) over others; institutional collaborations (temporary or long-term) create the networks and alliances that often lead to future projects and proposals.

This form of data analysis, particularly suited to qualitative case studies in social research, can be thought of as “an emergent product of a process of gradual induction” (Lofland and Lofland 1995:181 italics in original). With a somewhat bounded and coherent data set for analysis (limited through research design and the inductive process of feedback demanded by scene-based analysis, and not just by my own pre-defined analytical categories), I was free to code and analyze inductively, seeking the relational patterns that emerged from the data corpus itself. This approach to coding allowed me to disaggregate data, and to reorganize and group data together in new patterns that emerged (Lofland & Lofland 1995:187). Data never speak for themselves, so I have sought research strategies to help me make sense of the data being generated in as objective a manner as can be expected from this kind of social research. Through scene-based analysis I had several opportunities during the research process to reflect on my foundational assumptions, my objects of analysis, my codes and categories, and even my strategies for making meaning out of my findings.

Despite my efforts to generate data in a manner best suited to open, inductive analysis, I recognize the potential pitfalls of using my own familiarity with Canadian media literacy in the coding phase of my research. It is only from reading multiple accounts of the AML-Ontario narrative that I can identify key terms that have travelled through Canadian education; it is only by immersing myself in curricular documents that I can trace the institutional pathways of subject material in schools; and it is only through an ongoing consideration of how cultural scenes form (in the abstract) that I can recognize the creative energies producing and sustaining a
Vancouver media literacy scene. Tempering my own knowledge and expectation with an approach to data analysis that seeks spontaneity, serendipity, and unseen/invisible pathways of connection has often been difficult, but I believe that “scene,” as a sensitizing concept, has forced me to reflect on methodology at every stage of research. In their guide to studying social spaces, Lofland and Lofland summarize this type of challenge as follows:

You get from data, topics, and questions, on the one side, to answers or propositions, on the other, through intensive immersion in the data, allowing your data to interact with your intuition and sensibilities as these latter are informed by your knowledge of topics and questions. (1995:184 italics in original)

Other research tools and practices may have led me to neater, more contained results, but such tools did not seem appropriate for the kinds of questions that continue to animate my research efforts.

1.3 Research Questions

Before proceeding with my dissertation research, I organized my various concerns and interests into the following research questions, each of which I have annotated and expanded upon for clarification. I have returned to these questions throughout the research and writing process, to remember what it was that first compelled me to study media literacy in Vancouver.

1. How has media literacy been constructed as a school subject, taken up within educational spaces and institutions, and understood across teaching communities in Canadian education?

This question addresses what I identify as a fundamental gap in the existing literature on Canadian media literacy. I trace the dominant historical narrative of media literacy as articulated in scholarly research, official curriculum documents, as well as in faculties of education and through professional teaching organizations. I was interested in identifying which theories and
approaches are included in these dominant narratives, which recur in multiple sites, and which remain absent or invisible. Rather than conducting a kind of empirical content analysis of this enormous body of data, I looked for sustained patterns, connections and nodal figures/groups. Which ideas have exercised the greatest influence on the development of the subject itself? Which authors and texts form the canon when media literacy is taught, as a formal school subject or otherwise? How might these ideas have traveled from one space to another, and have certain evangelical texts or figures exercised extraordinary influence in forming media literacy’s historical narrative as a result of such movement and interaction? How has this historical narrative produced a kind of “schooling-centred” orientation to media literacy in various jurisdictions, one that focuses (and indeed limits) its attention to sites of formal and institutional classroom learning? I addressed this first research question through an extended literature review, which in turn informed the interviews with key informants and teachers in and around Vancouver.

2. In what ways has a national narrative of media literacy become conflated with a Toronto/Ontario narrative; what are the institutional practices of education scholarship and administration that continue to generate such (potentially hegemonic) narratives; and how might an analysis of BC’s history of media literacy help to better understand the processes at work in education across Canada?

This question seeks to expand upon the idea of institutional feedback mechanisms that I introduced in this chapter. An educational jurisdiction such as Toronto has pursued media literacy initiatives in a particular manner, which in turn has generated a more significant body of archival knowledge than can be found elsewhere in Canada. The history of a subject, then, may be easier to trace when the institutional legitimacy of public record is always and already
producing official discourse. I studied the histories of media literacy and curriculum in both BC and Ontario, to better understand the ways in which institutional and organizational factors help to construct a school subject in multiple ways. The specific content of different media literacy curricula may be less influential over the longer term than the conditions under which these documents are produced, revised and circulated, and taken up (or not) by teachers and students.

3. How has a unique set of media literacy practices developed in Vancouver, and what do these structures and conditions of practice contribute to a broader understanding of school subjects and their histories within education research?

My final research question attempts to link a case study of media literacy’s history in Vancouver with an analysis of the more conventional methodologies used to explore similar histories in other educational spaces. In considering Vancouver as a site of creative production, I use Straw’s notion of scenes to understand how disparate actors and spaces can create highly generative and sustained networks, particularly in a field such as media literacy. I contrast the more modernist conception of education, which, I argue, permeates many of the formal institutions at the core of the Ontario narrative (school boards, ministries, universities, etc.) with a pedagogical framework that can include spaces and practices that produce the Vancouver media literacy scene. I believe this conceptual framework is an excellent match for the kinds of studies undertaken in a field such as Education, where examining the social often ends up directing our gaze in several directions all at once. “In contrast to quantitative research, which takes apart a phenomenon to examine component parts (which become the variables of the study),” Merriam argues, “qualitative research can reveal how all the parts work together to form a whole” (1998:6). I believe this research helps to address existing gaps in Canadian education research, and will provide a useful theoretical framework with which to pursue future research projects.
For the purposes of focusing and containing this research, I decided against classroom observation in this study. I felt that focusing on classroom teaching and learning would help to reinforce the very “school-centred” orientation of media literacy that I am attempting to disrupt. Ultimately, I am more interested in the pedagogical and political efforts attempting to produce a young school subject (and, in some cases, duplicating these individual practices without any greater ambition to achieve subject status) than I am with its lived, experienced history in classrooms; both are co-constitutive of one another, but I believe it is the former which requires additional attention and reflection. Critical ethnographies of various school subjects produce an important image of Canadian education, but there remains much to be uncovered in the historical narrative of media literacy in British Columbia. I believe the methodological program of inquiry I used in this study is well suited to the research questions I set out to answer, and has provided me with both the tools for data collection and the conceptual framework for analyzing the results. Focusing on media literacy in a single region (Vancouver and the BC Lower Mainland) provides a contained case study, ideally suited to qualitative research in education. As Merriam writes of case studies, “the interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation” (1998:19). This nicely mirrors the thinking that went into originally formulating my research questions. It is not the daily practices of media literacy in Canadian education in and of themselves that compel me to do this research. Rather, it is the network of historical, contingent, socially constructed forces producing media literacy (both in theory and in practice) that intrigues me. As Merriam argues, case studies illustrate the unique characteristics of the case itself. It is precisely these unique characteristics of media literacy in BC that have helped sensitize me to other critical questions and concerns in this dissertation.
The first major phase of research conducted for this dissertation was done in conjunction with Prof. Kari Dehli’s SSHRC-funded project, “Contested Subjects”. As a research assistant on this three-year project, I had the opportunity to work with Prof. Dehli in conducting several interviews in Ontario and BC. The interview components of my doctoral research were included under the umbrella of her ethics protocol, allowing me to ask my own questions of participants. Prof. Dehli and I conducted four of the interviews included in this dissertation; she alone conducted two of the interviews I refer to here: those with Charles Ungerleider and David Buckingham. The remaining interviews conducted in Vancouver are unique to my dissertation research, and were conducted by me alone, though still under the umbrella ethics protocol of Prof. Dehli’s SSHRC research. These interviews fall into two categories: preliminary key informant interviews (providing an overview of the informant’s own work in media literacy, and their general historical knowledge of the subject’s history), and follow-up interviews with a handful of informants who were essential to the generation and growth of the BC media literacy scene. (The interview protocol used in this research is included in Appendix A.) I interviewed representatives from four organizations (discussed in chapter six), as well as two individuals involved in the early days of media literacy in BC. As a part of the interview protocol, I asked participants to list their partners and collaborators, and in a few cases this helped introduce me to some of the key figures identified in this dissertation. I had hoped to speak with more of the media organizations in BC identified by other participants (including Video In Video Out [VIVO], Out in Schools, and Reel 2 Real, and at least one faculty member at Emily Carr University of Art and Design), but not everyone responded to my requests for interviews². The

² As a general principle, I stopped at three unanswered email requests. Whether or not identifying myself as a researcher from the University of Toronto played any role in these ‘missed connections’ is unknown, but anecdotal evidence suggests this may have been a factor in one or two cases.
Youth Digital Media Ecologies in Canada project (ydme.ca), led by Stuart Poyntz and Michael Hoechsmann, also helped to provide a list of individuals and organization to contact. For those familiar with the BC media literacy scene, I would like to acknowledge any notable omissions or absences in this research (and there are several). I was able to cast my net widely, so to speak, but a number of them got away.

While the interview subjects all consented to being identified, I have, in a handful of places, decided to protect their identities through the use of pseudonyms. While tenured professors and retired teachers may feel secure in freely discussing their relationships with funding organizations, government offices, and even their own colleagues, the highly precarious nature of BC’s media literacy scene compels me to keep certain statements (controversial in some instances, potentially damaging within certain professional spheres in others) anonymous within this text. While I do not think that this dissertation would attract the attention of individuals making future hiring or funding decisions, I nevertheless feel that I have a responsibility to keep certain kinds of statements semi-abstracted from the people and organizations that continue to work in the various fields of teaching and learning. The handful of pseudonyms I have selected for this dissertation is listed in Appendix B, along with brief summaries.

I have divided this dissertation into seven chapters, including this introduction and the conclusion. Chapter two reviews several key theoretical strands of media literacy’s history, from the work of Stuart Hall to David Buckingham, from Marshall McLuhan to James Paul Gee. Each of these strands has helped to produce the school subject of media literacy in Canada, as much through their points of overlap as through the disagreements and debates they foster. Chapter three outlines the methodological uses of Foucauldian genealogy in this dissertation, and presents much of media literacy’s Canadian history through such a framework. I consider some
of the ways in which a historical narrative has been produced, and how this singular narrative continues to make possible the conditions for future media literacy work. In chapter four, I analyze two concepts at the heart of this dissertation: school subjects, and scenes. I begin chapter four with an unpacking and interrogation of how school subjects emerge and develop, and then present the sensitizing concept “scene,” which I believe is particularly useful when studying complex social formations such as school subjects.

Chapter five recounts some of the history of media literacy in BC, with a particular emphasis on the kinds of organizations and institutions that have played such a leading role in the school subject’s history in Ontario. I look at the accomplishments (and shortcomings) of these efforts in BC, considering the consequences of the divergences between the two provinces and their experiences with media literacy. This sets up the analysis in chapter six, which applies scene-based analysis to media literacy in BC. I consider several of the spaces and places where media literacy occurs in BC, well outside of schools. This analysis helps to re-frame the history of a school subject, positioning the efforts of teachers and institutions in BC as only one part of a much larger, more complex web of social interactions and exchanges. Finally, in my conclusion I summarize some of the methodological uses of scene-based analysis, arguing that while particularly well suited to studying school subjects, the concept of scene can be constructively applied across the social sciences and humanities. I then point to an additional series of research questions arising from this study, some of which I hope to address in future work.
Chapter 2
Changing the Channel: A Brief History of Media Literacy and its Influences

*Education must always concentrate its resources at the point of major information intake. But from what sources do growing minds nowadays acquire most factual data and how much critical awareness is conferred at these points? It’s a commentary on our extreme cultural lag that when we think of criticism or information flow we still use only the concept of book culture, namely, how much trust can be reposed in the words of the message. Yet the bias of each medium of communication is far more distorting than the deliberate lie.* (Marshall McLuhan 1969:119)

This chapter traces the contours of media literacy, both as a field of inquiry in and of itself, and as a body of teachable knowledge within education. While I include several major strands within media literacy’s multiple histories, I am focusing my efforts on those figures and ideas most prominent in the documented narrative of the subject within Canada. Rather than looking across disciplines and schools of thought for points of overlap, I am (semi-chronologically) mapping the influence of particular theories as they travel across sites of Canadian education. Reviewing the literature on media literacy has been an ongoing part of my work as a graduate student, and in this chapter I present several major themes that have provided the framework for my research.

First, I briefly summarize some of the arguments given for taking media seriously in education—that is, the rationale behind the development of the subject itself. I look at the canonical figures and theories that have most directly shaped the development of media literacy, here in Canada and around the world.

Throughout much of this literature, two terms – media literacy and media education – are often used interchangeably. For some, the terms represent quite different pedagogical projects. For
others, they are merely different names for the very same thing; as Buckingham notes of the various terms (he includes media studies and “moving image literacy”), “each of them represents basically an attempt to make this more palatable in policy terms” (interview with Kari Dehli, 2012). For my purposes, I have tried to distinguish between the two as follows: the broader tradition of analyzing “the media,” whether in formal sites of education or elsewhere, has formed the discipline of media studies; the general development of new teaching materials, taking up many of the same questions and practices of media studies, has formed a cluster of educational activities known as media education; and the specific applications of media education, particularly when developed in conjunction with host subjects such as English, form a school subject known as media literacy. I fully recognize that in many of the sources I summarize in this chapter the meanings of the various terms do not directly correspond to what I outline here. But in Canadian history (which I unpack and critique in this dissertation), media literacy has tended to refer to the school subject in formal sites of education, whereas media education has tended to speak to a broader collection of discourses and debates, both in formal and informal sites of learning.

I am hardly the first to attempt such a clarification, but I feel it is critical to outline my definitions and make clear what separation exists between the discipline and the subject. (Analyzing the genealogical roots of media studies – in Canada or elsewhere – is a far bigger project than I can undertake in this dissertation, but I would recommend that readers look to Bennett, Kendall and McDougall’s 2011 book, After the Media: Culture and Identity in the 21st Century for one such analysis.) Tracing the histories of media studies – that is, of how “the media” has been taken up in universities, K-12 classrooms, and the broader public vernacular – is not an entirely dissimilar project from what I am presenting here, as there are many points of overlap. But it is media literacy, specifically, that interests me here, and I have done my best to
frame potentially ambiguous uses of the term through the distinction I set out at this early stage of the dissertation.

2.1 From Leavis to Hall: Taking Popular Culture Seriously

While it may be impossible (and indeed fruitless) to pinpoint an exact moment when scholars and educators first began to take modern popular culture “seriously,” a common narrative about and within the field of cultural studies begins with the work of British scholar F. R. Leavis. In Buckingham’s account, Leavis’s “inoculation model” – an effort to protect young people from the perceived harmfulness of popular culture – represents the first of three major phases in the development of British media studies (each of which is critical to the emergence of Canadian media literacy), with the Birmingham School and the work of Len Masterman representing phases two and three, respectively (2003:7). In their 1933 book “Culture and Environment: The Training of Critical Awareness,” Leavis and Thompson helped to bring popular culture into the British classroom, but only as a kind of cautionary example: in their view, students must be taught to see the ephemerality and depthlessness of contemporary texts, in contrast to the enduring importance of Great books, High art, and Real culture. Leavis provided a kind of curricular model for teachers to use in their classrooms, giving the “how” and “why” of cultural study. While Leavis’s work may have encouraged a wide range of pedagogical practices, the enduring legacy of his work was the widespread belief that contemporary popular culture posed a threat, to be resolutely countered by the conservative energies of education. Many decades later, the essentializing and elitist effects of this inoculation model continue to be felt in many classrooms around the world. The idea that formal education functions as an arbiter of cultural preference persists, whether in popular texts from the so-called “culture wars” (Allan Bloom’s 1987 The Closing of the American Mind, for example) or Neil Postman’s efforts to paint
television as the root of all evil (including his influential 1985 work, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*).

Many 20th century scholars continued to engage with questions of culture and media, notably the Frankfurt School tradition of critical inquiry and Marshall McLuhan’s explorations of electronic media. In their 1947 work, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer argue that the massification of modern society has changed the nature of culture itself; instead of individual artists creating works of art, we now have corporations and governments mass-producing cultural texts whose primary function is hegemonic, rather than aesthetic. This new “culture industry” tends to “atomise” citizens, isolating us from one another, and thus making us highly susceptible to the new mass media forms of propaganda (Adorno & Horkheimer 1972:120-21).

The Frankfurt School critique of media brought a Marxist, economic perspective to the study of popular culture, alerting us to the structural forces involved in media production and consumption. As I discuss below, this institutional analysis has not always been at the centre of media literacy discourses, but it has been highly influential on many of the media studies scholars involved in the creation and dissemination of such discourses.

Similarly, the critical technology studies approach of two Canadian scholars – Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan – has exercised a major influence on both media studies scholars and media literacy teachers, here in Canada and around the world. The theories and approaches developed by Innis and McLuhan (along with Eric Havelock, Walter Ong, and others) have been referred to as the “Toronto School” of media studies (de Kerckhove 1989; Watson, Blondheim & Watson 2007), signaling their comparable historical impact alongside the Frankfurt and Birmingham Schools. Innis investigated the unique “bias” that each communication medium exerts in society, which helped firmly establish the idea (now central in Canadian media literacy discourses) that
media are never *neutral* channels of communication (Innis 1951). Technologies make some actions easier, while discouraging others; they reinforce some forms of power, and they undermine others; they embody the values of their creators, and they help establish new patterns of behaviour in their users. Building on this work, McLuhan argued that each new technology creates a wholly new balance among human senses, altering the way that each of us perceives the world around us (McLuhan 1962). After centuries of print literacy (which encouraged us to organize our world in highly linear, sequential patterns), we are now living in a world of electronic media, which re-tribalize us and return us to a kind of acoustic space, similar to (but certainly not the same as) the older world of oral culture. McLuhan’s provocative ideas, which he happily disseminated through a range of modern media forms, influenced a generation of young teachers and students, including a number of key figures within the history of Canadian media literacy. While many have now forgotten the major theories of the Toronto School (or have badly misinterpreted them to suit specific needs in the Internet age), their role in the history of media studies and media literacy remains significant, and worth re-examining in more detail.

My own introduction to studying media was essentially an intersection of the three major schools of thought presented in this chapter: the Frankfurt School’s critical Marxist analysis of political economy and the “culture industry”; the Birmingham School’s research into media’s ideological function in our daily lives; and the Toronto School’s philosophy of technology, which brought linguistic analysis to the technologies of human communication. Even today, I find these three canonical bodies of literature on the outlines of first-year Communication and Cultural Studies courses across Canada. What are the media and how do they work; who controls the media and why does this matter; what role do media play in identity-formation and meaning-making? These questions are at the heart of media studies more broadly, and of media literacy initiatives all around the world. In various countries and educational jurisdictions, one school of thought may
play a more dominant role than the others, but the foundational questions and their points of intersection remain as relevant today as when they were first explored.

In the history of Canadian media literacy, the work of British cultural studies scholars has been especially influential. What Buckingham calls the second major phase in the history of British media studies is illustrative of this work, as it signals a shift in the scope of cultural studies as a field. This shift began with the groundwork provided by Williams (1958, 1961) and Hoggart (1959), and carries through to the work of what is now referred to as the Birmingham School. Buckingham argues that by the late 1950s the word culture no longer referred simply to “a fixed set of privileged artefacts – an approved ‘canon’ of literary texts,” but rather to “a whole way of life,” adding that it was now the expression of culture, “from the exalted to the everyday,” that interested scholars (2003:7). Recognizing that the quotidian experiences of culture were as worthy of research as any particular (and often rarefied) example of cultural production or expression, a number of authors began to critique the institutional limitations of the Leavisian tradition. Writing on popular culture, Williams notes that “the contempt for many of these activities […] is a mark of the observers’ limits, not those of the activities themselves,” adding that “neglect of the extraordinary popularity of many of these activities” is often due to “partisan selection” (1958:309). Over the past several decades, media educators have often neglected extraordinarily popular media forms (comic books, video games, social media, etc.). While many in the academy continue to overlook or marginalize particular cultural activities according to their own “partisan selections,” the general trend since the mid-20th century has been toward a broader definition of what constitutes culture, and of what kinds of cultural activity are worthy of research or classroom discussion.
This move, from the dry consideration of culture as an entity in and of itself, to investigations of culture as a lived set of practices and struggles, led to a number of canonical case studies, many of which were clustered around the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University. Among the most well-known and commonly cited scholars from this era is Stuart Hall, who, prior to moving to Birmingham, co-authored the 1964 book, *The Popular Arts*, in which he and Paddy Whannel helped to popularize some of the approaches and ideas developed by Williams and Hoggart. Mirroring what Williams wrote about “partisan selection,” Hall and Whannel argue that, “the struggle between what is good and worthwhile and what is shoddy and debased is not a struggle against the modern forms of communication but a conflict within these media” (1964:15 italics mine). Hall and Whannel further advanced the argument that popular sites of cultural consumption are essential tools for meaning making and identity formation. Their project was “to establish the importance of studying aspects of popular culture on the same terms as earlier generations of ‘high art’ – subjecting the ‘best’ of each medium and form to a developed ‘literary’ scrutiny” (Lusted 1986:11). Much of their focus, however, was on film and music, rather than television. Hall’s colleagues at Birmingham went on to continue this tradition, focusing on specific sites and practices of cultural life, ignoring and sometimes diminishing the impacts of others.

Although it engages with contemporary cultural practices in the field, the Birmingham approach – and indeed many of the media studies works it inspired – has, at times, been slow to recognize and understand (at an institutional level) new media forms and tools. By the mid-1960s, cinema/screen studies was becoming a recognized discipline in many universities, formally legitimizing the study of some texts (Hollywood auteurs, Continental film traditions and the nouvelle vague, as well as global filmmakers such as Akira Kurosawa in Japan), while overlooking or even dismissing the importance of other closely related media forms such as
television. As I argue in chapters three and four, this pattern has repeated itself in media literacy initiatives across Canada and around the world: the tensions between top-down (university scholars making certain kinds of work legitimate through the mere practice of scholarly research) and bottom-up (in-service classroom teachers making other kinds of work legitimate through the creation of lessons, assessment tools, and even curriculum documents) models of subject development. Regardless of who first identifies it as worthy or necessary of study, culture is lived and practiced all around us. Certain sites of production and consumption, however, can take on a kind of institutional legitimacy the more they are studied, documented, and taught. (This remains an enduring concern for those who study culture, and it foregrounds the need for scholarly vigilance: we should not let our own research interests contribute to a hardening of our research categories.)

Despite these and other critiques, the Birmingham model (and Hall’s work in particular) represents an important advancement in the study of media and cultural texts, one that has informed a range of education initiatives globally. In their analysis of British media studies as a school subject, Bennett, Kendall and McDougall draw on Schulman’s (1993) description of Hall’s legacy, pointing to four specific contributions attributable to this “second phase”. First, cultural studies in the Birmingham era “moved away from behaviourist stimulus-response approaches to media influence,” focusing instead on viewing practices and the ideological construction of audiences; second, the belief that media texts are “transparent bearers of meaning” was replaced by a semiotic approach to culture, emphasizing the symbolic (and contested) nature of all media; third, the emergence of an active model of audience led scholars to consider “varied decodings and the importance of political and social motivation,” granting far more agency to audiences themselves; and fourth, the authors argue that British cultural studies “broke with the notion of a monolithic mass culture and mass media,” focusing instead
on the multitude of channels, texts and practices which constitute “the media” (2011:17-18). Each of these elements has contributed to media literacy (in Canada and elsewhere) in important ways, opening up paths of inquiry that had previously been hidden. Critical ideas and terms emerge in this era of British cultural studies, including an emphasis on decoding the meaning of media texts such as films and songs. Active consumers of media (today’s “digital natives”) begin to be seen as active participants in media landscapes, shifting the pedagogical goal from “enlightened discernment” towards critical reading practices.

Julian Sefton-Green has also considered the Birmingham School’s enduring influence in British media studies, focusing largely on methodological contributions, and arguing that the school changed education and cultural studies in three important ways. At the macro level, Birmingham scholars were interested in “how schooling works as a delegate or sorting agency allocating class-bound roles within a stratified labour market,” as well as “the processes of symbolic power required to pursue this agenda”; at the meso level, they considerer how curricula “construct forms of inclusion and exclusion especially organized around gender, ethnicity and class”; and at the micro level, they examined “how schooling might work on individuals both in terms of how negotiating the processes of enculturation offered an agentive way for self-constitution; and how/if it offered forms of structuration for identity work” (2011:56). Operating simultaneously across these three analytic scales or dimensions, the Birmingham approach to studying the social remains a highly useful (and applicable) resource within education research, as I re-visit in later chapters. Straddling these three dimensions of social research, particularly the meso level connecting the structural to the personal, is essential to the research I have pursued in this dissertation. Additionally, within a history of Canadian media literacy, the legacy of this era of British cultural studies can be found in both curriculum documents and media literacy scholarship here in Canada and around the world. Instead of simply presenting “media” as a
body of knowledge (to be imparted by teachers to students), the Birmingham School encouraged teachers to see media as sites of inquiry, or opportunities for engaged teaching and learning. This re-positioning, when combined with the radical/critical pedagogies emerging in Freirian approaches to education (discussed in more detail below), signalled a major shift not only in how teachers might work with “the media” in their classrooms, but also in how classrooms themselves might look or function in the future.

The third and most recent era of British cultural studies, which Buckingham (2003:7) refers to as the age of “demystification,” traces its genealogical roots to the work of Len Masterman, and specifically to his 1985 book, *Teaching the Media*. While Buckingham himself (1993b; 1998; 2003; 2006) and others (Bazalgette 1997, for example) eventually expanded upon, further popularized, and ultimately critiqued Masterman’s contributions, Masterman’s unique combination of structural analysis and audience-based theorization continues to shape media literacy initiatives around the world. The field of contemporary British media studies is sometimes conceived of as either a debate between Masterman and Buckingham, or as an evolution of ideas from the former to the latter (Bazalgette 1997; Lee 1997; Bennett, Kendall & McDougall 2011). Considering the theoretical roots of the two authors, however, it is clear that any tensions or disagreements that might exist are actually critical reminders of media’s fundamental complexities. Arguing that mass media are a kind of “consciousness industry,” Masterman conceives of media studies as a necessary pedagogical task, one that is both personal and political. But where Leavis sought to illustrate common culture’s innate baseness as a way to protect a “better” cultural legacy, Masterman draws attention to culture’s political and economic function as a tool of citizenship and survival – a strategy that recalls the Frankfurt School’s study of “the culture industry.” Thus, while the Birmingham model provides criticality and a focus on the popular (taken up by both Masterman and Buckingham in their own ways), Masterman’s
early contribution to media studies lies in his political and social concerns with the industrial
nature of media – that is, the scale and scope of the texts with which we engage every day. By
paying less direct attention to the individual audience member’s role in media (an element of the
Birmingham approach that Buckingham, for example, finds lacking in Masterman’s work),
Masterman is able to offer the kinds of larger, structural critiques of culture found in the
Frankfurt School’s approach.

It is within this historical framework, then, that Buckingham represents a return to focusing on
the audience (and, indeed, toward the individual’s response to media), and to considering the
affective nature of media consumption. In Lee’s analysis of their perceived split, she notes that
Buckingham accused Masterman of “ignoring the audience’s aesthetic pleasure and emotional
engagement with the media,” adding that Buckingham “insisted that the ethnographic
explorations of audience cultural consumption should not be neglected” (1997:331). While this
notion of a split or disagreement has provided the starting point for subsequent analyses of
British media studies, it also obscures the distinct contributions of both scholars to media literacy
and indeed to education as a whole. In the case of Masterman and Buckingham, it is far more
useful to hold these two distinct figures side by side to see how they might both be useful for
future research and teaching. The British narrative of cultural studies, including its expansion
through the works of Masterman and Buckingham, is recognized as an essential genealogical
thread in the development of media literacy courses and curricula, both in Canada and elsewhere.
As I argue in the next section, the canonical faces of such traditions may come to stand in for the
messy debates and differences that constitute the traditions themselves; this type of history told
solely through “key figures” is not necessarily an essential function of institutional education, but
it is nonetheless as common as it is problematic. The modernist tendency to see history through
the acts of singular leaders/visionaries, which I critique in more detail below, warps a narrative
as complex as the genealogy of British cultural studies, or Canadian media literacy. Leavis, Williams, Hall, Masterman, and Buckingham are certainly important figures in both histories, but there is much, much more to these stories and how they unfold.

2.2 Learning to Read the Word/World: Multiple Literacies in an Information Age

Untangling the various historical strands of Canadian media literacy compels me to consider a greater range of influences and inspirations shaping the field of media studies as a whole. While the history of British cultural studies remains central to both the Ontario/AML model and the various practices in British Columbia, other clusters of scholarly work continue to have an equally important impact. I proceed by considering the shifting definitions of literacy within education research, as understanding the term literacy is central to the work of media literacy; whether or not one can be literate, whether an individual has literacy (or literacies), and whether literacy is acquired or constructed, are all essential considerations for media educators. Moreover, these distinctions help establish some necessary groundwork for researching media literacy as it is practiced, as they draw attention to who is teaching media literacy, as well as where, and even how. The various efforts of Freirian and Marxian scholars to re-frame literacy through the lenses of power, ideology, and discourse, for example, have produced a highly contested terrain of meaning, which researchers and teachers navigate in a number of ways. For the purposes of this study and the research questions framing it, I emphasize a few particular moments/debates in this history. I begin with a look at the New London Group, its influence on media studies, and the critical arguments it helped bring to light. I then summarize a number of interrogations of media literacy’s purported “criticality,” including Elizabeth Ellsworth’s 1989 essay, “Why Doesn’t This Feel Empowering?” Finally, I summarize the unique contributions of James Paul Gee, who provides a usefully expansive vocabulary for discussing literacy in a highly
mediated world. These three bodies of work in and around literacy help set up the methodological framework developed in the next two chapters, and they will be re-visited in the analysis of Vancouver’s media literacy “scene” in chapter six.

In the early 1990s, after a series of conferences and events in the United States, an influential report emerged from The National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy, in which Patricia Aufderheide laid out clear definitions and goals for media literacy in America. In her report, she states that, “the fundamental objective of media literacy is critical autonomy in relationship to all media” (1993:9). Media literacy, at its core, is “the movement to expand notions of literacy to include the powerful post-print media that dominate our informational landscape” (ibid.). The New London Group emerged a few years later to challenge and to further develop the prevailing theories of media and literacy at the time, particularly the questions of power in classrooms raised by scholars such as Michael Apple, Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, and others. In Apple’s work, for example, he argues that the project of critical education scholarship involves “making the curriculum forms found in schools problematic so that their latent ideological content can be uncovered” (2004:6). This means asking specific questions such as: “Whose knowledge is it? Who selected it? Why is it organized and taught in this way? To this particular group?” Beyond simply asking these questions, however, he adds “one is guided, as well, by attempting to link these investigations to competing conceptions of social and economic power and ideologies. In this way, one can begin to get a more concrete appraisal of the linkages between economic and political power and the knowledge made available (and not made available) to students” (2004:6 italics in original). Building on the work of Freire (1970; 1974), scholars such as Apple, Giroux, and McLaren looked to subjects such as media and cultural studies as an ideal way of bringing critical, radical pedagogies to institutional sites of education. Freirian notions of equity and liberation could start with a radical shift in educational authority; as Hobbs argues, drawing on
Giroux (1994), “the power relations of the classroom can be abolished by changing the content of the curriculum to include topics of study (e.g., popular culture) in which students are experts and teachers know very little” (1998:22). The belief in media literacy’s inherent democratic potential persists to this day, although it is not without its critics. The idea of “abolishing” power relations, for example, may be easier to imagine (yet harder to actually realize) for those currently benefiting from such uneven relations; for those who continue to be marginalized or silenced in spaces of education, the idea that talking about popular culture will somehow right all ongoing wrongs is, at best, far-fetched, and at worst a dangerous distraction from the hard work of social justice.

Additionally, Buckingham worries that young people will respond to such pedagogy in one of two ways:

Either they will choose to play the game in which case they may learn to reproduce the ‘politically correct’ responses without necessarily investigating or questioning their own position. Or they will refuse to do so, in which case they will say things they may or may not believe, in order to annoy the teacher and thereby amuse themselves. (1993a:290).

This tension between why educators would choose to focus on popular culture and media texts and how students engage with media in the classroom illustrates an ongoing set of debates within media studies, and it becomes a key consideration for the scholars associated with the New London Group – Courtney Cazden, Bill Cope, Norman Fairclough, James Gee, Mary Kalantzis, Gunther Kress, Allan Luke, Carmen Luke, Sarah Michaels, and Martin Nakata – who began their

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3 I find this summation of Freirian pedagogy highly problematic, and not entirely in keeping with the spirit of the original texts upon which it draws. Nevertheless, this piece by Hobbs has travelled widely in media literacy circles, and remains an influential, heavily cited contribution to the field.

In the group’s 1996 manifesto, “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures,” they outline a distinctive vision for future media education and literacy, arguing for “a different kind of pedagogy where language and other modes of meaning (like images and sound) are considered as ‘dynamic representational resources’ that are constantly re-made by users as they work to achieve their various cultural purposes” (Van Heertum & Share 2006:252). Such pedagogy is to be achieved through both critical analysis of texts (and their construction) and creative production of original texts, organized around the four pillars of “situated practice,” “overt instruction,” “critical framing,” and “transformed practice” (The New London Group 1996:65). Their manifesto outlines – in broad strokes – the contours of future media literacy work, with an attempt to balance various pedagogical approaches and satisfy the largest possible number of educational partners (i.e. ministries of education, school boards, professional organizations, parents, researchers, and more). Media literacy, or more broadly the study of “multiliteracies,” will focus on “how negotiating the multiple linguistic and cultural differences in our society is central to the pragmatics of the working, civic, and private lives of students” (1996:60). Their emphasis on the working and civic lives of students is particularly significant, as it casts young people as more than mere consumers of media and more than just classroom learners. Citizenship, labour, and political engagement are all bound up in the media environments young people navigate each day. Institutional learning is a key component of education, but as the Group notes, “curriculum is a design for social futures” (1996:73 italics in original).
The New London Group helped initiate a more expansive, yet inclusive, discussion about the uses of media in formal education. Their discussion of media production work, however, became a focal point for future debate. For some Freirian and Marxian media scholars, production work cannot be untangled from the very webs of institutional and economic power that media literacy seeks to disrupt. The question of whether or not media production should be part of media literacy work remains one of the seven “Great Debates” identified by Hobbs (1998). As a result, those who advocate for media literacy in schools fall into one of two categories. Some see media literacy as “teaching for creativity,” that is, a kind of pedagogical practice “where the aims of interventions, principles and practices have as their object making children and young people more creative (however defined)”; others see media literacy as “teaching creatively,” that is, pedagogical practice where “attention falls on the structure and organisation of schools and classrooms, on the production of teaching materials and on interactions between teachers and students in order to change curriculum, pedagogy and assessment” (Sefton-Green, Thomson, Jones, & Bresler 2011:1-2 italics mine). To the New London Group, the choice is nuanced, but clear: reproducing the forms and practices of the emerging knowledge economy is “largely compatible with the broader aim of social justice,” and a certain form of “economic efficiency” may in fact “be an ally of social justice, though not always a staunch or reliable one” (Van Heertum & Share 2006:253). This position on media and its status in society is, however, somewhat indistinguishable from certain neoliberal discourses of “lifelong learning,” or of “skills development,” which tend to serve the needs of industry rather than civil society. Observing this blurring of categorical boundaries in Australian education, for example, Robyn Quin observes that school subjects and the knowledge they generate change “not because new discoveries are made,” but rather because “there is a shift of forces that results in a new appropriation of knowledge and thus a new set of interpretations that becomes the truth”
Media literacy (or media education in the Australian context) may become what it needs to become in order to serve various political and cultural demands, to the point of partial or even complete ideological reversal. Forced to pick up the responsibility for worker training and technical skills development, media literacy may in fact stray from the aims of Freirian pedagogy. The New London Group identifies this potential overlap as a strategic advantage for progressive organizations: by pitching media literacy through the language and logic of economic interest, we might further advance the broader projects of social justice and equity.

These conversations between the New London Group’s position and those who wish to keep media literacy more critical and theoretical (Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis of the Media Education Foundation, among others) are best read as highly situated conversations within a particular cultural moment. In looking to media production as an essential tool for both economic development and empowered citizenship, the New London Group approach illustrates a growing concern with illiteracy, high school completion rates, youth poverty and crime. Hobbs notes, for example, how “historically, in some schools, video production has been used as the lowest track in the English or vocational-education curriculum, in what Buckingham (1993a) has called, ‘institutionalized under achievement’” (cited in Hobbs 1998:20). Freirian educators seeking to disrupt the power relationships of traditional classrooms must therefore contend with administrators and community partners using media as a kind of desperate attempt to keep at-risk students in the system. New London Group members, too, recognized the potential uses and misuses of media production, given the multiple demands being made on student and teachers. As Kari Dehli writes, researchers such as Allan Luke (2000) have warned that when media literacy gains a foothold in schools, an emphasis on “critiquing media texts and media corporations” might be replaced by “the teaching of de-politicised skills and techniques” (Dehli 2009:63). To those concerned with keeping young people in the school system, “de-politicised
skills and techniques” can be an effective pedagogical tool for dealing with at-risk students; for those seeking to disrupt and re-make the school system in a more democratic and equitable manner, the de-politicizing of media literacy represents a move in the wrong direction. The tension between these positions continues to stimulate important conversations between scholars, teachers, students, and activists, both here in Canada and elsewhere. (Indeed, the history of Canadian media literacy – particularly when we look to histories outside and beyond the dominant Ontario narrative – has been animated by such conversations for at least 25 years now: educators and scholars are no closer to reaching consensus on this issue today than they were when the New London Group wrote their manifesto.) The inclusion of a substantial production component in media literacy programs may serve particular progressive aims and ideals, or it may serve to reproduce the very hegemonic cultural practices one hopes to disrupt through media literacy. As I explain in chapter five, this debate has largely been settled in and around Vancouver, where production has been an essential component in virtually all major media literacy initiatives for decades. BC media educators do not really see how or why radical pedagogy would be incompatible with media creativity.

2.3 “Why Doesn’t This Feel Empowering?”

Critiques of Freirian pedagogy, and the discussion started by the New London Group, help to illustrate the complexities and contradictions that continue to define media literacy, both as a school subject and as a broader pedagogical practice. How we define media literacy depends a great deal on how we understand the function of formal education and its various goals. Can media literacy really transform education itself, or is it yet another school subject stuck in a largely conservative institution? To answer this question, it is worth further interrogating the logic of transformation, revolution, and critique in critical pedagogy. By pushing back against the mythology of radical, emancipatory pedagogy, we create space in classrooms for a wider
range of voices and perspectives, without privileging a particular set of actors or practices. Based on her own experience teaching anti-racist seminars at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, for example, Elizabeth Ellsworth argues that “key assumptions, goals, and pedagogical practices fundamental to the literature on critical pedagogy” – including “empowerment,” “student voice,” “dialogue,” and even the term “critical” – are actually “repressive myths that perpetuate relations of domination” (1989:298). She argues that the original goal of critical pedagogy, as articulated by Freire and his followers, was to foster “a critical democracy, individual freedom, social justice, and social change,” and create “a revitalized public sphere characterized by citizens capable of confronting public issues critically through ongoing forms of public debate and social action” (1989:300). In order to critically confront such issues, Freirian pedagogy posits that teachers and learners come into the classroom as “fully rational subjects”. Ellsworth goes on to note, however, that such a discourse of rationality effectively assumes the existence of “an irrational Other, which has been understood historically as the province of women and other exotic Others” (1989:301). To imagine that everyone in the classroom is free (and able) to participate equally in a rational, respectful discussion is to ignore a great many power imbalances (in Ellsworth’s case she was confronting issues of racism and misogyny on her own campus) that do not simply disappear when we decide to adopt “radical” pedagogies in our schools.

Literature on media literacy’s radical pedagogical potential, for example, sometimes relies on the assumption that young learners enter the classroom with a great deal of media knowledge and expertise. Collectively, a classroom of students is likely to be more familiar with and more knowledgeable about contemporary media landscapes than their teacher, shifting the balance of power in their favour. Good media literacy teachers, it is therefore argued, must be willing to embrace this new power dynamic and use the students’ own knowledge as the starting point for reflection and learning. This position takes many forms, both hopeful and alarmist, always
assuming that young people in the 21st century are somehow more technologically proficient than the previous generations were. This discourse of “digital natives” is far from universally accepted. Citing Penrod, for example, Namita argues that many educators have bought into the myth of the digital native, simply because students consume a great deal of media. Young learners, however, are “still building the multi-dimensional schema they need to develop the broad overall perspective people use to separate the superficial from the meaningful” (cited in Namita 2010:217).

When we imagine that our students enter the classroom with a high degree of media experience, we may take it upon ourselves to “undo” the lessons they have already learned. The concept of “demystification,” for example, “implies that students are mystified, and that they will automatically recognize the truth when the teacher reveals it to them” (Buckingham 1993c:143). American media educator Kathleen Tyner has been particularly critical of demystification, arguing that adopting this as a core approach in media literacy has led to what she calls a “tyranny of the narrative,” in which young learners are given media texts to deconstruct, always already under the assumption that what they will uncover is harmful or manipulative (2009). She has advocated for media literacy initiatives that move beyond literary deconstruction, to encourage different pedagogical modes such as storytelling. Rather than always learning about the media through critique of existing (often mainstream) productions, argues Tyner, why not engage young learners through their own expression, their own imagination, their own voice? The notion of youth “voice” is undoubtedly problematic, as mainstream media messages often colonize our imaginations. But to take this concern as an inevitable starting point, to be analyzed and undone, is to deny the real possibility that young people do have original stories to tell, and can think outside of their own consumption habits. Tyner points, for example, to one group in Austin, Texas – the Center for Young Cinema (CYC) – that attempts to resist the tyranny of the
narrative, by using film production as both education about media as well as of media. To understand the constructed nature of media messages, it is important for young learners to try their hand at these same creative practices. To develop the skills needed for creative production projects, it is important for young learners to study existing texts, breaking them down into their constituent pieces to see how media works. In their mission statement, the CYC states: “We thought that ‘enlightening’ teenagers to become informed media consumers was an elitist and self-defeating proposition” (cited in Tyner 2009:5). As I illustrate in chapter six, this Texas group would seem a not so distant relative to the many media literacy groups in and around Vancouver, BC.

While many Freirian scholars believe that school subjects such as media literacy offer the radical potential to disrupt classroom power, we should not presume to know how such disruption would unfold nor what its effects may be. Careful consideration of the interests and investments involved in education is required before we begin to transform or disrupt classroom practice. To this end, Sue Jackson (1997) looks to the contributions of both critical pedagogy proponents and feminist scholars, arguing that the latter offer a useful set of critiques to expand upon the work of the former. Citing Jennifer Gore (1993), Jackson proposes four key elements of “radical pedagogy,” combining both traditional critical pedagogy and feminist pedagogy. The first strand identified by Gore addresses “social vision,” and can be linked to the work of Henry Giroux; the second addresses “the development of explicit instructional practices,” and stems from the work of Paulo Freire; the remaining two strands – one emphasizing “a multiplicity of feminisms,” the other the “instructional practices from (a) feminist perspective(s)” – emerge from women’s studies (1997:457). It is this emphasis on multiplicities and divergence that offers a methodological pathway for researching the radical potential of media literacy: rather than seeing a single school subject, “media literacy,” it is worth considering the broad spectrum of practices
and discourses constituting media literacy, or media literacies. In chapter four, I develop such an approach using the concept of “scene,” which I believe neatly encapsulates the best elements of both critical/radical pedagogy and its various criticisms. There is no such thing as “the media,” just as there is no homogenous group of young people we can think of as “learners”; there is no such thing as a single school subject called “media literacy”; there is always a rich multitude, too often obscured or simply ignored by simplified categories and definitions.

2.4 Constructing Literacies

Finally, understanding the stakes and terms of media literacy, with its various and multiple histories in Canada and elsewhere, requires that we continually re-evaluate our own assumptions about literacy’s multiple functions in society. It is therefore worth considering the contributions to the histories of media literacy/literacies made by one particular New London Group member, James Paul Gee. I give additional attention to Gee’s work, as it focuses less on the particular political-economic concerns of media production and instead connects the broader issue of media literacy to the ideas of discourse and power in society. Gee’s work in education research helps to re-frame some of the enduring debates in the field of media literacy, shifting our attention to the constitutive practices of literacy. This emphasis on how and why individual learners come to inhabit particular literacies provides an important connection with chapter four in this dissertation, pointing as it does to the social webs (or “scenes”) that produce literacy all around us. In addition to considering the social functions of traditional print literacy, Gee considers the ways in which literacy must be understood as “a multiple matter,” in the sense that “the legal literacy needed for reading law books is not the same as the literacy needed for reading physics texts or superhero comic books” (2003:14). We must therefore look to both multiple forms of literacy (print literacy, image literacy, mathematic literacy, etc.) and multiple kinds of literacy (unique to particular social and discursive spaces). Teaching young people to recognize the
choices made by a novel’s author, for example, provides a stepping-stone to *auteur* theory in film studies; researching the political economy of Super Bowl advertising might lead to an additional assignment asking students to find out who publishes the textbooks they use in class. Rather than simply categorizing literacies by the technological forms involved, Gee asks us to see literacies as social practices, defined by daily experience with a wide assortment of texts and contexts.

Of particular interest for my research is the way in which Gee positions literacy as a *process*. Traditional models of understanding literacy tended to focus on the content of literacy—the things that learners could seek out, identify, and acquire. Gee argues that, “an academic discipline, or any other semiotic domain, for that matter, is not primarily content, in the sense of facts and principles. It is rather primarily a lived and historically changing set of distinctive social practices,” adding that it is “in these social practices that ‘content’ is generated, debated, and transformed via certain distinctive ways of thinking, talking, valuing, acting, and, often, writing and reading” (2003:21). Gee’s insight that literacies are continually produced through social practices has helped me to connect my interest in media literacy to seemingly unrelated methodological works from such fields as popular music studies and geography. The question of space (and place) is central to the production and spread of literacy, and education research alone sometimes struggles to provide the methodological tools for mapping and analyzing Gee’s “distinctive social practices”.

In the case of media literacy, young learners often navigate a multiplicity of spaces (some personal, some social; some corporate, some public) all at once. But where the discourse of the digital native assumes a kind of proficiency and understanding across these spaces, Gee’s work only alerts us to the multiplicity of spaces. Bedrooms and computer labs are critical spaces for
studying literacies, and it is therefore imperative that education researchers interested in media literacy seek out the methodological tools that can best connect multiple spaces, as well as the spaces producing and produced within these spaces. My review of background literature has given me a fairly comprehensive knowledge of how media literacy presents itself in Canadian education, but it has done little to help explain how such articulations are produced in the first place. Gee helps turn my attention to the issues of space, place, practice, and action, which in turn helps me to recall various academic approaches to these same categories. This preliminary vocabulary for describing certain gaps in the history of Canadian media literacy now calls for a structure, or grammar, for articulating the development and implementation of the young school subject.
Chapter 3
And There’s a Canadian Connection: Foucauldian Genealogy and the Ontario Narrative of Media Literacy

Genealogy does not pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of forgotten things; its duty is not to demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present, that it continues secretly to animate the present, having imposed a predetermined form to all its vicissitudes. Genealogy does not resemble the evolution of a species and does not map the destiny of a people. On the contrary, to follow the complex course of descent is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations – or conversely, the complete reversals – the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us; it is to discover that truth or being do not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents. (Foucault 1980d:146)

The development of formal media curricula, both in Canada and internationally, remains an incomplete and disputed project. As a young school subject that deals with rapidly changing terrain, media literacy must find institutional stability where it can, both for legitimation and for pedagogical consistency. As a result, the history of media literacy in Canada is, in no small measure, a history of borrowed and appropriated ideas; the core concepts and canonical texts in the field largely have their roots in British cultural studies and Canadian media studies. These older bodies of work have provided Canadian educators with a well-established theoretical framework upon which to construct contemporary projects of media analysis. As Pungente, Duncan, and Andersen (2005) and Lee (1997) summarize, many of the key individuals and organizations within the history of Canadian media literacy have explicitly credited figures such as Hall, McLuhan, Masterman and Buckingham in the development of curriculum documents. The Ontario-based AML, for example, played a critical role in getting media literacy onto the
provincial curriculum in the late 1980s; AML founders/members Barry Duncan, Neil Andersen, and John Pungente have discussed their various influences in numerous interviews and articles (Pungente 1989; Duncan 1993, for example).

In translating certain canonical theories and texts into Ministry of Education documents and classroom guidelines, the AML and its partners have tended to emphasize certain critical practices over others. Simple mnemonics and short lists, for example, are easy to standardize and transmit to large populations of teachers and students. This kind of institutional imperative toward theory in shorthand may or may not over-simplify complex ideas; what is more significant for media literacy across Canada is the way in which such pedagogical abbreviation is ideally suited for travel and transmission. As specific learning devices within media literacy become the synecdoche for the curriculum itself, those who look to the Ontario model may borrow the language of a school subject, and not necessarily the underlying theoretical frameworks supporting the subject itself. The AML-inspired curriculum documents in Ontario, for example, refer to several “Key Concepts” of media literacy, summarized in the 1989 Ontario Media Literacy Resource Guide as follows:

1. All media are constructions.
2. The media construct versions of reality.
3. Audiences negotiate meaning in media.
4. Media texts have commercial implications.
5. Media texts express/contain values and beliefs (ideology).
6. Media messages have political and social implications.
7. Form and content are closely related in media messages.
8. Each medium has a unique aesthetic form.

(Andersen, Duncan & Pungente 1999:142-3)

These key concepts can be linked to Masterman’s seven “rationales” for doing media education, although the AML’s concepts are more prescriptive in their pedagogical aims (Masterman
In my interviews with media scholars and educators in both Toronto and Vancouver, these key concepts are well recognized and frequently cited. As one Vancouver teacher notes, “we often look at documents put out by the TDSB and the Peel board⁴” when developing media literacy materials (Brown, interview with the author, 2013). Teachers and researchers point to the AML and its contributions to media literacy as foundational elements of the field itself in Canada. Both the concepts, and the founding figures who travelled across Canada spreading this pedagogical evangel, are woven into curriculum documents and professional development materials in various jurisdictions. Whether or not such decisions were deliberate or strategic, many key ideas in the history of Canadian media literacy seem ideally suited for transmission and duplication, demonstrating what might be described as memetic qualities.

This Ontario/AML narrative in Canadian education, however, cannot be entirely understood outside of its own historical context. While paradigmatic concepts have traveled in particular ways, important aspects of the Ontario/AML history are tied to the unique cultural moment in which the AML emerged. After the early first wave of screen education in the 1960s (inspired in part by McLuhan’s work in Toronto at the time), a second wave of media study in the late 1970s and early 1980s found very particular kinds of public support in Ontario (Lee 1997). Specifically, groups such as the AML were seen to provide a necessary balance to an expanding media environment rife with violence and overt sexuality. Working with community groups (include women’s groups concerned with sexism, violence, gender bias and representation in media texts), religious organizations (particularly the education-oriented Jesuits, including Pungente himself) and government agencies, media organizations advocated for a greater

⁴ Refers to the Toronto District School Board and the Peel Board of Education
presence within formal education, as a means to protect young people from potentially harmful media messages. Discussing this period, Pungente writes:

The concern of many public groups about the proliferation of violence and pornography in the media resulted in pressure to have the school system respond in some constructive way. Many parent groups, troubled by the increase in television viewing among the young, insisted that schools should have some responsibility for teaching media literacy skills. (1989:200).

Influenced by these social pressures for a particular *kind* of media literacy, the AML and its partners were drawn to certain influential and recognizably authoritative texts in the field. As Pungente himself writes during this period, “Ontario’s aims closely follow those first stated by Len Masterman (1985) in *Teaching Media*” (1989:201). Elsewhere, Pungente, Duncan and Andersen (2005) draw connections between the institutional history of Ontario media literacy and the history of British cultural studies, even noting how the Masterman/Buckingham schism played out here in Canada. By the mid-1990s, Lee notes a clear shift in the AML’s publications and pronouncements, moving away from Masterman’s approach and towards Buckingham’s version of studying the media (Lee 1997:331). I see this shift as more than a mere changing of tastes: it is also rooted in pedagogical practice and institutional pragmatics. Buckingham’s increased emphasis on audience reception to (and engagement with) media texts lends itself well to certain forms of classroom activity and assessment. Of particular importance is the close connection between media literacy in Ontario and its “host subject,” English language and literature. Many key AML figures were themselves English teachers working with various Ontario school boards. Adapting Buckingham’s version of media literacy for use in Ontario, English teachers should therefore treat movies and popular music as *texts* for deconstruction and analysis. This approach helps students understand the constructed nature of the media, but it may lack the kinds of broader social critique located in Masterman’s work. (The exegesis of a
particular media text may lead to discussion of authorship, voice, historical context, etc., leaving questions of institutional power and ideology unasked and unanswered.) While undoubtedly appealing to the Ontario teachers who actually taught media literacy in their classrooms, this singular vision of how to study media is only one possible model among many in the history of media literacy. The Ontario/AML model obviously emerges at a particular historical moment, but it is the way in which this model came to suit the needs of those involved in its production that demands further attention.

The history of Canadian media literacy has unfolded across a geographically large space, but it has occurred over a relatively short timeframe. This can make historical analyses somewhat challenging, unless such research can properly account for the sometimes contradictory dimensions and scales at work. How, for example, should we approach such a young school subject within the context of a much older educational establishment, and how might we discuss a national narrative without obscuring the rich details of individual locales? Among the available research tools and questions available for a project such as mine, I begin by drawing on the archaeological and genealogical approaches of Michel Foucault, as they combine the best elements of criticality and comprehensiveness: that is, they allow the researcher to ask clear, probing questions (be they policy oriented, structural in nature, etc.) without losing sight of methodological precision or scope. Foucault’s work addresses the ways in which domains of knowledge are formed, how they circulate, and ultimately how they produce individuals and subjects. While his major works rarely focused on formal sites of schooling, Foucault certainly recognized the importance of schools and education research, noting that, “in its distribution, in what it permits and in what it prevents,” education “follows the well-trodden battle-lines of social conflict” (1972:227). This recognition of conflict, contestation, and struggle is at the heart of Foucault’s interest in education, and likely explains his enduring appeal with education
scholars. If one feels that public education is a crucial site for discussing the most pressing concerns facing a society, then researching the history of school subjects is much more than the sterile documenting of what was written, when, and by whom; education research helps us to document and explain where ideas come from, how they circulate, why they matter, and how they may orient us toward the future. Educational institutions are continually producing officially documented histories, leaving researchers the challenge of analysis and critical interpretation. In summarizing the uses and benefits of Foucauldian genealogy within education, Tamboukou argues that our task is thus to “criticise, diagnose and demythologize” what might be labeled “truth phenomena” – the statements circulating in society which are often seen to be more true, or more valid than others (1999:202). Education, by its nature, is in the business of producing truth phenomena, making critical research all the more necessary.

Scholars taking up Foucauldian approaches to education research have championed the critical nature of genealogical work, as well as the various degrees of flexibility offered by such methodology. As Gutting writes, Foucault’s great strength as a researcher “lies less in his invention of new methods than in his willingness to employ whatever methods seem required by his specific subject matter” (2003:14). The individual ideas that inspired Foucault’s own case studies are therefore less useful than the underlying research questions framing the studies themselves. Thus, the usefulness of Foucauldian methodology in education research depends largely on this understanding of Foucault’s own contributions to research practice. Rather than simply trying to apply Foucault to my own set of research questions, I believe it is important to fully consider how Foucault compels the researcher to ask a wholly different set of questions. In education, genealogical lines of inquiry help draw our attention to the questions of power at the heart of institutional teaching and learning. Davidson (1986), for example, sees Foucauldian genealogy as primarily an analysis of different “modalities of power,” shifting our attention away
from fully formed school subjects and towards their conditions of formation and circulation (1986:221). The social, cultural, political, and institutional currents that have worked to produce school subjects, such as media literacy, become the object of genealogical analysis, thereby focusing our attention on “the way in which there is a ‘political regime’ of the production of truth” (Davidson 1986:224).

Beyond a purely ideological analysis of institutionally legitimate power (ministries of education, professional teaching bodies, etc.), Foucault’s methods seek power in the everyday banality of teaching and learning. In an interview in which he considers the usefulness of his methods in other fields (geography in this specific instance), he states, “the formation of discourses and the genealogy of knowledge need to be analysed, not in terms of types of consciousness, modes of perception and forms of ideology, but in terms of tactics and strategies of power” (1980b:77 italics mine). This tactical, strategic consideration brings education out of the abstract (domains of knowledge and pedagogy in their purely theoretical forms), and into the applied and the everyday. His genealogical approach emphasizes the forms of power at their “capillary form of existence,” which is to say “the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives” (1980a:39). It is Foucault’s careful consideration of such “capillary power” that is most useful to my own interests in media literacy, its localities, its daily practices, and its production of community or scene.

Genealogy helps to address what Popkewitz calls the “social epistemology” of education, which emphasizes both “the relational and social embeddedness of knowledge” and “how the systems of ideas in schooling organize perceptions, ways of responding to the world, and conceptions of ‘self’” (2001:152). The history of Canadian media literacy is thus more than the documented,
Archival record of curriculum development; it is a narrative produced by (and producing) tens of thousands of teachers and students and their everyday experiences in classrooms. Genealogical inquiry, however, does not simply lay bare the narrative itself, but instead helps contextualize the various actors and elements involved in the story. As Cormack and Green write, Foucault’s approach “refuses the unity of subjects (such as ‘child’ or ‘citizen’), institutions (such as ‘school’ or ‘clinic’), and ideas (such as ‘democracy’ or ‘ability’),” noting that these are “constituted within discourses,” and as such “are not transhistorical in the way that traditional historical narratives constitute them, through the ways they describe their formation, their development and their emergence” (2009:229). Key figures and organizations do not simply produce the history of media literacy, but are themselves produced by the narratives we construct concerning the subject’s history. They only become “key figures” in hindsight, and within particular narrative frameworks, particularly those research paradigms seeking “leaders” and “critical moments”. This is because, as Popkewitz writes, “history is a theoretical activity that fabricates its object of research through its distinctions and categories of historical phenomena” (2001:152). In the genealogy I present in this dissertation, I have done my best to interrogate what I identify as the self-evident truths, categories, and subjects that re-appear in histories of media literacy, to consider the ways in which they have produced one another.

3.1 Archaeology and Genealogy

To better unpack the methodological applications of Foucauldian genealogy and use them to analyze the history of Canadian media literacy, a few points of clarification and definition are in order. Within Foucault’s own historical case studies (of incarceration, of madness, etc.), at least two major methodological models are developed: archaeology and genealogy. A third model, addressing “the self’s relationship to itself,” can also be considered (under the title of “ethics”), but the vast majority of work applying/implicating Foucauldian methods concentrate on the first
two models (Davidson 1986:221). The distinction between archaeologies and genealogies is more than a mere technical footnote to Foucault’s own research career. As Kendall and Wickham write, the difference between these two approaches is quite significant: “where archaeology provides us with a snapshot, a slice through a discursive nexus, genealogy pays attention to the processual aspects of the web of discourse – its ongoing character” (1999:31). The former model, in taking a “snapshot,” is still a useful research tool for studying the history of Canadian media literacy, even though it is precisely the “processual aspects” involved in media literacy that make it a compelling example within education research.

There remains an archaeological element to my research, however, as Foucauldian archaeology allows for a bounded analysis of a specific discourse, without over-privileging the status of the discursive utterances and texts themselves. Specific discursive formations (such as curriculum documents and their development) are an important part of my historical analysis, and I require methodological tools that allow me to consider how individual, largely static discourses (curricular review cycles over many years) can interact with fluid, evolving practices (classroom instruction, professional development practices, teachers’ own media use, etc.). Thus, while the general project of studying Canadian media literacy is most productively understood as genealogical in nature, there are archaeological angles to this work. The two approaches do not always overlap, but in researching the history of a school subject within Canadian education, I see a complementary set of concerns. As Foucault argues, archaeology “does not treat discourse as document, as a sign of something else, as an element that ought to be transparent”; rather, “it is concerned with discourse in its own volume, as a monument. It is not an interpretative discipline: it does not seek another, better-hidden discourse. It refuses to be ‘allegorical’” (1969/2010:155 italics in original). In this way, archaeology hopefully avoids what Foucault considered “architectonic” descriptions, or epistemological inquiries; instead of describing the
straightforward, linear “development” of an idea, researchers focus on particular discourses and their own specific histories, without any necessary reference to related ideas or forces (1969/2010:174).

The archaeological element of this doctoral dissertation research therefore describes the conditions and rules of formation of a particular set of statements, or the discursive domain of media literacy. The genealogical element, on the other hand, is concerned with the modalities of power circulating in and around this discourse. As Davidson writes, "genealogy does not so much displace archaeology as widen the kind of analysis to be pursued," opening up additional pathways of inquiry, without losing sight of the original research questions or concerns (1986:227). While such a distinction is hardly an original insight within education research, I believe this application of both major Foucauldian methodologies provides a particularly rich set of tools for a study such as mine, as it allows me to comprehensively analyze specific discursive elements of media literacy, while simultaneously researching the social and political production of the subject as a whole. Mere mapping of media literacy’s history in Vancouver, while interesting, fails to address my broader interest with education research and its intersection of policy and pedagogy. In Foucault’s own terms, archaeology is an appropriate methodology for the analysis of “local discursivities,” and genealogy “would be the tactics whereby, on the basis of the description of these local discursivities, the subjected knowledges which were thus released would be brought into play” (1980c:85). For those of us interested in how school subjects such as media literacy actually help learners make sense of the world around them, archaeological investigations are insufficient. Thinking about genealogy as an extension and expansion of archaeology allows me to think about how subjects exert and embody power at the “capillary level” of Canadian life.
Using Foucauldian genealogy as the primary methodological framework for researching the history of media literacy in Canada makes a series of particular demands, each of which helps sensitize me to particular educational practices. Seeing the various actors, institutions, exchanges and ideas forming an individual school subject within education also illustrates the broader social forces working across all sites of teaching and learning. This is because genealogy, in Tamboukou’s words, asks researchers to question, “which kinds of practices tied to which kinds of external conditions determine the different knowledges in which we ourselves figure” (1999:202). In Canadian media literacy, both practice (classroom instruction, community initiatives, teacher education at universities, etc.) and external conditions (a range of intellectual trajectories and narratives, the neoliberalization of cities and provinces over three decades, etc.) mutually constitute the school subject itself. In developing my own methodological framework for this research, I found it useful to treat Foucauldian genealogy as follows. First, I disrupt what Foucault considers to be the self-evidence of the subject in hand. In the case of media literacy, this means questioning the established narratives (national and global) of what media literacy is and how it must be taught/understood, and disrupting the idea that media literacy is itself always already a school subject, whether fully formed or in its nascent stages. The second step is to document the ways in which the subject became self-evident: what are the histories of these established narratives, how were they produced, and how have they travelled through Canadian education? Finally, I attempt to recover other relevant ways of seeing/being/acting in the world: did lost practices appear and disappear, and might they be useful today in combatting the hegemonic force of a dominant Canadian media literacy narrative? The present we inhabit is not the logical outcome of necessary steps in a long, ordered sequence; strategic choices were made at various stages and for various reasons, and it is important to uncover how this process unfolds. This research strategy therefore investigates the history of Canadian media literacy without
simply seeking origins or linear developments. Rather, it provides what Tamboukou calls a “counter-memory,” which can “help subjects recreate the historical and practical conditions of their present existence” (1999:202).

This is not unlike Harwood and Rasmussen’s (2007) suggestion that researchers consider various angles of scrutiny within Foucauldian genealogy, such as discontinuity, contingency, and a search for subjugated knowledges, in order to structure empirical analysis. As the authors note, however, such an application “is not an attempt at a model or recipe for genealogy, neither is it prescriptive in the sense that all angles are needed for a given genealogical investigation” (2007:34). When considering discontinuities, for instance, they argue, “the genealogist is looking for points of rupture and difference in the apparently continuous truths,” encouraging us to ask “on what conditions or occurrences was the creation of conduct disorder contingent?” (Harwood & Rasmussen 2007:35). Genealogy, as a project, is resolutely opposed to a search for origins: that is, the genealogist is not attempting to “erect shining epistemological foundations” (Davidson 1986:225). Rather, as Harwood and Rasmussen write, by thinking about the “emergence or emergences of truths,” it is possible to “tactically exhume moments of emergence” that disrupt established narratives and continuities (2007:36). Within Canadian media literacy, this is precisely what I believe is lacking in established historical narratives: which specific events produced media literacy as it circulates in education today; which events, actors, or activities are excluded from these narratives, and why?

3.2 Discourse and Knowledge

In tracing the history of media literacy, I am particularly interested in those statements, actions, events, and actors that have helped to form the discourse itself, that were essential to its emergence and development, and that situate it within Canadian education today. In Foucauldian
terms, I am particularly interested in the *practice* of media literacy: how it has been produced, and how it has helped to produce contemporary understandings of the school subject itself. As Flynn writes, a practice creates the conditions of possibility for action “by its twofold character as *judicative* and *veridicative*”; on the one hand, “practices establish and apply norms, controls, and exclusions,” and on the other, “they render true/false discourse possible” (2003:31). In the early years of media literacy in Ontario, for example, a specific set of media literacy *practices* developed. That is, a set of widely acknowledged ideas and examples as to how media literacy is taught – simply, what it *looked like*. This is not to say that all classroom instruction (in Foucault's terms, the *action* of media literacy) was identical, but rather that a framework for teaching and learning this new school subject, media literacy, was established through various discursive practices. The resulting norms, prohibitions, boundaries, and canonical definitions continue to produce a wide range of media literacy actions in Ontario and elsewhere, but the initial *formation* of practice remains an important consideration for this research. Some media literacy in the classroom involves creative production, often with a wide range of media, depending on availability and cost. For some teachers, however, making a collage from magazines is simply *not* media literacy: documentaries about race and representation, on the other hand, *are* media literacy. Who gets to decide which practices can be counted as media literacy, and why?

When media educators take their students on a “mall walk” (analyzing the lived spaces of consumer culture by experiencing it firsthand), are they aware of this action’s origins? Barry Duncan used mall walks as a media literacy activity for many years, and this has now become a canonical pedagogical activity for many Canadian teachers. (It is worth remembering that Duncan’s own use of this action may have been facilitated, in part, by his own relative freedom to pursue such creative methods in the alternative high school where he taught.) When teachers use documentaries to teach *about* a media form, or popular Hollywood films to illustrate
particular cultural stereotypes, are they thinking about the best ways to engage young people, or are they somewhat trapped by the framing practices of the school subject? (A subject with greater institutional and disciplinary links to film studies than to television studies, for example.) For teachers working within a school subject such as media literacy, both the judicative and veridicative forces may limit the range of possible action within the field, and thus the very development of the “new” school subject itself. In his examination of another school subject (English), Robert Morgan makes this same point, arguing that “state schooling does not merely add a subject called ‘English’, but in an important sense made and continuously remakes the subject as a determination of which contexts and capacities will prevail in the organization of social literacy” (1987:36 italics in original). When considering what one can and cannot consider as “English,” Morgan argues, we must look to the subject’s history, and not just at its present definitions and framings.

The historical accumulation of statements, practices, actions, and ideas that we group together as school subjects is thus best understood altogether as a discourse, or collections of utterances forming a unique body of knowledge. As Foucault writes, a discourse grows and mutates as new utterances (énoncés) are generated; these utterances are found in official institutional documents, popular media discussion of an idea, everyday professional applications, etc. He points to three specific types of utterance that work to produce and sustain discourses: their criteria of formation, or the rules for generating the "objects, operations, concepts, and options" of a unique discursive domain; their criteria of transformation/threshold, forming "the set of conditions which must have been jointly fulfilled at the precise moment of time, for it to have been possible for its objects, operations, concepts and theoretical options to have been formed"; and their criteria of correlation, being "the set of relations which define and situate it among other types of discourse […] and in the non-discursive context in which it functions (institutions, social
relations, economic and political conjuncture)" (1991:54). In the following text, I use these three types of utterances as a structure for analyzing the history of Canadian media literacy, particularly the well-established and documented narrative in Ontario. Considering the conditions of formation, threshold, and correlation needed to generate and sustain a Canadian media literacy discourse helps illustrate how one particular set of ideas and events has generated a national narrative, and provides a starting point for uncovering alternative narratives outside of Ontario.

3.2.1 Formation

In the documented history of Canadian media literacy, the *formation* of the discourse is often traced back to specific actors in the so-called “second wave” of media literacy – key figures such as Barry Duncan, Neil Andersen, and John Pungente are often mentioned. What is significant in these accounts of media literacy's history is that key figures and institutions were not just *present* at the beginning, but were in and of themselves *essential to* the subject's birth and growth. As criteria of discursive formation, one cannot discuss media literacy in Canada without explicit reference to these senior figures of the field. The particular pedagogical practices and policies of Canadian media literacy are therefore inextricably linked – in no small manner – to the earliest meetings, conferences, and publications involving this rather small nexus of teachers and scholars. Canadian media literacy in the 21st century is thus seen as an inevitable result of some key decisions and events in the 1970s. In Lee’s history of media literacy, for example, she emphasizes the importance of the Report of the Ontario Royal Commission on Violence in the Communications Industry, which led to an increased public concern “about media violence and pornography,” and ultimately to the organization of a special conference – “The Media: How to Talk Back,” featuring a keynote address by Judy LaMarsh, who chaired the Ontario Royal
Commission (1997:157). What started as a government investigation of perceived public threats helped to generate greater community support for some type of action, providing a fertile environment from which this new media literacy “movement” might emerge. In Ontario, the special conference on media, sex, and violence led to the formation of a new advocacy group, the Association for Media Literacy (AML). The AML took a strong leadership role in educating the public (both young students and adult consumers) about the potential risks associated with modern media forms, and eventually became the lobbying force that brought media literacy into the Ontario public school curriculum. As AML member Neil Andersen puts it, “since 1978 the history of media literacy education in Ontario has been the history of the Association for Media Literacy” (cited in Lee 1997:158). Without the AML, the story goes, there would be no media literacy in Ontario schools today.

The necessary criteria for the formation of Canadian media literacy, particularly as they have been articulated by many of the actors involved, illustrate what Popkewitz sees as two Enlightenment assumptions that are prevalent in both education practice and education research. The first assumption “identifies social progress as tied to an evolutionary conception of change,” and the second “relates to the epistemological assumption that inquiry must identify the actors as causal agents who bring or suppress social change” (2001:151). In conceiving of a distinction (and indeed a chronological vector) between the first and the second wave of media literacy in Canada, histories of the subject are already identifying a kind of progress or advancement. Furthermore, such a change is understood as the result of sustained, valiant efforts on the part of advocacy organizations and leadership figures within a “movement”. As Popkewitz argues, “The historical identification of actors and the chronological ordering of events” are generally seen as “the precursor of any meaningful change” in education, and in society at large (2001:157).

Indeed, I must take this time to admit my own complicity, as I have now written a dissertation in
which I effectively identify “key figures” in the history of media literacy, the “origins” of the Canadian media literacy discourse, etc. (In my defense, I am actively questioning the very idea of “progress” within the school subject, through an interrogation of the idea that key figures and origins can ever really exist in a large and complex subject such as media literacy.) Nevertheless, the history of Canadian media literacy, as it is often told within education circles, continues to be the story of one organization, led by a handful of individuals. This singular history not only makes invisible all of the other teachers, administrators, and community partners involved in a sustained effort to change curriculum, but it also endows the few “key” individuals with a kind of mythic status, greatly distorting the real motivations and interests held by these figures. “Being present” at the time of a movement’s birth might not sound as impressive as “being essential to” the movement’s very existence, but it is arguably a slightly more accurate version of historical events.

3.2.2 Threshold

Along with this kind of “creation story,” there is also the particular matrix of theoretical perspectives and ideological frameworks which intersected at the precise cultural moment when media literacy became a subject in Canadian education – that is, the threshold conditions required for an assemblage of statements to solidify into a unique discursive formation. Before media literacy became a recognized subject in the Ontario curriculum, it existed on the margins, which meant that (institutionally) it could not exist at all. The notion of a first and second wave of Canadian media literacy is illustrative here, as it suggests that the initial efforts to form a school subject failed because the necessary conditions were not yet in place. (The first wave didn’t reach far enough up the beach, but it may have helped provide the kinetic energy needed for the second wave to move further?) In Namita’s discussion of these two waves, she writes of
the era of Screen Education in Canada, focusing on the Canadian Association for Screen Education (CASE), formed in Toronto in 1966: “the organization hosted the first national conference for media educators in 1969 at the University of York in Toronto. In the province of Ontario, where most of the initiatives took place, a new position exclusively dedicated to screen education (Assistant Superintendent, Screen Education) was created within the Ontario Department of Education in 1968” (2010:43). Even with this new position to assist with the further development of screen education, CASE claimed in its own documents (in 1969) that the subject was still in an “embryonic stage” (cited in Namita 2010:44).

A key link between the two waves of Canadian media literacy was Barry Duncan. According to Lee (who interviewed Duncan for her dissertation), “Duncan was one of the few who survived the screen education movement and was active again in the late 1970s to promote the study of media” (1997:122). As Lee documents through her interviews with many of those involved in the second wave, the first wave of Canadian media literacy (informed in large part by the media studies work of Marshall McLuhan and the growing discipline of film studies in the UK and Europe) failed to take permanent root in Canadian schools. (As an avid McLuhan scholar myself, I can readily attest to the fact that McLuhan's work may have limited appeal to those who work in Education.) Some key figures from the second wave attribute screen education’s failure to proceed beyond this embryonic stage to the subject’s own tightly constrained boundaries; as Duncan notes, screen education in the 1960s was “mainly teaching through rather than teaching about the media” (Duncan 1993:14). (Teaching through films may also invite a more pleasurable relation with media than is found in the second wave approach of teaching about media. This may mirror a similar dynamic between studying literature and doing literary studies.) The conditions present at the time of the second wave were better suited to generating a stable media literacy discourse that complemented existing pedagogical practice in curricular documents. For
example, a more detailed body of knowledge (generated in large part by British media scholars like Masterman and Buckingham) gave Canadian advocates of media literacy in the second wave a new vocabulary for pitching the young school subject to ministries and school boards. Where the first wave offered pedagogically useful tools for engaging with media texts, the second wave added teaching practices more amenable to testing and assessment, thus bringing the new school subject in line with existing, established, institutional modes of learning. If the first wave helped articulate the theoretical underpinnings of a growing discipline (media studies), then the second wave developed a set of pragmatic approaches to applying these theories, in the hopes of growing a school subject (media literacy). Of the many academic disciplines generating knowledge in society, not all are suited for the daily needs of K-12 classroom instruction. The task for advocacy groups is therefore to seek out ways of translating canonical ideas of theory into the “key concepts” of new school subjects. The shift from first to second wave of Canadian media literacy illustrates this process very clearly, but similar analyses could be undertaken of other disciplines/subjects: ecology and resource management becoming environmental education; gender and race studies, sociology, and peace studies becoming social justice education.

In the early days of the AML, a small group of concerned educators sought a new school subject to deal with what was perceived as a new social concern, stemming from new media technologies. The second wave of media literacy in Canada was thus able to articulate a growing concern with “the media” that was circulating in many countries, thereby positioning the subject as an essential survival skill for young people coming of age in media-saturated environments. While similar concerns existed in the previous era of film, radio, and broadcast television, it was the 100-channel cable galaxy that galvanized community groups, parents, and churches in their calls for increased attention to media's influence over young minds. Early AML members have
pointed to the work of Neil Postman as being influential to their own media literacy practice, citing Postman’s claim that television (and modern media in general) constitute “the first curriculum” that children encounter, thereby making formal classroom learning “the second curriculum” (cited in Lee 1997:196). Postman’s argument, however, raises a fairly immediate follow-up question: before television, did young learners enter the classroom as blank slates? What is it about television, in particular, that fundamentally re-made education? Haven’t young learners always entered the classroom with experiences and ideas from their own private lives? A great deal of popular media studies tend to see the “newness” of today’s media as a problem to be solved, without always considering the histories of technology and education. Rather than imagining a need for a new school subject (built around the particular technological zeitgeist of the time), perhaps those concerned with the “effects” of new media might look at what existing subjects and practices can do, and how they might adapt to changing technologies and tools.

Through the early years of Canadian media literacy in the 1990s, this discourse of prohibition and prevention slowly mutated into a broader neoliberal concern with the status of knowledge in a brave new media world. While the moral outrage subsided slightly, the individualizing discourse of students needing to develop particular skills remained the same. Testable media literacy “skills” would help future knowledge workers succeed in a global market, shifting media literacy’s focus away from engaged citizenship and toward individual economic agency. In many cases, as Quin (2003) observes, this approach to teaching media became a kind of last resort for young people considered “at-risk” in institutional settings – a high-tech skills-training lab for students with no other connection to traditional teaching and learning. The various promises

5 Postman’s arguments about television echo those of George Gerbner, who wrote extensively on television’s effects on young minds (Gerbner & Gross 1976; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, and Shanahan 2002, for example).
made by media educators during this period of second wave Canadian media literacy functioned as threshold criteria, as they now appear both inevitable to the subject’s history (a new school subject that found itself in the right place at the right time), and integral to future successes elsewhere (the strategy of using the language of neoliberalism against itself to get media into the curriculum). Educators and community groups identified the new realm of cyberspace as an exponentially more troubling media environment than television, so that even today, media literacy remains a relevant, even “urgent” concern for many. Seeing a need for media literacy (understood and articulated through language unknowingly borrowed from Leavis’s inoculation model), various community partners continue to advocate for the young school subject. The ongoing second wave of media literacy clearly speaks to a particular set of cultural concerns and fears, connecting pedagogy with general public sentiment in ways that the first wave could not.

3.2.3 Correlation

The final category of discursive utterance central to understanding how Canadian media literacy has come to generate its own unique set of boundaries, prohibitions, and structuring categories of knowledge – what Foucault calls the criteria of correlation – emerges through the particular relationships and partnerships found in Ontario and especially in Toronto. First, there are the relations connecting media literacy to other formal school subjects. These relations of correlation, Foucault argues, help to produce the body of statements forming a media literacy discourse, by establishing stable institutional links to existing, established discursive domains within education, particularly the historical links to English literacy in jurisdictions such as Toronto. Lee examines the historical significance for new school subjects of a host, or sponsor subject. When finding space within existing curricula for additional material, an established discourse can help “piggyback” the new subject into formal, institutional recognition. A number
of key AML figures in Toronto (Duncan and Andersen, in particular) were English teachers who brought media into their classrooms in a very specific way, thereby creating a particular set of pedagogical practices that came to define a young school subject. A focus on texts, authors, and close reading practices that developed in a handful of English classrooms eventually found its way into early media literacy curriculum documents. Morgan, among others, sees this model placing too much emphasis on deconstruction and textual analysis in media literacy, arguing that a focus on the constructed nature of media often “dovetails with conspiracy theory” (1998:165). While this approach to studying media is certainly useful and generative, it offers one single set of analytic tools, situated knowledges, and general competencies, among many others available to educators. Social Studies teachers, for example, may approach the study of “the media” in an entirely different way, shifting the focus from texts and authors towards social contexts and shared meanings.

Having a host subject in place for media literacy in Ontario appears to be both good fortune and an essential constituting force in the young subject’s own historical narrative. (Host subjects, however, are neither essential nor inevitable in the development of new school subjects, as I discuss in chapters five and seven.) The way in which the AML describes media literacy today – the vocabulary of both theory and practice – is in no small part determined by the early overlapping discussions of two distinct subjects: English and media literacy. Considered in isolation, the discourse of media literacy in the 21st century may appear to have developed in a top-down direction. That is, the terminology we use to discuss media in classrooms may appear to come from the discipline of media studies itself, from scholars and researchers working within an academic field with direct historical ties to media literacy in schools. As I discuss in chapter four, the way in which we think about a subject – and thus its history and development – has a great deal to do with the borders we create between subjects, and the practices in which we
engage to police such borders. In considering the ways in which the discourse of English (and its own historical narrative) helped produce (and was thus in turn produced by) the media literacy discourse, we can see a discursive vector that has moved laterally, not vertically. It was the back-and-forth exchange between two school subjects, and not merely the top-down implementation of formal rules or practices (developed by Masterman, Buckingham, Hall, or anyone else), that produced the discourse of Canadian media literacy. In the history of Canadian media literacy, English has been a host subject, a willing collaborator, and a kind of established template from which media literacy teachers can borrow ideas. It is the relation between these two school subjects that may go unnoticed or undocumented in histories of either individual subject, despite their (now) obvious points of overlap. Both subjects recognize that we live in a world of readers, and that it is important to teach young learners how to read (and not just what to read).

A second significant set of correlative criteria functions non-discursively, as they situate media literacy within the "institutions, social relations, economic and political conjuncture" operating all around it, and not simply alongside it in the classroom (Foucault 1991:54). Foucauldian analysis of the Canadian media literacy discourse requires that I examine relationships and associations that differ in kind, and not simply in content, from the more easily traceable connections to education and its formal spaces, structures, and apparatuses of learning. Throughout the documented history of media literacy, key actors and organizations play an essential role in the relatively mundane, material practice of working with media. The National Film Board of Canada (NFB) and its Toronto facilities, for example, as with the Pacific Cinématèque in Vancouver, have been important partners for various media literacy initiatives, in part because, quite simply, they have the equipment and expertise required to screen feature films to a large audience. With their own educational mandates in the cities where they exist, these film organizations have been ideal collaborators for teachers wishing to teach about and
through film. Without necessarily producing their own pedagogical discourses of how to watch movies, the NFB and the Cinématèque provide the extra-institutional spaces needed to watch movies, outside of (and thus freed from many of the restrictions of) the classroom, yet containing their own set of rules, prohibitions, boundaries, etc. In Ontario, the AML has had a long and productive relationship with the NFB, dating back to the AML’s first meeting, when the NFB’s Arlene Moskovitch joined the AML and its leadership team. The NFB hosts screening for AML events, including media literacy workshops that I attended and participated in between 2007 and 2010. As a key partner in the AML’s efforts, the NFB has not only provided the infrastructure to exhibit media, but has also helped to shape the conceptual frameworks of studying media, as well as the categorical boundaries of what constitutes media.

The technological requirements of projecting movies may also help to explain the ongoing distinction some educators may experience between teaching with film, and teaching with television. Whereas television requires only a small receiver available in most homes, film has traditionally required a theatre, a projectionist, a print of the actual film, etc. Film requires a kind of secondary infrastructure for exhibition, which in turn has generated a tertiary industry of community film organizations, local/regional film festivals, and supplementary teaching materials, which are often created as simultaneously promotional and educational in nature. While most large cities are home to at least one film organization capable of assisting media educators through formal and informal institutional arrangements, equivalent work with television gets left to producers (local affiliate stations and public broadcasters), creating an entirely different set of educational opportunities and practices. The correlative connections between formal media literacy (as an established school subject) and informal media education (as public or private organizational practice) highlight many of the historical forces that have helped produce media literacy in Canada, and that continue to pull educators in multiple
directions at once. In the Ontario history of media literacy, for example, the CHUM network, as well as Television Ontario (TVO), has played an important (yet not altogether unproblematic) role in the development of the school subject. As I discuss in more detail in chapter five, these producers and distributors have helped to expand a kind of “ex-officio” media literacy in Canada. Where existing educational institutions lack the necessary infrastructure for certain forms of media literacy, two sets of partners have emerged: independent (or state-funded) film organizations on the one hand, and private (or state-funded) television stations on the other. The fundamental differences in the mandates, funding structures, and operating practices of these two kinds of partners help to explain some of the ongoing debates over which media forms are best suited to media literacy initiatives. The foundational elements of each medium – its unique grammar, its technical constraints and possibilities, etc. – are often lost in this debate, obscured by the political economy of the particular partners available to educators at any moment in time or in any particular jurisdiction.

3.3 Nominalism and Coding Categories

Beyond simply identifying the criteria which produce discourses in the first place, Foucauldian genealogy also helps to unearth the categories of knowledge that come to generate and frame the discursive narratives circulating in society. Foucault's inquiries emphasize the social forces that constitute and sustain the very terms, categories, and techniques that make knowledge possible (Tamboukou 1999:205). John Rajchman (1985, 1986, 1991) sees four major lines of inquiry in Foucauldian genealogy, which he calls Dispersal, Reversal, Critique, and Skepticism. These four research tools focus attention on the particular strategies for questioning and disrupting existing, established knowledge. In this section, I start with Rajchman’s framework for Foucauldian genealogy in order to move from the history of Canadian media literacy (primarily an Ontario narrative) as it has been documented elsewhere (Pungente 1989; Lee 1997; Pungente, Duncan &
Andersen 2005; Namita 2010) to alternate narratives that have developed across Canada. By documenting media literacy and its history outside of Ontario, I want to make the self-evidences of the conventional narrative a little less stable; I want to unravel the narrative that has been told, and, in doing so, destabilize (and indeed de-school) the school subject as a whole; I want to identify some of the unseen, undocumented events in Canadian media literacy history, in order to make new narratives possible, new discursive formations available. Media literacy, like any school subject, is more than just the semi-stable, coherent assemblage of ideas currently presenting itself as the definitive version of the subject as a whole. We are storytellers by nature, but our tendency to connect disparate events and ideas into a single narrative strand often means that we leave important details out. We repeat the story year after year to help us remember the original events and ideas, and eventually the story risks becoming a myth: not entirely untrue, but hardly an accurate reflection of what happened in the past. My goal in studying the genealogy of Canadian media literacy is to de-mythologize what has become the established historical narrative of the subject.

Rajchman provides a useful set of tools for such a project, taking Foucault’s original works and setting out a number of research strategies for applying Foucault’s methods to a wider range of case studies. His four lines of inquiry, which I define and apply below, provided a starting point for my study of media literacy in Vancouver. Given the Ontario narrative and its discursive patterns, what makes Vancouver a useful case study for a broader, de-mythologized history of media literacy in Canada?

**Dispersal:** As Tamboukou notes, this refers to the way in which Foucault's analysis “disrupts the supposed unity of reason, the subject and history" (1999:205). Through studying the history of media literacy in Vancouver, I began to challenge the dominant, totalizing discourse of Canadian
media literacy, which positions Ontario as the leader, and all other regions as a distant followers. The narrative unity of this account has remained largely unchallenged, even among many educators and scholars in Vancouver (including Namita’s 2010 research in and around Vancouver, as well as Kari Dehli and my 2011 interview with Dan Blake). My aim is to untangle this neat strand, to see how the individual historical elements occupy their own space, and move freely in their own directions. The histories of media literacy across Canada have become burdened by their own narrative weight, their insistence upon origins, founding events, key figures and concepts. What narrative strands connect a series of individuals, organizations and events, and how have these strands been woven together to tell one consistent and unquestioned story?

Reversal: This line of inquiry aims at "shattering self-evidences of Western civilisation" (Tamboukou 1999:205). As Renee Hobbs and others note, a subject like media literacy remains a highly contested discursive domain; it is the debates and contradictions that make the subject meaningful, not just the canonical, institutionally-accepted borders one may erect around particular jurisdictions. For some, media literacy necessarily involves creative production. For others, deconstruction of texts must form the curricular core of media literacy. Genealogical inquiry of media literacy is therefore effective at uncovering the forgotten practices and policies that destabilize the widespread “truths” about the subject. Rather than reifying alternatives, I am interested in showing how the multiplicity of media literacy efforts in Canada became the singular vision of the dominant national narrative. Vancouver’s history need not form its own self-legitimating narrative, but it can assist in unraveling other such narratives. An undoing, or unmaking of Canadian media literacy history simply frees the various constitutive elements from their position in a well-told story, allowing for their re-consideration within different contexts.
**Critique:** Rather than merely “criticising the past in terms of the present,” Foucauldian genealogy looks to “criticise the present by reflecting upon the ways the discursive and institutional practices of the past still affect the constitution of the present” (Tamboukou 1999:205). The exceptional efforts of the AML and others in Ontario have changed the way that we talk about media in schools today. The individuals involved in producing this particular model of media literacy, however, may not have intended to produce a national narrative; the subject travelled and grew according to political and cultural currents of the time. As such, this genealogy is not meant in any way as a dismissive criticism of those who worked to make media literacy a formal school subject in Ontario. It is meant, instead, as a critique of educational jurisdictions in Canada (and elsewhere) that fail to acknowledge the historical specificity of the programs and practices currently circulating in their schools. The discursive domain of a particular school subject is produced over many years, but its rhizomatic roots are never invisible. By digging just under the surface, we can identify the complex network of circulation and exchange that works to continually reproduce a subject such as media literacy.

**Skepticism:** As Tamboukou writes, Foucault “refused to accept given dogmas and discourses of his time,” preferring to question and critique our very impulse toward dogmatizing and discoursing (1999:205). How and why do we establish the codes and categories into which new ideas will be placed and understood, and how might we begin to consider entirely new practices of meaning making? Media literacy in and around Vancouver is both structurally and pedagogically distinct from media literacy in Toronto, making it possible to map some of the ways in which growing school subjects reflect the social and political contexts in which they are produced. For example, one might consider the administrative/jurisdictional function of ministries and school boards in large urban areas undergoing profound demographic shifts. In both Vancouver and Toronto, the ongoing neoliberalization of civic space (from gentrification in
city centres to transit strategies that privilege suburban affluence) can be seen in school spaces, community organization, and even academic research practice itself. Such changes demand that educators consider the function and value of subjects such as media literacy, as it is not sufficient to simply deliver the same curriculum year after year. Mapping media literacy in Vancouver means taking a snapshot of the city as it exists right now, warts and all. It means finding the pathways of cultural exchange and the circulation of creative energies. In mapping media literacy’s genealogy, I am both identifying the multiple spaces in which media literacy itself is produced in the city, and arguing that mapping itself is a means of better understanding cultural life in cities. School subjects such as media literacy cannot be left on the books, taken for granted, and accepted “as is” for years at a time. Indeed, the rapidly changing nature of “media” makes media literacy an ideal school subject for analysis. Scholars and teachers should pay attention to social and political currents relevant to the nexus of culture, media, and technology, as the lived experience of a city is an essential locus of knowledge production and identity formation.

3.4 Beyond Foucault: Mapmaking and Movement

Ultimately, what drew me to Foucauldian genealogy for this work is that the methodology seeks to conduct “a functional microanalysis of power relations, operating on the smallest and most insignificant details” (Tamboukou 1999:205). I believe these seemingly insignificant details constitute much of the subject’s history in Vancouver (and across Canada). What may appear to be a major, or significant detail in the history of media literacy in Ontario may be of no greater importance to the subject (as it exists today) than any other action or event. Does the Ontario government’s decision to include media literacy in the public school curriculum in the 1980s continue to affect teachers in classrooms across Canada today? Do McLuhan, Hall, or Buckingham continue to influence pedagogical practice in the 21st century? Rather than
assuming that some details are more significant (however one chooses to define that term) than others, genealogy looks at patterns, connections, abandoned pathways, and forgotten moments in history. I find this particularly useful for studying school subjects, as the subjects continue to exist today, whether as formal curriculum documents, lived classroom experience, or just the discursive sum of statements circulating in society about “media,” “literacy,” and “media literacy”.

Through genealogical approaches, a subject such as media literacy can be studied locally, or in relation to regional, national, and global trends; one locale may be studied over the course of decades, or in its most present state; media literacy may be located in and around specific cultural venues, or through the energies of particular teachers and organizations. As a social activity, media literacy offers multiple points of entry, to be considered across these numerous dimensions. At each dimension though, one must find empirical evidence to identify and map media literacy – be it through ethnographic study of local places, textual analysis of online communities of teaching and learning, or (as in my case) key informant interviews with local experts. Genealogy, in focusing on the "smallest and most insignificant details," helps give some methodological specificity to what might otherwise be an open-ended approach to multidimensional research. Genealogy is “attentive to details, many of them having remained unnoticed and unrecorded in the narratives of mainstream history,” and thus ends up celebrating “the philosophy of the event" (Tamboukou 207). Rather than considering the grand historical categories and narratives of institutional education, genealogical research helps us to consider specific events and their relevance.

More importantly, genealogy emphasizes the actions of inquiry, rather than the completed project. As Deleuze (drawing on the work of Foucault) notes, this is because genealogy is an act
of mapmaking, or creating cartographical diagrams. Such diagrams, he adds, proceed “by primary non-localisable relations,” and pass “in every relation from one point to the other” (1992:36). Seeking out these relations and making them visible is an act of mapmaking, which should not be confused with mere tracing. In Foucault's (and subsequently Deleuze's) vocabulary, a tracing is the cartographer’s attempt to accurately “capture” reality in a static image; the importance is in the mapping practice itself, and not the final image produced. This mapping can proceed in one of two ways: either we start with the tiny dots we identify in particular places (the events of everyday life), or with the lines of movement and circulation (the social forces making everyday life possible). For Foucault, both mapping practices are essential and, in fact, mutually reinforcing. Writing on the relationship between specific statements within discourse to the totality of discourse itself, he notes:

It can be said that the mapping of discursive formations, independently of other principles of possible unification, reveals the specific level of the statement; but it can also be said that the description of statements and of the way in which the enunciative level is organized leads to the individualization of the discursive formations. The two approaches are equally justifiable and reversible. The analysis of the statement and that of the formation are established correlative. (1969:130)

Foucault’s genealogical method presents a challenge for the researcher seeking to study both statements and formations simultaneously. In studying media literacy in Vancouver, I see no reason to choose between the events of media literacy (classroom practice, professional development seminars, public lectures, etc.) and the more institutionally formalized statements about media literacy (curriculum documents, ministry reports, etc.). The general sometimes determines the specific, but the general is only meaningful through articulations of the specific. How, then, do I map a young school subject, constituted as much by singular events and undocumented practice as by well-established archival texts and legitimated discursive
statements? Genealogy helps identify the *things* to study, as well as the *questions* to ask when studying, but it does not give a clear set of instructions on how to actually *do* research, how to think through the categories and codes of actual empirical work, or genealogical case studies.

The historical account of Canadian media literacy, in Ontario and elsewhere, is told as the history of a school subject, produced as much by formal curriculum documents as by professional organizations, community partners, scholarly research, and everyday classroom practice. Media literacy’s history, as it is most commonly documented, tends to give a greater weight to particular kinds of discursive statements rather than others. To move beyond genealogical analysis therefore requires additional theoretical tools, as well as a deeper interrogation of the very terms and concepts involved in education research. How else can we study the formation and development of a school subject such as media literacy? What other kinds of places, spaces, partnerships, and exchanges might be involved in the production of this subject, and what kinds of methodological approaches will make them visible, comprehensible, and relevant? Moving beyond Foucault’s genealogical research methods, I identify a set of complementary tools and ideas that help me to proceed with my research questions.
Chapter 4
Subjects and Scenes

A decade ago, the move to investigate space seemed to unfold under the influence of Foucault or Lefebvre, whose claims about space as produced seemed to authorize the analysis of circumscribed sites with clear significance in the delineation of power. ... An unending flood of work now seeks to capture a reordering of perception presumed to have been produced within the conditions of urban modernity. ... [Scene]’s intermittent appeal to popular music scholars has stemmed from the sense that it will help to resolve a number of thorny questions, most notably that of relations between the global and the local. [...] It compels us to examine the role of affinities and interconnections which, as they unfold through time, mark and regularize the spatial itineraries of people, things and ideas. (Straw 2002:253)

While Foucauldian genealogy provides a methodological framework for studying the history of media literacy in Canada, I was not convinced that this one framework alone could provide me with the practical tools needed to conduct empirical research in and around Vancouver. Genealogy has helped me to refine and focus my research interests, encouraging historical analysis without ignoring critical concerns of ideology and power. In order to proceed with original research into the history of media literacy, however, I first had to consider how school subjects themselves are constituted and studied, and I then looked for research paradigms and instruments that could link highly localized data to regional, national, and international discourses of the subject as a whole. This chapter clarifies two core conceits/constructs at the heart of this dissertation: subjects (the areas of knowledge constituting institutional education) and research concepts (which structure and guide the research process). I discuss the ways in which a new school subject such as media literacy can come into being, and how it gains various kinds of legitimacy. Rather
than simply defining “subjects” in the abstract, I am interested in how researchers have looked at school subjects as discrete objects of analysis, and how these subjects function at the intersection of multiple (often contradictory) discourses in society. I then introduce what has become a central concept in my own research – Will Straw’s use of the word “scene” – and argue for the value of scene-based analyses, both in education specifically, and in any research that addresses social phenomena more generally. After tracing the term’s own history in cultural studies research, I make the case for “scene” as a critical tool for empirical studies, ideally suited for studying (and complicating) school subjects. As a complex jumble of creative energies, theoretical frameworks, and pedagogical interventions into everyday life, school subjects are precisely the kinds of dense social assemblages that can challenge researchers to find pattern, structure, and meaning. I believe that by developing a model of “scene-based analysis,” I not only position Vancouver’s experience with media literacy within the broader Canadian media literacy narrative (and thereby challenge the hegemony of this national narrative), but I also advance a methodological framework for studying other subjects and their histories.

4.1 Schools, Students, and Studies: Defining Subjects in Education

Much of the literature reviewed in this dissertation takes the existence of a stable school subject called “media literacy” for granted, as if we all agree what this term means, how it developed, and what it looks like in daily life. Media literacy is simply given as a subject, fully formed from its earliest days. It exists as a subject, distinct from other existing subjects. But how are we to define, distinguish, and understand this term within education, and how does it construct the possibilities of future research? To study media literacy’s history in Canada, it is worth taking a step back and thinking about how school
subjects are defined. Who traces the boundaries, and how? What distinguishes a subject among all the other subjects already circulating in education? In the case of media literacy, these questions actually remain highly contested. In Lee’s dissertation, she summarizes this debate, using Kress’s (1992) argument that media literacy is an “autonomous field of study,” but that like many similar fields, “it falls into the category of cross-curricular themes,” so that even in jurisdictions where it is included in curriculum, “it is not yet accepted as a core or foundation subject. Nowhere is media education established at the core of primary and secondary school curricula as a subject in its own right” (Lee 1997:13). Even as the AML in Ontario was pushing full-steam ahead with their media literacy efforts, proselytizing around the world, many media scholars in education still saw an incomplete project: media literacy was emerging as a field of inquiry within other subjects, but it had yet to be “accepted” as a school subject in and of itself. So what actually makes a school subject a school subject? If “acceptance” is key, then whose acceptance: researchers, parents, administrators, and/or classroom teachers? If formal curricular recognition doesn’t provide sufficient legitimacy to call something a subject, then what does? The answers to such questions seem to vary greatly depending on whom you ask. Thankfully, a number of scholars have attempted to provide frameworks and models for studying a range of school subjects, and I believe some of these ideas will be useful in understanding the history of Canadian media literacy.

I begin with Goodson’s work with curriculum studies, not because it offers a clear answer to my questions (it doesn’t), but because it provides a constructive vocabulary for thinking about the social histories of school subjects in the first place – a vocabulary that I unpack and interrogate, but which nonetheless provides a useful framework for subsequent analysis. Where Foucault’s genealogies help illuminate the constructed and
contingent nature of discourses, their emphasis on archival texts (those statements that survive in institutional records) can make it difficult to do genealogical research in the present. How do I research a largely undocumented history of a young school subject, especially in a province where the subject is often imagined to be “falling behind” other jurisdictions? A school subject’s history can be understood in a number of ways, according to various epistemological and ontological frameworks. Rather than beginning with the assumption that one singular narrative has indeed unfolded, and then problematizing each of the constitutive elements according to the methodological vectors outlined in the previous chapter, I believe it is first necessary to examine the ways in which this historical narrative has been understood and articulated in education research. Part of the genealogical process, then, involves investigating the foundational terms, concepts and assumptions that underpin the subject itself. In order to develop the scene-based analysis presented in chapter six, I begin by considering the multiplicities and divergences at the core of education research focused on school subjects.

In Goodson’s review of relevant literature, there are two main frameworks with which scholars have understood school subjects and their histories – one Philosophical, the other Sociological. Each model considers the relationship between a discipline (understood here as the academic, scholarly discourse) and the school subject (the pragmatic discourse of classroom instruction); for my purposes, this maps neatly onto the distinction between media studies and media literacy. The Philosophical model argues that “the intellectual discipline is created and systematically defined by a community of scholars, normally working in a university department, and is then ‘translated’ for use as a school subject” (Goodson 1981:166). Using this framework, the history of media literacy must be traced directly to the genealogical roots of media studies. The critical
moment for Canadian media literacy, then, is the Birmingham School’s application of cultural studies theory to everyday cultural life. Each instantiation of media literacy today is tied to this pedagogical move, its emphasis on the ideological construction of media themselves, and its fundamentally pragmatic focus on deconstruction, demystification, and power.

As Goodson summarizes, the second major model for considering a school subject’s history, the Sociological framework, does more than merely reverse the flow of ideas and influence. Quoting Musgrove (1968), Goodson argues that this model addresses subjects “both within the school and the nation at large as social systems sustained by communication networks, material endowments and ideologies” (cited in Goodson 1981:163). Where the Philosophical framework sees a vertical hierarchy of knowledge dissemination (the “experts” in the discipline shape the ideas to be taught by the teachers in the field), the Sociological framework sees multiple axes of lateral movement and exchange. Subjects are not simply developed by a core group of scholars or practitioners; they are socially constructed phenomena with a vast network of genealogical roots. Using this second framework, the history of Canadian media literacy can be traced to a far broader assemblage of discourses and practices. I do not discount the extraordinary importance of the intellectual trajectories which have helped produce media literacy as a school subject today (the Birmingham, Frankfurt, and Toronto Schools, among others), but I believe this sociological approach to studying media literacy’s history is a far richer way to capture the incredible range of actors and organizations involved. School subjects are often inexorably linked to founding figures and key concepts, but this is more often than not a by-product of our narrative impulse. The story of a school subject’s history is most easily told – and remembered – by connecting the biggest, most obvious dots in the
archive. The subject itself, however, is a palimpsest, written and re-written upon by those who have worked in and around media for decades. (And all of this assumes, at its core, that school subjects such as media literacy are first and foremost *school* subjects – that is, media literacy is what happens in schools. Goodson’s model is a useful way to consider the narrative aspect of a school subject’s history, but it does little to help shift our focus away from schools and towards the broader social discourses around media and literacy.)

Beyond the two fundamental frameworks for considering where school subjects come from, how they develop, and how we might study them today, Goodson also cites the work of David Layton, who advanced “a tentative model for the evolution of a school subject,” specifically within the context of public school curriculum (cited in Goodson 1981:167). Layton’s model involves three steps, each of which is summarized below (in order to capture Layton’s wonderfully wry take on education itself). In each step, he considers the teachers involved, the appeal of the subject to those studying it, and the future of the subject within institutional spaces of education. In the first step:

The callow intruder stakes a place in the time-table, justifying its presence on grounds such as pertinence and utility. During this stage learners are attracted to the subject because of its bearing on matters of concern to them. The teachers are rarely trained specialists, but bring the missionary enthusiasm of pioneers to their task. (Layton 1972:11)

In Canadian media literacy, this first step might be Barry Duncan taking his students on a mall walk. With “missionary enthusiasm,” teachers such as Duncan began bringing media into the classroom, as well as bringing their students to the media. Those who studied with Duncan (including a few current AML members, plus countless active and retired teachers in Ontario) report being drawn to the subject, in no small part, because of
their teacher’s enthusiasm. As one AML member recalls, discovering the work of Marshall McLuhan was the “epiphany,” but it was Duncan’s professional development work in Toronto that turned media literacy into “a passion” (Arcus, interview with Kari Dehli and the author, 2011). Combining Goodson’s frameworks with Layton’s steps, it is clear that this first step has been repeated countless times in every jurisdiction across Canada. Duncan may have been one of the first teachers to bring a “missionary enthusiasm” for media to his students, but a similar story can be found in Vancouver, in Calgary, in Montreal, etc. Each time an enthusiastic educator begins to bring media into the classroom (or to bring the classroom out into the mediated world), they are building momentum for the growth of a “new” school subject.

The single, solitary teacher (often working against an established curriculum) is not an anomaly, nor is it necessarily the direct result of a growing discipline (formed in part by the actions of earlier, “key” teachers, such as those in the AML). It is possible to see each instance of the “pioneer” teacher as a unique moment in the formation of the school subject, without having to privilege any one instance over the others. Similarly, in his reflection on the history of British Cultural Studies, Sefton-Green looks at specific initiatives – including a 1989 project on the Music Business with which he himself was involved – and observes that the use of classroom teachers may be framed as an “avant-garde (perhaps in other analyses as a Trotskyite fraction)” that helped lead the development of curriculum. But such an effort, he writes, was (and is) ultimately “based on a particular model of pupil engagement”; “clearly,” he argues, “the critical radical position of these teachers drove their aspirations for their students” (2011:58). The metaphor of the missionary, the pioneer, or the avant-garde figures prominently in histories of school subjects such as media literacy. This is explained in part by a
modernist impulse to find narrative in history: the origins, the early successes, the obstacles, the perseverance, the hard-lived victories, and finally the enduring legacy of the great figure. And it is explained in part (certainly in the case of media literacy in Ontario) by the ongoing presence and active contributions of these key figures: when the same founding members are still engaged in the school subject today, it’s easy to look to their leadership and historical knowledge, which first developed in the “early days” of “missionary enthusiasm”. (The pioneer and the missionary are not exclusively understood to be male in these narratives, but there is certainly something inherently masculine in the perceived “boldness” or “fearless leadership” of these figures that demands some critical unpacking.)

Layton’s model moves to its second step once the early vanguard of educators gathers sufficient clout as to advocate for greater inclusion in formal curriculum documents. At this point, he writes:

A tradition of scholarly work in the subject is emerging along with a corps of trained specialists from which teachers may be recruited. Students are still attracted to the study, but as much by its reputation and growing academic status as by its relevance to their own problems and concerns. The internal logic and discipline of the subject is becoming increasingly influential on the selection and organisation of subject matter. (1972:11)

In the history of Canadian media literacy, this second step would appear to have started in the late 1980s, when the AML was advocating for the inclusion of the Key Concepts in the Ontario provincial curriculum. As Ontario teachers (many connected to or involved in the AML) began to see themselves at the forefront of a national and global project, a kind of “hardening of the categories” began to occur in the subject. Formal boundaries were
being drawn, defining what is and what is not to be taught in the classroom. Again, if we consider both Layton’s steps and Goodson’s frameworks, then the history of Canadian media literacy becomes more complex. While the AML’s influence on the Ontario curriculum is clear, it remains to be seen whether or not they exerted equal influence in other jurisdictions where media literacy has entered the curriculum. The “internal logic and discipline” of media literacy across Canada appears monolithic only if one presumes that the subject itself is uniform and universal. If the starting moments in each jurisdiction (the “pioneer” teacher) differ – in degree if not in kind – then why not presume that the developing school subject (and its growing curricular footprint) differs as well? It is easy to see a pattern in Canadian media literacy if one connects the structuring elements in every jurisdiction back to a single origin (the AML in Ontario). Disconnect the dots, however, and you end up with a whole range of new, previously untraced pictures.

In Layton’s third and final step, the new subject reaches full legitimacy within education, which may or may not be in the interests of those most involved with advocacy and development:

The teachers now constitute a professional body with established rules and values. The selection of subject matter is determined in large measure by the judgements and practices of the specialist scholars who lead inquiries in the field. Students are initiated into a tradition, their attitudes approaching passivity and resignation, a prelude to disenchantment. (1972:11)

While hardly a flattering image of where we may now find ourselves in the history of Canadian media literacy, this may not be far from the mark. How excited can we expect young learners to be when faced with a formal school subject, complete with prescribed
learning outcomes and standardized, testable skills? This is not to say that media literacy is a joyless exercise in deconstruction and demystification, but it no longer is the young school subject on the margins, taught by pioneering teachers looking to disrupt the system in which they and their students are caught. Like the song says, as school subjects age and develop, they don’t always get what they want (radical pedagogical transformation); but if they try, sometimes they get what they need (a stable foothold in classrooms; an institutional recognition of their legitimacy). Drawing on the research to date, I am not convinced that Canadian media literacy has yet reached this third step in Layton’s model, but I believe it is very close. The reach of one particular view of the subject (the AML’s approach of deconstruction and demystification, drawing on both the Birmingham tradition and Buckingham’s view of media studies) is impressive, inserting itself into informant interviews in Vancouver. What media literacy is and can be in Vancouver has been partially determined by the events that took place in Ontario over twenty-five years ago. Those who began their media literacy careers as pioneers have now become the specialists, responsible for shaping the future of the field (even in jurisdictions with which they have no actual experience, as teachers or researchers).

While the individuals associated with the early history of media literacy in both Ontario and BC worked on several fronts to build provincial support for the new school subject, generating reports, articles, and well-reviewed seminars/institutes, assessment of actual classroom instruction of media literacy has been fairly limited. Only a few large-scale research efforts have attempted such an assessment, with limited/limiting results. In Ontario, for example, Robert Morgan’s 1997 survey of over 100 media teachers revealed “significant challenges to teacher media literacy,” including “literary biases, elitist or canonical cultural expectations,” as well as what he labels “traditional English classroom
practices” (cited in Pungente, Duncan & Andersen 2005:150). In BC, a similar gap between curricular expectation and actual classroom pedagogy exists. As Namita summarizes, while “there have been no provincial-wide or even school board-wide surveys conducted to assess how much media education is taking place in classrooms, thus making concrete details unavailable,” she does cite the efforts of SFU’s Kline and Stewart, who “conducted a survey of 80 teachers in BC in 2005 and 2006 and reported that many of the specified media education Prescribed Learning Outcomes (PLOs) in BC curricula are ignored or not taught” (cited in Namita 2010:52). As with Ontario, BC media literacy on the ground may differ greatly from formal institutional definitions (codified and prescribed in official documents and discourses).

As every teacher I have ever spoken with – for this dissertation research or otherwise – has confirmed, however, the curriculum is rarely, if ever, the definitive resource when it comes to classroom teaching and learning. Media literacy is often taught without the teacher even necessarily labelling it as such. Teachers may lack the particular vocabulary to accurately describe what they do in the classroom (at least in terms of the scholarly and professional discourses of school subjects such as media literacy), but they are nevertheless doing the very kinds of work described by the academic experts and veteran media educators alike. Individual teachers (working in all subjects), for example, often use media texts to complement their existing teaching practices (documentaries, for example). Deeper engagement with the media industries, consumer commercialism, constructions and articulations of ideology, etc. may not be commonplace in many BC schools, but this may not necessarily be a failure of media literacy advocates. One teacher interviewed in Vancouver (who teaches in both Social Studies and English) describes the challenge of media literacy as follows:
In English there is an actual media literacy component, where they talk about things like […] ‘how would something like a camera angle affect the audience in a way like a literary device affects the reader?’ So there’s actually like teaching them the meta-language around media literacy. I’m not sure how well that is done but that is actually part of the curriculum. For Social Studies it’s more just using media to enhance the curriculum. […] I know that it’s not mandated in the curriculum to kind of critically analyze media in Social Studies the same way that it is in English. It’s more just ‘use it’. (Molly, interview with the author)

Nevertheless, as an English teacher herself, Molly sees a fair amount of resistance from many of her colleagues who teach the subject: “I don’t think the average teacher in my department would say that a discussion of hetero-normativity or whiteness or race is more important than reading *The Wife of Bath*. I just don’t think we’re there yet,” she adds, “where we think that those discussions are more important than content” (ibid.). As the school subject of media literacy grows and develops, then, it seems that other subjects are caught in the maelstrom it creates; English and Social Studies, for example, are themselves involved in similar debates around the nature of texts, culture, ideas, narratives, etc. Isolating a single school subject for genealogical analysis provides only a partial understanding of the subject’s current status in Canadian education.

How then are we to problematize a school subject such as media literacy, which is simultaneously young (relative to almost every other subject taught in Canadian schools), and almost fully developed (at least within Layton’s loose framework)? With multiple jurisdictions (the provinces and territories across Canada, as well as the local specificities of particular school boards) and only a few decades of history, media literacy has moved fairly quickly. Yet less than thirty years after the AML’s Key Concepts entered the Ontario curriculum, the genealogical roots of the subject are starting to ossify, leaving a
permanent record for archival study. There is much more to this history than such an archival record would admit. There is also much more to media literacy than the school subject and its particular history in BC. While Layton and Goodson interrogate some of the power dynamics at play within institutionally formalized and legitimized spaces of teaching and learning, there is a far greater range of educational practice that falls well outside the basic terminology of the models advanced above. What, then, connects school subjects to community organizations, classroom teachers to social justice activists? How do we study an idea such as media literacy as simultaneously a school subject and a larger social discourse? Much of my own research and thinking around media literacy has been influenced by a particular set of scholars and their research approaches – most notably Hall, Foucault, and McLuhan. Developing a research framework that is better suited to the increasingly complex web of interaction and exchange producing Canadian media literacy, however, pushed me in some surprising and highly rewarding directions.

4.2 Scene-Thinking: A Research Concept Ahead of Its Time

While researching the multiple histories of media literacy across Canada, I had regular working sessions with a couple of colleagues in Vancouver: Professor Stuart Poyntz (at Simon Fraser University), and Professor Benjamin Woo (now at Carleton University). Our semi-overlapping interests led to many fruitful conversations on media, education, sociology, research methodology, etc. Over the span of several months, we noticed a recurring idea in these conversations: each of us was partially remembering an article we had read in the journal Cultural Studies many years before. Something about this piece – a reflection on popular music studies – had buried itself deep in our memory, and was returning at this particular moment in each of our academic careers. The author of this essay, Will Straw, used the word “scene” to describe a particular set of social relations
essential to the production and consumption of music. “Scene,” he argued, eliminated the need in music studies for such a simplistic binary as production vs. consumption, as it is the social relations (and the spaces through which cultural energies circulate) that are the critical object of analysis.

The term “scene” itself has been used to describe cultural activities for many years by John Irwin (1977) and Barry Shank (1994), among others, but over the past two decades Straw’s work on popular culture (1991; 2002; 2004) has employed the term to better articulate the multiple processes of production, consumption, engagement, and interaction that constitute the cultural life of contemporary cities. He suggests that scene is “the most flexible term in a social morphology that includes such categories as art world, simplex or subculture” (2002:250). But unlike these other terms, scene offers a wholly unique relationship between space, place, time, and movement, focusing our attention on the transient, ephemeral energies that may generate and/or sustain cultural activity. Straw’s term and its implications have given cultural studies scholars a unique vocabulary for identifying the practices and exchanges of cultural energy, without developing a precise methodological framework for conducting scene-based research. Focusing on the overlooked and unseen pathways by which people and ideas produce meaningful activity can greatly enhance the efforts of researchers in a range of disciplines, yet Straw’s use of the term primarily continues to influence those studying music, art, and other forms of creative expression in the cultural realm. In the past few years, I have been drawn ever closer to this work and its implications for my own research in education. I believe the idea of “scene” has a great deal to contribute to the study of school subjects and their histories.
Identifying a particular cluster of cultural activities as a scene does more than simply name a category for analysis or create a boundary for containing and excluding data. Rather, it provides the researcher with what the sociologist Herbert Blumer (1954) calls a “sensitizing concept”. Sensitizing concepts are the foundational concepts guiding empirical research: they help to illuminate particular activities and phenomena that we may encounter in the field. As Bowen writes, they can “draw attention to important features of social interaction and provide guidelines for research in specific settings” (2006:3). For Blumer, one of the greatest problems facing those who research social phenomena was the confusion over concepts and their uses in the research process. In an address to fellow sociologists, Blumer argued that “social theory is conspicuously defective in its guidance of research inquiry,” adding that it is “gravely restricted in setting research problems, in suggesting kinds of empirical data to be sought, and in connecting these data to one another” (1954:4). His recommendation was to re-consider the role of concepts themselves, as concepts are the only means to connect theory with the measurable world around us, adding that “it is the concept that points to the empirical instances about which a theoretical proposal is made” (1954:4). He then proposed that the concepts employed by empirical researchers be divided into two types: what he calls definitive concepts (those that designate “what is common to a class of objects, by the aid of a clear definition in terms of attributes or fixed benchmarks”), and what he calls sensitizing concepts, which lack such attributes or fixed benchmarks, and thus can only provide the researcher with “a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances” (1954:7). For Blumer, a significant problem with a great deal of research was that sensitizing concepts tend to be taken for granted, turning them into “vague stereotypes(s),” or mere “device(s) for ordering or arranging empirical instances”
To consider the crucial function of research concepts (particularly those that guide, direct, or “sensitize” the researcher in particular ways) is therefore to re-consider the research process itself, from the initial formation of research questions to the analysis and presentation of final data.

The term “scene” itself has proved exceptionally difficult to define, and as such it may appear to be of little methodological use as a concept. As Straw writes:

A scene resists deciphering, in part, because it mobilizes local energies and moves these energies in multiple directions - onwards, to later reiterations of itself; outwards, to more formal sorts of social or entrepreneurial activity; upwards, to the broader coalescing of cultural energies within which collective identities take shape. (2004:412)

A scene lacks clear, traceable boundaries, making it difficult to map with conventional research tools. Studying scenes requires a different set of tools altogether, as the researcher must focus on movement and flow, rather than stable patterns and figures. For Straw, a key feature of cultural scenes is their lack of containment; what one researcher may identify as a central, defining element of a community may appear to another researcher as residual excess – the inevitable remains of creative production. For this reason, Straw argues, "scenes take shape, much of the time, on the edges of cultural institutions which can only partially absorb and channel the clusters of expressive energy which form within urban life" (2004:416). In my interviews with key informants in Vancouver, I encountered stories of this very phenomenon – cultural activities that seemed to generate “too much” content or energy, which spilled out of institutional borders and became “lost”. (The Summer Institute media literacy series, which I discuss in chapter five, is an example of a simultaneously over-looked and over-analyzed
moment in BC’s media literacy scene. Misunderstood by even those most involved in the scene’s emergence, the series is nonetheless held up by others as a crucial intervention, bridging scholarly media research with on-the-ground professional development.) In my efforts to theorize, contain, and speak to this excess, I was drawn to Straw’s research into popular music, in which unabsorbed energies are recognized as an essential constitutive force producing music scenes. This approach to studying culture helped me to better understand the importance of “one-off” events (in music or in media literacy), the status and function of the solitary figure within a scene (as opposed to the coordinated and legitimized efforts of organizations/institutions), and the significance of temporary alliances, collaborations and partnerships (many of which come and go with budget cycles, annual events, etc.).

“Scene” therefore acts as a very peculiar kind of sensitizing concept, alerting the researcher to both the temporal and spatial characteristics of cultural practice. Like the similar concepts of “subculture,” “community,” or “network,” a scene is grounded in localized spaces and places: it is inexorably tied to the cultural, social, and economic fabric of cities and towns. The spatial configuration of a scene can often keep it hidden, even when it is right in front of us, unfolding in the everyday places we inhabit. For education research such as my own, scene-based analysis can draw out previously unseen detail and connection, filling in many of the gaps created by genealogy’s overarching attempts to trouble the past and re-write the present. Scene-based analysis connects Foucauldian approaches to the history of knowledge (where media literacy comes from, and how it has developed over time) with Goodson’s Sociological approach to the study of subjects. As a school subject, Canadian media literacy has travelled, mutated, and adapted itself to a wide range of local environments; it has drawn on scholarly discourses
concerning media and literacy; it is the creation of teachers and administrators, activists and artists, researchers and reporters. Given the multiple challenges involved in studying such a complex social phenomenon, it came as no surprise to me that a research tool as useful as “scene” has been criticized for its expansive, even vague nature. As Hesmondhalgh writes, “its use has been very ambiguous, or perhaps more accurately, downright confusing” (2005:28-29). Working through the murkiness of such a broadly applicable research concept has been one of the most interesting and rewarding challenges of this dissertation, as I feel the term is particularly useful in a research field such as education.

Concepts such as “scene” are much more than mere prescriptive research tools (identifying specific objects of analysis). They are highly influential modes of thought, challenging the researcher to consider the normative dimensions they are invoking in each use of the term itself. Rather than simply applying a typology and punching in the numbers, a sensitizing concept such as “scene” demands a further set of research questions be addressed: how is this a scene, who is involved, what is the history of the scene, where does the scene unfold, etc. Doing scene-based analysis, I argue, means treating a cluster of activities as a scene, in order to consider the elements and relationships constituting cultural practice more comprehensively. Thinking about the importance of sensitizing concepts (such as scene) orients the researcher towards certain kinds of research questions, but it also assists in data coding and analysis. As Bowen argues, sensitizing concepts in social research are particularly well suited to grounded theory, involving the “continual interplay between data collection and analysis to produce a theory” (2006:2). Sensitizing concepts inform the earliest stages of the research process, but, as Blumer reflects, they can (and must) continually be “tested, improved, and
refined,” especially when “examining substantive codes with a view to developing thematic categories from the data” (cited in Bowen 2006:3). This continual interplay between sensitizing concepts, research questions, codes and categories gives scene-based analysis a highly useful morphology, adapting and amending the research framework as changing conditions may demand. The pathways of circulation and exchange uncovered through data collection ultimately give structure to the coding choices that will make data analysis both possible and productive.

Selecting and considering a sensitizing concept such as “scene” is, of course, no guarantee of inclusivity, reliability, or comprehensiveness. In his own use of Blumer’s work in a case study of community-based antipoverty projects in Jamaica, Bowen warns that while “sensitizing concepts might alert researchers to some important aspects of research situations, they also might direct attention away from other important aspects” (2006:3). Considering the history of media literacy in Vancouver as a scene helps sensitize me to particular activities and connections, but this is by no means the only such concept available to me. Across a range of disciplines and research traditions, there are several other terms that could easily fill this sensitizing role. Before proceeding with a scene-based analysis, I first provide some justification of the term as the most suitable for my particular research project. What are the strengths of scene as a sensitizing concept, and what can it offer above and beyond similar concepts? In our analysis of scene’s uses within cultural studies and communication scholarship, Woo, Poyntz and I argue that, across a number of disciplines and theoretical traditions, scholars have attempted to populate the excluded middle between individual agency and social structure (Woo, Rennie & Poyntz 2014). In addition to “network,” for instance, researchers have posited social objects such as “subculture” (Hall and Jefferson 1976) and its post-subcultural
heirs (Muggleton and Wienzierl 2003; Bennett 2011), “field” (Bourdieu 1996), “art world” (Becker 1982), “community of practice” (Lave and Wenger 1991), “fandom” (Jenkins 1992), “(neo-)tribe” (Maffesoli 1996; Bennett 1999), and “media ecology”\(^6\) (Ito et al. 2010) as sites of meaning-making practices. Each of these concepts offers the researcher a particular way of imagining and organizing their ideas, but I believe “scene” combines the best elements of them all, without some of the institutional and historical baggage many of them carry.

Within media literacy research itself, a range of terms has been used to categorize and analyze the social nature of the field. Sefton-Green and Bresler, for example, point to the work of sociologists of cultural production such as Bourdieu (1986, 1993), who use the terms “field” and “practice” to explain “the interplay of the individual, their formation and their actions” (2011:11). The strength of the Bourdieusian vernacular is that it sensitizes the researcher to the spatial complexities of cultural activity (developing and unfolding across a “field” of play – as in the sporting context – containing its own rules and regulations), as well as to the inherent link between the personal and the social (in order to advance, an activity must be “practiced,” that is, performed, rehearsed, or acted out). What “field” and “practice” lack, in contrast to “scene,” is a clear awareness of culture’s deeper temporal characteristics: the unfolding histories of a field (its locations, its boundaries and borders, for example) or practice (who has practiced this activity, and for how long?) may be investigated, but the concepts themselves are more spatially oriented. (As I argue in greater detail below, the temporal sensitivities of scene-based

\(^6\) This use of the term “media ecology” is distinct from the media studies approach of the same name, pioneered by Marshall McLuhan, Neil Postman, and others.
analysis are essential to studying school subjects such as media literacy. While similar concepts may capture some of scene’s spatial features, they may not be as well suited for the fundamentally genealogical nature of education research.)

Perhaps the most common concept used in the past two decades to describe cultural activities such as media literacy is “network,” which, as Woo, Poyntz and I argue, has morphed into a kind of meta-concept we call “network talk” (2014:5). This meta-concept includes not only explicit uses of “network” itself as a sensitizing concept (such as the Actor-Network Theory [ANT] of Latour, Callon, Law and others, or Manuel Castells’ oft-cited “network society”), but also more general metaphorical uses of “network” within popular discourse of cultural and technology. There is undoubtedly much common ground covered by the sensitizing concepts of “network” and “scene”. In arguing for the specific usefulness of scene-based analysis to education research such as my own, I am not diminishing the contributions made by “network” or by “network talk” to contemporary scholarship. Rather, I believe “scene” is particularly well suited to certain kinds of research, namely those fields of inquiry that must work within various categories of space (public institutions, private homes, community centres, etc.), as well as across differing temporal dimensions (day-to-day classroom instruction, annual professional development events, and career-spanning engagements with specific topics, etc.). Both “network” and “scene” foreground the connections and relations among individual members, but the former can tend toward highly disembodied constructions of how and where people engage with one another. Scenes are closer to the ground, as it were, linking the materiality of daily life to the invisible pathways of circulation and exchange. Networks are often defined by decentralized logic, which emphasizes the importance of nodes and nodal figures. Scenes, on the other hand, are often produced by highly
ephemeral memberships and associations, making it difficult to identify stable, enduring circuits of meaning making. If network talk seeks to transcend the spatial and temporal – what Castells (2000) calls “the space of flows” and “timeless time” – scene-based analysis invests the lived world and its physical places with a kind of concrete meaning, independent of their actual longevity or permanence.

As a network, Canadian media literacy takes shape through the formal connections between recognized organizations and actors: John Pungente’s visits to British Columbia, or the NFB’s online archive of classroom teaching materials. The nodal figures in this network are the pioneer teachers in Ontario, the leading (and currently in vogue) scholars in media studies, and the official and affiliated advocacy groups across Canada: the AML, BCAME, CAMEO, MediaSmarts, etc. Studying this network involves identifying the key nodes, then tracing the links between them, producing a map of Canadian media literacy in its present form. Such a map would undoubtedly identify many of the same actors that I discuss in chapters five and six, but a network map differs from a scene-based analysis in that the former flattens all social activity while the latter tries to capture a brief snapshot of its liveliness, or its essential yet ephemeral being in the world. Networks and scenes only appear alike if the method used in identifying and (more importantly) describing them is alike. As I argue below, re-thinking how researchers conceptualize the social world involves a re-examination of the essential concepts themselves.

If, as Blumer argued, the concepts employed in studying the social are the very foundation of thoughtful, effective research, then seeing media literacy in Vancouver as a “scene,” rather than a “community” or a “network,” is critical. Scene-based analysis
raises a particular set of questions, both holistic and highly specific. Scenes straddle the personal, the institutional, and the everyday, and scene research therefore invokes the cultural studies scholarship of Birmingham School scholars as well as James Gee’s explorations of literacies. To study a particular scene is to ask: What kinds of actors, connections, activities and artefacts are worth studying, and how does one begin to identify and categorize the wide range of data sources that exist around us? Thinking about sensitizing concepts strikes me as an important task in education research as elsewhere, and I believe “scene” is a particularly appropriate concept for studying subjects and their histories. In the next section, I sketch what I see as the necessary contours of a scene-based analysis in order to better articulate what it actually means to study a scene. I focus on both the spatial and temporal usefulness of scene as a concept, and argue for the methodological soundness of such analyses. In the next two chapters, I apply this framework to media literacy in Vancouver, showing how scene-based analysis actually looks in practice.

4.3 Doing Scene-Based Research: Space Explorers and the Final Frontier

In order to do scene-based research, it is first necessary to outline the terms and strategies involved in what is a relatively new and emerging approach to studying social phenomena. I do not claim to be breaking new ground with this methodological reflection: rather, I believe that the model of scene-based analysis I outline in this chapter is an original contribution to education research only insofar as it groups together a set of tools and theories that are rarely seen to be connected. To think about media literacy in Canada as a scene (or set of scenes) is to think about the various genealogical strands of a school subject’s history which have worked to produce contemporary practice in the
field; it is to take a step back and reflect on the foundational concepts guiding social research; it is to re-think the spatial and temporal conditions produced by (and continually producing) social research. Scene-based analysis provides a set of structuring principles to complement Foucauldian genealogy, allowing the researcher to trace subject histories at the meso-level, linking the everyday to broader structural questions. I contend that the research model developed and applied in this dissertation is of use to scholars across a range of disciplines.

Existing literature on the study of scenes connects the concept itself with similar ideas of movement, fluidity, and exchange. In their 2010 anthology on cities, for example, Boutros and Straw advocate what Ben Highmore (2005) calls "rhythmic terms" of studying the social, and in particular the notion of "circulation"; Boutros and Straw trace circulation's various uses (over several centuries) as a conceptual tool for understanding practices and processes – from the circulation of blood through the body, to the circulation of newspapers, and the movements of pipelines, sewers, and electrical grids across cities (2010:3). Citing Lee and LiPuma (2002), they argue that analyzing circulation goes well beyond the simple study of "people, ideas, and commodities" moving from one place to the next; rather, they recognize that "circulation is a cultural process with its own forms of abstraction, evaluation, and constraint, which are created by the interactions between specific types of circulating forms and interpretive communities built around them" (Boutros & Straw 2010:10-11). Ultimately, circulation is a defining feature of scenes, because it is simultaneously a spatial and temporal process, moving from place to place, sometimes leaving permanent traces, and often disappearing completely. "Things do not just move through (or around) the city," write Boutros and Straw, “but are accumulated and sedimented over time. People do not simply move
through the city in predictable ways but sometimes coalesce into momentary and temporary collectives” (2010:11). Scenes are defined in part by this ongoing process of circulation, and this helps explain the difficulties in clearly defining and containing the concept itself. If the circulating energies constituting scenes are unpredictable, impermanent, and abstract, then how does one begin to study them in meaningful ways? How do we capture a momentary snapshot of circulation, and develop an informed understanding of the connections and processes producing this circulation?

Circulation, both as metaphor and as daily practice, should be an instantly recognizable metaphor for those researching education. Students move through the school system, passing from grade to grade, from school to school, from childhood to adulthood; teachers move through the system, navigating their own career trajectories; and subjects themselves circulate through the institutions of education, from teacher education to professional development workshops to classroom teaching materials. Like the fans in nightclubs first studied by Straw, the constitutive elements of a media literacy scene are in constant movement, circulating in and around the spaces of teaching and learning. The surplus energy generated by such circulation can sometimes coalesce or crystallize, creating easily observable phenomena for researchers to identify and document; other times this surplus energy simply dissipates or mutates into other, barely recognizable forms. The challenge of studying scenes is directly tied to the problem of circulation: by the time the researcher can find clear traces of the scene, the energies that made the scene observable may have already moved on, or vanished altogether.

Studying the circulation of cultural energies and activities, be it punk music in Montreal or media literacy initiatives in Vancouver, therefore necessitates a particular way of
thinking about space and time, as scenes can be very difficult to visualize and map using conventional tools. The question of space (understanding the ways it has been imagined or understood in different cultures at different times) is highly instructive in developing a methodological framework for studying scenes. Social relations and cultural activities, writes Henri Lefebvre, “have no real existence save in and through space. Their underpinning is spatial” (1991:404 italics in original). As Lefebvre famously remarked, to talk about space is really to talk about the production of space, adding, “there is a politics of space because space is political” (2009:174). We tend to treat space as an already existing reality of the world around us, when in fact it is as much a socially and historically produced concept as “education” or “identity”. Lefebvre argues that each discipline studying social phenomena (including education) tends to create its own “residue” – that is, something that “evades its grasp” (2003:56). Numbers and statistics may hint at narratives they cannot fully articulate, while generalized theories often fail to provide clear tools and categories for future work. Thus, for Lefebvre, it was essential to flush out a fuller philosophy of space itself, to better sensitize other disciplines to an essential oversight (or “blind field”) he believed was haunting their methodology.

Lefebvre goes on to sketch out the project at hand for researchers in these fields which study social phenomena: we must connect mental space (“that of mathematicians, that of philosophers, that of epistemology, […] the refined representation of space […] the space of commonplace perception”) with social space (“that of the accumulations invested in the planet and the investor, that of spatial practices”); as he sees it, this act of connection forms a “methodologically essential link” between the “elementary and the partial to the global”; however, he warns that one must neither blur the boundary between the two forms of space nor continue to see them as somehow distinct, and thus make “the
elucidation of practice impossible” (2009:198-9). This linking of the “partial to the global” (without the subsumption of one by the other) is precisely the kind of challenge taken up by Straw and others advancing the scene-based analysis of situated social practices. As a meso-level unit of analysis, scene sensitizes researchers to policy, ideology, and institutional history on the one hand (existing in Lefebvre’s “mental space”), as well as classroom practice, professional development, and local media activity on the other (existing in Lefebvre’s “social space”), without collapsing the defining boundaries between the two. The space of scenes exists and unfolds at several scales all at once, and cannot be represented with a single set of mapping instruments. It is simultaneously a socially produced space of exchange and circulation, a geographically linked space of physical and places and pathways, and an imagined space of national and global associations. Studying the school subject of media literacy may involve a search for the top and the bottom, to best conceive of the (inherently vertical) flows of ideas and practices; studying the media literacy scene, however, requires a spatial mode characterized by lateral exchanges between various members/producers of the scene itself. As I discuss in chapter seven, re-imagining the top and the bottom in this history may prove useful for future interrogations of school subjects, curriculum developments and revisions, etc.

Understanding the spaces around us provides its own act of sensitization, drawing attention to people and practices that may not be visible on conventional maps of conventional spaces. As Lefebvre puts it:

A social space cannot be adequately accounted for either by nature (climate, site) or by its previous history. Nor does the growth of the forces of production give rise in any direct causal fashion to a particular space or a particular time.
Mediations, and mediators, have to be taken into consideration: the action of
groups, factors within knowledge, within ideology, or within the domain of
representations. Social space contains a great diversity of objects, both natural and
social, including the networks and pathways which facilitate the exchange of
material things and information.” (1991:77)

Studying the spatial importance of “networks and pathways” combines the social
geography advocated by Lefebvre with research trajectories from other, seemingly
disparate fields. Richard Cavell, for example, sees the question of social space as a
critical link between the media studies of McLuhan (essential to the AML’s early work)
and the historical investigations of Foucault. McLuhan ties the production of space to
specific historical epochs (defined by the dominant communication technology in a
particular culture), arguing that print literacy conflated the visual with the spatial, when
in fact we are now living in a space that is effectively acoustic in nature (Cavell
2002:26). Where visual space was linear, sequential, and rational (Euclidean geometry as
a defining example), acoustic space is spherical, all-at-once, and heterogeneous. To live
in the electronic global village, argued McLuhan, is to live in acoustic space, rather than
visual space (Cavell 2002:26). For McLuhan himself, education (institutionally) was a
remnant of visual space, whereas modern media environments (of the 1960s) were
inherently acoustic in their nature.

Cavell sees this as analogous to Foucault's notion of "heterotopic" spaces, which are
"something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites,
all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously
represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault 1986:22-4). For Foucault, the question of
space is a question of the social, noting that "we do not live in a kind of void, inside of
which we could place individuals and things,” but rather “inside a set of relations”; to
study the spaces in which we live, he adds, we must start by “looking for the set of relations by which a given site can be defined” (1986:23). Among the many sites and spaces of inquiry, Foucault was particularly interested in heterotopias, which he believed are "capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible,” listing such diverse examples as the cinema, the garden, and even the cemetery: spaces where contradictory cultural impulses and possibilities play out all at once in a single place; some heterotopias represent an "indeinitely accumulating time" (such as museums and libraries, which attempt to create "a place of all times"), while others represent time "in its most fleeting, transitory, precarious aspect,” with fairgrounds on the outskirts of cities, populated for only a short period each year, as an example (Foucault 1986:26). As with McLuhan’s acoustic space or Lefebvre’s multiple produced spaces, Foucault’s heterotopias are complex intersections of cultural activity and exchange, combining the ephemerality of daily life with the sustained/sustaining meanings that make the social worth studying in the first place. To conceive of a particular cluster of social activities as a scene is therefore to ask the fundamental question of where scenes exist – in what kind(s) of space does a scene exist, and how is the production of the scene itself inexorably linked to the production of space(s)? To ask this in a more specific manner, where does Canadian media literacy exist, and which kinds of space have been essential to the development and growth of this young school subject?

Scene-based analysis, by sensitizing research to the spatial conditions of social activity, complements the essential temporal elements of genealogical research. As with Foucauldian genealogy, the production of a particular scene must be understood as unfolding in a space (which the scene ultimately helps to produce), and through time.
Scenes, as clusters of social activity in everyday life, are never static entities that one can isolate and define at a single moment in time. Nevertheless, as researchers we can only ever approach a scene in our own particular present. Thus, as Lefebvre observes, while “the past has left its marks, its inscriptions,” space is “always a present space, a current totality, with its links and connections to action”; the production “and the product” must therefore be understood as “inseparable sides of one process” (2009:186). The challenge of researching scenes presents itself as a kind of paradox: scenes have histories, but studying scenes necessarily involves investigating a present space. Scene-based analysis might therefore be conceived at one level as a kind of Foucauldian genealogy of space itself: what historical conditions and practices had to exist in order to account for and understand the circulation of social energies and activities we observe all around us in the present moment? The temporal element of scene-based research thus becomes a dimension of spatial configurations, rather than some separate entity in and of itself.

In Johannes Fabian’s formulation of the problem, time is more than a measure of activity, and thus “any attempt to eliminate it from interpretive discourse can only result in distorted and largely meaningless representations” (1983:24). Foucauldian genealogy seeks to uncover the ways in which the present has been produced over time, not as the necessary outcome of great historical forces, but rather as the particular configuration of statements, policies, practices, and mistakes that happened to occur as they did. Scene-based analysis recognizes that in conducting social research, we are attempting to freeze these ongoing productive forces for our own analytic purposes: the social energies that motivate our efforts may be altered by our not-so-objective interventions, or they may develop and mutate in their own manner, forever changing the scene and its future iterations.
Capturing a scene in time presents a great methodological challenge, as conventional practices of “mapping” social phenomena fail to account for the interplay of a scene’s temporal and spatial dimensions. How is one to “map” the circulation of creative energy producing and produced by people and places? By the time one can identify a scene, and take stock of its various constitutive/constituting elements, that particular scene is likely to be gone. The researcher can only take snapshots of a scene that was, never fully articulating a scene as it is in the present. The circulatory energies of scenes refuse to stand still for the portrait painter or the mapmaker: they demand the shutter speed of the camera, capturing only a single instant in time. Like Eadweard Muybridge capturing the briefest of moments when a horse has all four legs off the ground, researching scenes can only study movement by isolating the individual moments in time, frozen in photographs that illustrate how movement is even possible. As Dorothy Smith writes, researchers studying the social are caught in the currents and eddies forming all around us: the trick is thus in “recognizing that you are always there, that what you discover is always seen, interpreted, heard, experienced by you as you are situated historically in the ongoing, never-stand-still of the social” (2006:2).

Photographs, or snapshots, therefore present a more flexible conceptual metaphor for scene-based analysis than maps, as they foreground not only the technical apparatus (or research instrument) and the operator (the subject holding and pointing the camera), but also the spectator who views the final image. As Roland Barthes writes, “a photograph can be the object of three practices” – the camera Operator, the Spectator who looks at photographs, and “the person or thing photographed […], a kind of little simulacrum,” called the Spectrum; Barthes chooses this word because, as he notes, “this word retains, through its root, a relation to ‘spectacle’ and adds to it that rather terrible thing which is
there in every photograph: the return of the dead” (1981:9). This notion, that the thing one photographs continues to haunt the photograph itself, seems particularly relevant to the mapping practices involved in scene-based analysis. The spectacular nature of the scene (circulation and exchange) is inseparable from the spectral quality of scene-based research.

Mapping the Vancouver media literacy scene would be impossible, given the almost complete lack of stable boundaries that one could trace. Taking this metaphor one step further, the language of photography can generate additional research concepts for scene-based analysis. For example, Barthes argues that there are two elements that contribute to our enjoyment and appreciation of photographs. First, what he calls the *studium*, or an “application to a thing, taste for someone, a kind of general, enthusiastic commitment … without special acuity” (1981:26). He adds that it is only culturally that we can “participate in the figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the actions” of photography. The *studium* of the photograph represents the broader social interpretation of the photograph, making it meaningful socially and culturally, rather than just personally or emotionally. The second element breaks (or “punctuates”) the *studium*: “This time it is not I who seek it out (as I invest the field of the *studium* with my sovereign consciousness), it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow and pierces me.” Barthes calls this the photograph’s *punctum*. The *punctum* strikes the individual viewer, drawing them into a far more intimate relation with the image. These two elements prove useful in the reading of the photograph, separating the specific elements that capture our attention from the broader patterns that connect us with photography as a whole.
A more applied version of the traditional figure/ground distinction, these terms remind the researcher that critical details often emerge after the photograph is taken (the punctum may or may not be obvious to the camera operator, but it is essential to the spectator’s reading; the studium helps the spectator to read the photograph within one or more cultural contexts). Thinking about my own viewing habits can help me identify the most “piercing” elements of the photograph. As the researcher doing scene-based analysis, I am tasked with pointing the camera and opening the shutter at a particular time. But I am also the first (yet not the last) to look at the developed image, and seek its meaning. In studying scenes, I may or may not become a member of the scene itself; as a researcher considering this particular range of energies and exchanges as a scene in the first place, I am making certain decisions as to where to look, what to see, and indeed how others may eventually interpret my snapshots. In the case of Canadian media literacy, I am drawing my own attention (as well as that of the dissertation reader) to the brief history of a young school subject in a province often considered to be “lagging behind” the leaders in Ontario. Through scene-based analysis (building upon the Foucauldian genealogy of the previous chapter), I am doing more than simply pointing the camera: I am arguing for different ways of capturing images in social research, as well as different ways of understanding and interpreting these images.
Chapter 5
Media Literacy in British Columbia

Vancouver is such a peculiar place and such a peculiar city in so many ways, from its West Coast vibe of, well, ... how people don’t commit to anything here. People are very, ‘Oh, wait until the next thing comes along.’ (Molly, interview with the author)

This chapter outlines and analyzes the history of media literacy in Vancouver, in order to better illustrate the attempts to develop a school subject over the past 30 years. In both this chapter and the next, I have organized much of my data non-chronologically. Whereas chapter two considered the early Ontario history of media literacy in a fairly linear order, the “history” presented here is instead clustered around particular kinds of institutional and creative spaces in BC’s Lower Mainland. I begin with a brief history of the province’s formal media education advocacy groups, to draw out certain structural similarities between BC and Ontario, and to establish a number of key distinctions between the provinces that continue to shape the subject today. I then turn to the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation (BCTF) and its role in producing media literacy curriculum materials in the 1990s. The Federation’s ability to connect grassroots initiatives with larger institutional power gives it a unique opportunity to shape new school subjects, but as I discuss below, their successes have not always met their own expectations (which is not to say that they have failed in making important strides). This chapter presents a kind of Foucauldian counter-memory – an assemblage of subjugated knowledges and archival fragments arranged in such a way as to re-tell the history of a young school subject – which helps me to develop the scene-based analysis of media literacy in BC in chapter six.
Analyzing the short history of media literacy in British Columbia helps illustrate the far-reaching influence of the Ontario/AML model (and the limitations of that model), and demonstrates the usefulness of scene-based analysis in education research. Between two doctoral dissertations written by students at UBC (Lee 1997; Namita 2010) and a preliminary round of key informant interviews conducted in Vancouver in 2011, I identified two critical areas for additional analysis. First, the lack of detailed histories of the school subject itself in British Columbia was illustrative of the role played by institutional archives and organizational memory. That is, in the absence of a group such as the AML, BC teachers have done a great deal of media literacy work, but they have not generated the sustained historical record of their activities that serves to legitimate this work in a number of particular ways. Second, the lack of comparative histories – between BC and Ontario, for example – has led to the formation of a media literacy community in the Lower Mainland that defines itself both through and against the Ontario/AML narrative, without allowing for deeper considerations of how this distinction developed, or why it matters. The result of these two theoretical and historical oversights is that one narrative continues to function as the dominant, national account of media literacy (despite its own highly specific origins), while other narratives remain incoherent and largely ahistorical – a tangled discontinuity of failed “one-off” events and leaderless energies (or what Gee [2003:21] might consider to be the “distinctive social practices” constituting a discursive domain).

Indeed, I would argue that this view of BC (and other provinces) as somehow “trailing behind” Ontario in terms of media literacy has been a constitutive element of the Ontario/AML account itself. In positioning Ontario as a national and global leader, the obvious conclusion is that other provinces and nations are followers. In 1989, John
Pungente, recognized as one of the founders of media literacy in Ontario education, wrote the following in his survey of Canadian media literacy:

British Columbia, on the west coast, is the least developed of the Western provinces so far as media education is concerned. [...] Some schools teach television production courses as a preparation for a career in the media. A few of these schools have indicated that they would like to add a media literacy component to such courses, but there is a long way to go. (1989:200)

A major concern for Pungente and other Ontario-based media educators has been that BC and other jurisdictions have been unable to find stable host subjects for the new curricular area. Rather, media literacy in BC, as it exists in formal education and curriculum documents, functions as a “cross-curricular” subject; rather than working through a single well-established subject such as English literature, it permeates several fields, allowing a range of teachers to take up media literacy as they choose. (According to some definitions and models, then, media literacy is not a school subject at all in BC, as it only “exists” through other, institutionally recognized subjects.) Concern with such a model speaks to a broader debate within media studies globally, identified in Hobbs’ 1998 essay on what she calls the seven “Great Debates” within the field. Hobbs argues that while some see inclusion within particular host subjects as essential to the success of media literacy, others see host subjects as a convenience at best and a potential hindrance at worst. She cites, for example, Kress’s (1992) warning that if media literacy remains a “cross-curricular” subject, with its “concepts permeating the curriculum,” then media literacy will “always be at the margin of each subject, as a more or less unrelated, unvalued extra” (cited in Hobbs 1998:25).
This fear— that media literacy remains marginal without the support of a specific host subject— became a critical consideration for the expansion of the Ontario/AML model, particularly as it traveled with John Pungente. In an influential article from 1989, he identifies seven factors that he considers to be “crucial to the successful development of this subject in secondary schools”; he includes institutional support from faculties of education, in-service training, and “suitable” resources for teachers, as well as the presence of a support organization (“preferably run by teachers”), which will handle “workshops, conferences, dissemination of newsletters and the development of curriculum units” (1989:202). Through the successful combination of these factors, he writes, “the past few years have seen Ontario become a leader in media education not only in Canada but also across North America” (1989:202). This list of crucial factors has been cited internationally (Considine 2002; Lealand 2009) as a kind of blueprint for developing media literacy initiatives, turning historically contingent factors into the a priori foundations for all future success. Pungente’s seven factors also help to reinforce the essential school-centered nature of media literacy, in Ontario and elsewhere. In advocating for a series of institutional practices that will strengthen the school subject, these factors all but abandon the possibility that a broader pedagogical discourse around media literacy might take shape outside of schools.

The perception that Ontario is leading, and that the other provinces (and countries) are following, has even been taken up by those scholars documenting media literacy in British Columbia. In Namita’s 2010 analysis, she observes that those who are commonly identified as “the leading figures in Canadian media education” (Duncan, Andersen, Pungente, Carolyn Wilson, et al.) have tended to work in and around Toronto; as a result, she argues, “disseminating media education to the rest of the country has been even more
difficult than it was to originally implement media education in Ontario.” She notes that a handful of BC educators (including Dan Blake) have worked to develop media literacy as a formal school subject, but she goes on to argue that “the widely spread population in the province” might be a problem that “makes collaboration more difficult” (2010:49). (Why BC’s geography and demographics set it apart so markedly from other Canadian provinces and territories is not immediately clear.)

While I don’t dispute the fact that Ontario has produced a distinctive and influential model of media literacy education within formal school settings, I question whether all of the factors listed are actually crucial to the development of successful, sustainable media literacy initiatives. Of the key factors Pungente identifies, it is the institutional function of the support organization that best represents the distinction between Ontario and British Columbia. While media literacy in BC lacks a strong support organization, it does have both a unique culture of media production (mainstream and alternative) and a large number of progressive educators working with issues of media and representation in their classrooms. By insisting that a particular kind of support organization is essential to the success of broader media literacy initiatives, Pungente contributes to a kind of ossification of one model of media literacy – the teaching of a Buckingham-style media literacy curriculum in secondary schools, involving the textual deconstruction of media in English classrooms. (As I discuss in the next chapter, other forms of support, such as active and engaged faculty members at nearby universities, may be equally useful to the growth of media literacy initiatives, both in schools and elsewhere.) Undoubtedly, in order to promote a relatively new school subject within the institutional mechanisms of public education, a dedicated lobbying organization with deep connections to existing organizational power (professional teaching groups, faculties of education, etc.) is a
valuable asset. In the greater effort to increase media literacy among youth populations, however, the Ontario/AML model is not the only route available. As this study of media literacy in British Columbia argues, it is not even the only model for reaching classrooms. Casting its gaze across the rest of the country, the Ontario/AML model looks for what it identifies as successful media literacy in schools and finds BC to be lacking. But perceived deficiencies of this sort depend greatly on one’s own particular perspective. In their analysis of media studies around the world, British scholars Bennett, Kendall and McDougall come across a 2005 article written by Pungente, Duncan and Andersen, whom they accuse of describing Canada’s contribution in an overly “celebratory fashion” (2011:61). They go on to note that “while Canada is established as a developed nation for media education, there is no formal, assessed qualification in compulsory/further education for studying or producing media ‘texts’, or exploring industries or issues,” adding that “England, then, is seen as something of a nirvana by media educators in British Columbia” (2011:62). (The fact that secondary schools in Canada do not generally have formal, assessed qualifications in any school subject seems to have been ignored in this analysis.) Having embraced one available British model of media literacy (Masterman’s, and then Buckingham’s approach), Ontario educators are now accused of overlooking other questions and practices. In the UK, however, even David Buckingham acknowledges problems with the formal assessment of media education, which he sees as “a centralizing of control” (interview with Kari Dehli, 2012). Furthermore, he suggests that the UK system of media education has led to the “marketization of the exam system” in which exam boards are “in league with commercial publishers,” as well as “private companies to whom the training is outsourced” (ibid.). If England is “something of a
nirvana” for those of us teaching media in British Columbia, then perhaps we need to set our ambitions just a little bit higher?

While both critiques (the “British” attitude toward “Canadian” efforts as well as the Ontario/AML assessment of media literacy in BC) help identify potential oversights in the jurisdictions they scrutinize, they also speak to the ways in which the perception of authority or leadership often makes invisible one’s own (relatively recent) past.

Considering the history of a particular school subject (and certainly of the broader discourse surrounding that subject) requires that we not only question the contexts and relationships which tie local efforts to global movements and influences, but that we also examine how certain ideas may flow more freely in one particular direction. Disrupting these traditions of power and authority allows all parties/jurisdictions to consider a greater range of pedagogical possibilities, untying our own unique history from the bigger, older, dominant historical narratives around us.

5.1 Adam Named the Animals: A Brief History of Acronyms, Abbreviations, and Egos

While I am loathe to begin this scene-based analysis with yet another quest for origins, I believe it is important to find a set of places and people who were producing the school subject of media literacy in BC in its earliest stages. As I make clear in subsequent sections below, the work done by these early figures is markedly different from that of the AML’s founding members in Ontario. Where the AML has its own pantheon of innovators and leaders, many of the organizations discussed in this section have almost totally vanished from contemporary discussion of media literacy. This is the first major
point of contrast between Ontario’s history and BC’s history with media and education, and it highlights a number of unique identifying features of both the school subject itself, and the parties involved in both provinces.

In Layton’s three-step model, discussed in chapter four, the first step in the birth and incubation of a new school subject is the emergence of the enthusiastic teacher – an essentially solitary figure. One such enthusiastic figure in BC was Charles Ungerleider, a professor of education at UBC. Ungerleider has written extensively on Canadian education, dealing with issues of race and representation (1991), as well as media violence and its possible (yet very complex and difficult to isolate) effects on young people (2004). In the 1970s, Ungerleider worked on a show called *For the Record*, a CBC television program which he describes in an interview as “a staging point for engaging people around the issues of the impact of the media and how it can be used in a good way” (Ungerleider, interview with Kari Dehli, 2011). Another enthusiastic teacher, Dan Blake, was discovering his passion for media at roughly the same time, attending workshops and reading canonical texts from the field. Eventually, in BC as in Ontario, a critical mass of enthusiastic pioneers emerged, and they began to seek one another out. The result, in both Ontario and BC, was the creation of organizations and associations either dedicated to the development of a young school subject, or at the very least contributing to someone else’s vision of a young subject. In the early 1980s, Ungerleider and Blake helped to form the Media Education Workshop, and in 1991, a group of educators in BC established the Canadian Association for Media Education (CAME). CAME’s mandate was: “to educate Canadians about the media; to promote media education; and to encourage Canadian cultural expression in the media” (Blake 2001:40). As Ungerleider puts it, CAME “was started in my living room,” and the group included
himself, his wife, Blake, and a few others – “about 30 people altogether” (interview with Kari Dehli, 2011). The organization’s early work included workshops for in-service teachers, as well as teaching materials for use in classrooms. CAME wrote articles for newsletters and created teaching guides for films, such as *Shane*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *In the Heat of the Night*.

Soon after this, in 1992, Barry Duncan founded the Canadian Association for Media Education Organizations (CAMEO), to function as an umbrella organization for provincial and regional media literacy groups. CAMEO was not formally registered until 2001, but once a national umbrella organization was created in the 1990s, Blake notes that it was rather odd for a provincial organization to continue to have a name with national significance (interview with Kari Dehli and the author, 2011). Thus, CAME changed its name to the British Columbia Association for Media Education (BCAME). In Ungerleider’s words, Barry Duncan “wanted us to become part of CAMEO,” but Ungerleider “wasn’t wild about the idea,” as he worried that the BC group would be “essentially subsumed to the AML philosophy and approach” (interview with Kari Dehli, 2011). This early issue of naming an advocacy organization (operating within a single province) came down to a philosophical disagreement over the definition and evolution of the subject itself. In 2011, Ungerleider still insisted that CAME/BCAME approached media education differently than did the AML in Ontario. For Ungerleider, the AML (and Barry Duncan in particular) seemed to be continuing in the Leavisian tradition of education for the sake of inoculation: “I don’t think the media are inherently bad,” Ungerleider argues, “but I do think it’s important, in the same way that we educate about print, to educate about other media” (interview with Kari Dehli, 2011).
A key difference between the two organizations and their approaches has to do with the issue of host subjects and curricular placement for media literacy. “Barry wanted a media strand in the curriculum,” Ungerleider recalls, “and I and some others thought that was a mistake, that it should be infused in other courses” (interview with Kari Dehli, 2011). The debate over whether media literacy works best as a stand-alone subject, as a component of a host subject (most often English or Social Studies), or as a cross-curricular element operating in multiple subjects continues today. In Ontario, formal placement on the provincial curriculum as a required component of Language and Literacy in elementary schools, and in English in secondary schools, is heralded as a major success for the AML; in BC, Ungerleider says, the argument has been: “just because something is in the curriculum doesn’t mean it’s going to be taught” (ibid.). BC’s cross-curricular strategy can be tied to a broader concern for professional development in the province. For CAME/BCAME in British Columbia, part of media literacy involves demystifying media for teachers first, rather than going straight to the students. “What we used to say is that people knew more than they thought they knew,” says Ungerleider, arguing that sites such as the Faculties of Education are ideal starting points for the bigger project of media literacy in the province (ibid.). For AML members in Ontario, a similar concern with getting teachers involved in and concerned about media literacy persists today, but the strategic victory of curricular legitimacy was arguably the primary goal in the early stages of the advocacy group’s history.

For the early wave of media literacy enthusiasts in BC, teachers may have known more “than they thought they knew” about the media. Nevertheless, expertise remained a contested idea in the early days of media literacy in the province. As such, another difference between BC and Ontario’s approaches was made painfully clear during an
early collaboration between the two provinces. In preparation for one of the AML’s symposia on media literacy (either the 1990 or the 1992 conference, both held at Guelph – Ungerleider was not clear on the precise date), Duncan and Ungerleider clash over the application and adjudication process for potential participants – one favouring blind review of an academic-style CV/proposal, the other favouring a more transparent consideration of teaching and writing contributions. Because more of the key figures in the early development of media literacy in Ontario were themselves practicing teachers, a top-down approach from academics and researchers didn’t sit well with many AML members (Ungerleider, interview with Kari Dehli, 2011). This disagreement, connected to a single professional development event, helps illustrate some of the theoretical frameworks for considering school subjects discussed in chapter four. It also speaks to some critical historical differences between the two jurisdictions, and the ways in which media literacy has been imagined as either a school-centred curricular pursuit, or as a broader exercise in teaching and learning, or occasionally as both. Are young school subjects built and sustained from the top down, or from the bottom up, and how exactly are we to define the “top” or the “bottom” in this case?

On the one hand, early leaders may be classroom teachers, who share their growing expertise with colleagues laterally; the “top” is thus lacking the institutional authority of administrators or university scholars, which may in fact aid in the initial spread of the subject among in-service teachers (along the lines of Goodson’s Sociological model of a subject’s history). On the other hand, early leaders may work in the academic quarters of education, in which case the dissemination of knowledge across the field carries with it the structures of power, control, expertise, etc. associated with the university. In-service teachers may be doing much of the work of media literacy in this case, but the
appearance of expertise and leadership is likely associated with the post-secondary institutions (in keeping with Goodson’s Philosophical model).

When contrasting the history of media literacy in BC and in Ontario, these two models (and their fundamental differences) came into contact with one another quite early. In BC, CAME argued that the young school subject must develop through teachers and their own everyday experiences with media, rather than simply coming down from on high, delivered by the experts on the subject. In this way CAME’s idea of how the young school subject would develop is not unlike the AML’s model in Ontario: both foreground the pioneering classroom teacher rather than the academic expert at the local university. While the academic experts may have been more involved and accessible for much of the early development in BC, CAME’s history shows that “grassroots” experience is often still considered a vital force in the production of school subjects. When it came time to represent BC and its media educators on a national stage, however, the academics in leadership positions operated according to the patterns and routines most familiar to them in everyday university life: scholars with expertise and peer-reviewable research carry more weight than do the everyday practitioners working with anecdotal evidence.

Comparing the early media literacy teachers and organizations in two provinces, I see four major points of disagreement, which have played out in various ways over the past 30 years. Each of these debates has played a part in shaping media literacy in BC, either by pointing to the clear direction for future educational work, or by removing the possibility of a major alternative (owing to its association with Ontario’s provincial curriculum as a whole, or simply with Toronto as a general geographic and cultural...
concept). These four positions emerge from the early days of media literacy in BC, and are traced back to the key figures and associations identified above:

1. *When developing a new school subject, don’t add a whole new subject to the curriculum.*

Media literacy remains a cross-curricular concept in BC schools, largely because of decisions made by early leaders in the 1990s. When it operates as its own school subject, media literacy may be seen to make additional demands on the educational system as a whole. Therefore, despite being adamant that media literacy must start with teachers, Ungerleider was hesitant to add the subject into initial teacher development in faculties of education. “Every time anybody comes up with an idea” about teaching and learning, he says, it “overburdens” initial teacher education (interview with Kari Dehli, 2011). This “over-burdening” was precisely the point for many AML members, who saw their young school subject as part of a Freirian project of radical, transformative pedagogy. In BC, however, media literacy developed alongside other young subjects (environmental education; social justice education; LGBTQ education; Aboriginal education; etc.). With limited space and time for new subjects, Ungerleider and others saw the cross-curricular route as less disruptive, and thus more likely to gain support from the ministry and buy-in from in-service teachers.

2. *Cross-curricular subjects don’t need a host subject: they need several.*

On the difference between the BC and Ontario histories and their development, Ungerleider notes that in BC there has been as much interest from Social Studies teachers as from English teachers. In Ontario, he adds, the AML trajectory came from
“phenomenal English teachers” such as Duncan. As a result, the AML “came to media the same way they came to printed text, which is to take them apart and teach you how to analyze them” (Ungerleider, interview with Kari Dehli, 2011). As I argued in chapter three, the AML’s own particular approach to media literacy has tended to over-emphasize the concept of media “texts”. This in turn has created a perceived need for deconstruction, to help understand the constructed nature of media, as Morgan (1998) and others describe. In terms of adding a new school subject to the provincial curriculum, the strategy of working with a single host subject proved to be highly successful in Ontario, to the point where Pungente listed such a strategy as a prerequisite for the development of media literacy programs in other jurisdictions. To say that media educators in BC did not get Pungente’s memo would be a tad glib (and possibly untrue), but as I have argued throughout the preceding chapters, one cannot accurately assess the success of media literacy in BC if the measures of success themselves are couched in the historical framework that developed in a single province in a specific way. Whether seen as a young school subject, as a social movement (Lee 1997), or as a set of critical practices that can be infused in several subjects or curriculum areas and that can thrive outside of schools, media literacy has not always followed the same strategies of development in each jurisdiction. So long as any single jurisdiction continues to (attempt to) dictate the terms and conditions by which all media literacy programs must develop, the work of actually studying, critiquing and aiding in the future success of these other programs will remain over-determined from the outset.

The strategic benefits of developing media literacy as a cross-curricular subject have not really been considered in any of the literature reviewed in this research. Institutional stability and clear thematic coherence seem to be the immediate benefits of a single host
subject, but I do not necessarily see these as real *benefits* to media literacy. The crosscurricular model may, in fact, be ideally suited to many of media literacy’s own pedagogical aims. In his discussion of anti-racism efforts in schools (another crosscurricular subject), for example, Chris Richards writes that no single subject, or “disciplinary target,” is a perfect fit. Indeed, he writes, “it would be a serious mistake” to approach either anti-racism education or media literacy through individual disciplines, and, in doing so, risk “perpetuating their insulation from each other” (1986:79). A crosscurricular subject such as media literacy, he argues, “has to refuse any part in reproducing a simple distinction between the sanctity of educational discourse and the profanity of the popular media” (ibid). The more common that media literacy becomes in daily classroom activity the less it must adhere to strict disciplinary practices. This not only unleashes the transformative potential of media literacy itself, it also contributes to a far more holistic model of education, wherein the “insulation and the separation” of institutional school subjects may be overcome (ibid.). The cross-curricular history of media literacy in BC is certainly not a deficiency – it is a potentially great source of strength and resilience.

3. *Production is an essential element in media literacy.*

Media production has offered a critical opportunity for teaching young people about the construction of media messages, but it has also been a source of great debate within the field, as I outlined in chapter two. Creating original videos, for example, might lead students to find their own “voice,” or it might lead them to mimic the mainstream commercial media sources that teachers intended them to critique. The end of this debate is nowhere in sight, but across BC’s Lower Mainland, at least, the debate is almost entirely settled: production is a powerful tool of education, *even when* students are simply
copying existing texts. Without a stable advocacy organization such as the AML, media educators in BC have not been exposed to and informed by a consistent body of canonical texts and theories. The subject itself has been, for the most part, free to develop and spread in a variety of ways, mutating according to the particular cultural spaces it inhabits. As a result, the importance of deconstruction and analysis – the classroom practices at the heart of much media literacy work in Ontario – has not really gained the kind of doctrinal status in BC that it has elsewhere. For those teaching media literacy in BC, making media is just as important an activity as talking about the media is.

In interviews with teachers and scholars in Vancouver, I have not encountered any strong opposition to the inclusion of media production in broader programs of media literacy. The academic tradition of media studies, going back as far as I can trace it, cautions against any and all “uncritical” media production. In Vancouver, with so many skilled media artists and operators, it is easy to find the tools and the expertise needed to put film-making equipment into the hands of young learners; it appears just as easy to connect those learners with mentors and advisors who see these tools as empowering, enabling, and emancipatory. While many media scholars at SFU and UBC are familiar with the same canonical traditions as their colleagues in Ontario, this has not translated into the same reservations about media production, at least not in their publications or in their interviews with me. I certainly do not wish to give the impression that no one in Vancouver is critical of youth media production. But the overwhelming majority of people involved in media literacy in the Lower Mainland take it as a given that production is essential to the success of their project. Educating young people about the media (its ideological function, its constructed nature, its commercial agenda, etc.) is important, but this will not be accomplished by critical deconstruction alone. As one
media educator I spoke with in Vancouver puts it: “I think that things get fucked up when you’re doing nothing but [deconstruction],” adding, “I liked the idea of not feeling paralyzed … where all you’re talking about is what’s not working for you” (Anna, interview with the author). This is a critical legacy of the early efforts of individuals and organizations in BC’s media literacy history. Instead of advocating for a clearly-defined set of practices in specific classrooms, BC’s media educators – whether through deliberate efforts to distance themselves from what their peers were doing in Ontario, or simply through creative efforts to see what would work for a specific group of students – encouraged a far greater range of pedagogical activity, including production work itself.

4. *Without a stable home in classrooms/schools, the Ministry might not pay for this.*

Free to circulate and change on its own, without the supervisory/policing effect of an influential advocacy organization, or a formal location in the curriculum, media literacy in BC has found its own mechanisms of survival. Perhaps the single most defining feature of the current BC media literacy scene is the way in which its various activities and energies are funded. Without a formal home in K-12 education, the subject cannot reliably draw on financial and institutional assistance from the Provincial Specialist Associations (PSAs). Throughout the years, individual efforts from within these PSAs have occasionally helped to make certain kinds of activities possible, but rarely with a sustained/sustainable investment. In the early 2000s, for example, Dan Blake helped connect CAME with the British Columbia Teachers Federation (BCTF) in order to organize a series of Summer Institutes for in-service teachers interested in media literacy. Blake helped organize these events in 2001, 2003, 2005, and 2007, hosted by the BCTF and funded in large part through CAME’s partnership with the AML. The AML’s John
Pungente was able to secure funding from CHUM Television, and in return Pungente was invited as a keynote speaker. Even within the province, however, the Summer Institutes appear to have had a fairly limited reach. As Ungerleider recalls of the era, these events were “for the political activists of the Teachers Federation,” adding that media education was not really what the institutes were about (interview with Kari Dehli, 2011). Just as one of CAME’s founding members was moving forward to help in-service teachers develop their media literacy skills, another was mostly unaware of any such effort. Lack of sustained partnerships and unawareness of ongoing events seem to be recurring features of the BC media literacy scene, as I describe throughout this chapter.

The Summer Institutes at the BCTF are a fascinating example of how media literacy operated in the Lower Mainland, particularly when contrasted with another event from roughly the same time. In 2000, a Media Summit was held in Toronto, organized by members of the Ontario AML with support from major media corporations. It included participants from across the country and from the United States. BC media educators who attended the Summit were surprised to see that a major sponsor, the Nickelodeon television network, was giving an address to the participants about the network’s own involvement in media education. “I mean, I get the idea that you need to partner and you need to find resources in various ways,” says one participant, “but Nickelodeon? Come on. It felt … like you’re betraying the project in a deep way” (Albert, interview with the author). CHUM’s involvement in these media literacy events did not raise the same resentment among those I interviewed, perhaps because unlike Nickelodeon, CHUM was effectively absent from the event itself. The issue of corporate partnerships speaks to the larger divide growing between the media education organizations in the two provinces: if “the project” of media literacy itself might be undermined by the involvement of a large
corporate youth media content creator, this certainly suggests that “the project” as a whole may not mean the same thing to all involved.

In Lee’s (1997) interviews with former and current AML members, Neil Andersen describes the efforts of Nickelodeon, CHUM and others as a form of “ex-officio media education,” or “unofficial media education that receives no sanction from a government body and is supported by the members of the business community” (Lee 1997:369-70). As I outline below, media literacy in British Columbia has proceeded, in large part, without “sanction from a government body,” but it has tended to be the non-profit sector, rather than the business community, that has been the most active. The Summer Institute series at the BCTF is effectively the exception, rather than the rule, in BC, one of a very few media literacy events funded primarily through the private sector (CHUM Television). This may help to explain the bad taste left in the mouth of those BC media educators who heard Nickelodeon representatives speak in Toronto. The major lesson learned in BC seems to be that if the public sector isn’t going to take the lead with media literacy, then the private sector isn’t the only available option: the non-profit sector can seek out alternative funding streams, and still partner with school boards to deliver thoughtful, critical programming. A general wariness of corporate sponsors, combined with political and economic changes occurring at the time (discussed in the next chapter), helps to explain why some of the most impactful media literacy organizations in the Lower Mainland are still subsisting from grant cycle to grant cycle. There is no long-term, stable funding available from the government for the kinds of work being done by these groups, and there is a fundamental and ideological refusal in many cases to partner with corporate entities. This refusal has often (but not always) stemmed from the political climate at the BCTF, or within SFU’s School of Communication; the leadership and
advocacy wings of both groups have tended to be left-leaning for many years, certainly on issues of corporate influence in education and neo-liberalization in general. While “ex-officio” media literacy may work in some places, it has not really found a place in BC.

5.2 BCAME, the BCTF, and the Conceptual Framework: Wrong Time, Wrong Place?

By the 1990s, the main advocacy group for media literacy in Ontario had successfully fought to include media literacy in the public school curriculum across the province. In BC, the main advocacy group was looking to match this success by adding media literacy in the latest curriculum review conducted by the Ministry of Education. Within Layton’s model for understanding the growth of new school subjects, both organizations were pursuing the first step of phase two: get on the curriculum. Philosophically, the two organizations treated the young subject very differently, and saw the end result of such a fight in quite distinct terms: one wanted the host subject, English, to consider multiple media forms within the classroom, emphasizing the skills of deconstruction, exegesis, and critical analysis; the other wanted language added across the curriculum, to encourage all classroom teachers to engage with media and the way it helps construct reality for young learners. Pragmatically, the strategies were not all that dissimilar. “Every province has a process for revising their curriculum,” Ungerleider notes in interview, adding that, “the process is more similar than it is different” (interview with Kari Dehli, 2011). The first wave of enthusiastic teachers and scholars in both provinces was directly involved in the curricular revisions, often taking the lead roles in writing actual curriculum documents.
Media literacy formally entered the BC provincial curriculum in 1995, added as a cross-curricular subject for teachers to introduce in their classrooms. Cross-curricular subjects do not have their own set place on teaching schedules (as Math or English do). Rather, they exist as fragments across the larger set of curriculum documents, a mostly-coherent set of ideas and activities to be taught within other formal school subjects. Students may therefore encounter a cross-curricular subject several times in a single week without necessarily knowing that these various lessons are all part of a single subject known as “media literacy.” In BC, a set of Cross-Curricular Outlines was added within the Integrated Resource Packages, replacing the older Curriculum Guides for individual school subjects. For some, such as Ungerleider, the cross-curricular nature of media literacy in BC was an important feature for its future success (in contrast to the single-subject partnership with English found in Ontario). For others, cross-curricular is “basically a meaningless category”; the real potential for meaningful media literacy work is to be found in the specific Prescribed Learning Outcomes (PLOs) for English or Social Studies (Albert, interview with the author). Development of these Cross-Curricular Outlines proceeded as it does in most other provinces: the Ministry of Education worked with Provincial Specialist Associations (PSAs) in a kind of top-down process, designed to include and involve classroom teachers in media literacy. The various (between thirty-three and thirty-five, depending on who I asked) PSAs working with the BCTF at the time were often involved in this kind of process. When Dan Blake became a staff member at the BCTF, he was able to direct some resources toward media literacy. As Ungerleider recalls, Blake “had his hands full with lots of other stuff” too (interview with Kari Dehli, 2011). In Blake’s version of events, however, the BCTF and the PSAs were supportive of media literacy work, but there was little institutional support to turn one-off
initiatives into sustained/sustainable efforts (interview with Kari Dehli and the author, 2011). Recalling the history of the BCTF’s media literacy projects, Blake says he was never given a reason by Ministry officials for their lack of sustained support: “That was a real shame,” he told me, adding that “we pressed them but it never happened” (interview with the author, 2014). (Ungerleider himself went on to become BC’s Deputy Minister of Education in 1998, serving for four years.) As Ungerleider sees it, the Ministry was supportive, but the broader momentum was not really there. As Blake sees it, enthusiastic teachers worked very hard and the Ministry did not (or would not) make the changes permanent.

Lost in this disagreement over “what went wrong” and why is the actual material produced by CAME, the BCTF, and the handful of teachers working to develop the young school subject in BC. Blake was kind enough to share with me his one and only surviving copy of the 1994 document informing most of this work: *A Conceptual Framework for Media Education & Cross-Curricular Learning Outcomes and Opportunities for Teaching and Assessment*. This report, prepared by CAME in June of 1994 for the Learning Resources Branch of the Ministry of Education, was written by a core group of CAME members, known at the time as the Media Education Working Group. The group included:

- Dan Blake (teacher);
- Frances Bula (journalist);
- Jan Clemson (National Film Board);
- Gary Crocker (teacher; SFU CMNS grad student);
- Merrill Fearon (media production; Capilano College instructor);
- Shari Graydon (Media Watch; SFU CMNS grad student);
- Gavin Hainsworth (teacher);
In the minutes of their 1994 annual meeting, CAME discussed this project, noting: “We are hopeful about implementation of media education across the curriculum but are aware of the necessity to continue to advocate for this to become a reality” (CAME minutes from 1994, provided by Blake). From my interviews (particularly those with Blake himself), I get the impression that CAME’s ongoing advocacy efforts were sporadic at best: the group helped prepare an excellent framework document for the Ministry, but it was not as actively engaged in advocacy work as, say, their AML counterparts had been in Ontario.

The Framework document itself runs almost one hundred pages, and it is designed for teachers across the province to use in both their professional development and their classroom work. In their “Definitions” section, the authors of the document distinguish between three terms: “Media Studies,” “Media Education” and “Media Literacy”. The term media literacy, they write, “is used in Ontario to describe media education and it carries the same concepts and content”; however, “because of the concentration on literacy,” this model “lends itself to being incorporated in the language arts curriculum, rather than really being an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary concept,” and as such it “calls for an emphasis on skills of decoding the language of the different media” (1994:7 italics in original). By focusing on the term “literacy,” the authors add, the AML framing
“tends to neglect the social, political and economic issues inherent in media” (ibid.). They go on to consider four possible approaches to teaching media in schools:

1. as an independent course of media studies;
2. as a multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary concept;
3. as a pure across-the-curriculum approach;
4. as a cross-curricular theme with a base in an existing subject (ibid.)

The first option is quickly dismissed as it can only find classroom space at the senior levels of public education, meaning students will encounter media studies just as they are finishing their K-12 studies. The second option “may work well in elementary school, where the teacher is multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary in teaching approach,” but it may not work as well at the secondary level, where “learning is conceived in terms of subject areas” and where “each teacher is responsible for a certain area of curriculum” (ibid.:9). The third option faces many of the same problems as the second. Students “may be exposed to the same ideas from one teacher to the next,” but it is quite possible that “there will be no progression in conceptual learning,” as each teacher, free to make their own unique contributions to the study of media, may work in isolation from (and possibly opposition to) the work done by their colleagues (ibid.). Finally, the authors of this conceptual framework are wary of the fourth option, warning that English or Language Arts might not be as ideal a home for media studies as many believe. David Buckingham (1992) is quoted several times here; he worries that teaching literature “is primarily about developing students’ receptiveness to something which is seen as fundamentally good” (cited in CAME 1994:9).
Ultimately, the best option for BC is presented as combining the best methods from multiple approaches. The authors of the conceptual framework advocate for cross-curricular media studies, with two school subjects splitting the role of a “host” subject:

English and social studies can provide a shared home for media education where each area addresses mainly, but not exclusively, issues and concepts closest to their traditional teaching. In that way, English may address such areas as textual analysis, media language, symbols, and denotative and connotative meanings. Social studies may address representation, institutions and audience. And, by incorporating aspects of media education into all other curricular areas, the subject will be included throughout the school day just as media touches us throughout most of our out-of-school lives. (CAME 1994:10)

I find this section particularly noteworthy in its insistence that each subject maintain its “traditional” teaching modes, which effectively ignores or rejects the entire Freirian notion of transformative education. There is nothing revolutionary or radical about the subject material found in media studies, in and of itself: it is simply a new body of theories and questions, to be sorted and classified into existing pedagogical frameworks. The newness of media literacy, then, is not framed here as particularly disruptive to existing educational practice. Additionally, in-school and out-of-school experiences are considered equally here, as the spaces for learning and as the pedagogically meaningful elements in young lives: we work with media at home, we learn at home; we learn at school, so we should work with media at school, too. Dulling (or simply ignoring) the criticality of media literacy may have been a strategy for broader implementation across the curriculum, or it may have simply reflected the pragmatic view of the subject held by the framework’s authors.
In an acknowledging nod to (and/or rejection of) the AML’s work in Ontario, the framework document also contains ten “Key Concepts for Media Education”. Grouped into three categories – “Analysis of Media Products,” “Audience Interpretation and Influence,” and “Media and Society” – these ten concepts share a certain genealogical similarity with their AML counterparts:

Purpose / Values / Representation / Codes, Conventions and Characteristics / Production Interpretation / Influence of Media on Audience / Influence of Audience on Media Control / Scope (CAME 1994:12)

Whereas the AML’s Key Concepts tend more towards an inoculation model of media literacy (media express ideology; media have commercial implications; the media construct versions of reality), the 10 concepts from BC’s framework document focus more on the various kinds of relationships that exist between young people and the media in their lives. Media has a Purpose, but we can seek means to exercise Control over media; the media influences us, but we also exert an influence over the media. There are real disparities and inequities in the world of media, but young consumers are more than helpless victims of brainwashing. These key concepts recognize the agency of both consumers and producers.

The Conceptual Framework document is particularly interesting in its treatment of individual school subjects where media education can be inserted, which include Language Arts, English, Art, Drama, Music, Dance, Social Studies, Physical Education, Home Economics, Business Education, International Languages, and Science. The authors of the framework devote a considerable amount of time to Social Studies, arguing that, “generally speaking, the skills required of students in dealing with any text in social studies are almost identical to the ones required in media education” (1994:43). Rather
than simply deconstructing the constructed texts of our media environments, the authors encourage teachers and students to see individual media texts as mere surface ephemera of a far larger kind of construction. It is the socially produced narratives circulating within the media that demand our attention, as these narratives tell us who we are, where we come from, and where we are going. In a rather remarkable passage from this framework document – intended for professional development and lesson planning among the province’s teachers – the authors explain how Social Studies helps students distinguish between two seemingly related concepts:

The ‘past’ is different from history. While the former is a series of events, the latter is the construction and interpretation of a selection of those events into a narrative. The issues of identifying and questioning that selection, construction, and point of view are therefore fundamental in social studies as they are in dealing with media texts. Much of the historian’s work is dependent on primary and secondary sources. Questions of purpose, perspective, audience and representation play an important part in gaining a better understanding of a specific event or period in history from those sources. (1994:43)

Not to put too fine a point on it, but I believe I was well into my fourth year of undergraduate studies before I really grasped such a distinction. Where other sections of the framework downplay the disruptive potential of media literacy, here it goes beyond merely shaping the new school subject to transform teaching and learning itself. The authors of this framework document were not content to have students in BC picking apart the constructed nature of magazine ads; they were shooting for the stars, pedagogically speaking. They wanted media to find its way into everyday teaching and learning, not just as the vehicle for curriculum delivery, but also as a foundation for critical thought, active engagement in the world, and various forms of creative
expression. This conceptual framework document can be read as an attempt to address both a critical deficiency in many media literacy initiatives and an obstacle to radical pedagogy as a whole. As David Lusted articulated these problems in 1986, “many critical attempts to democratise the structure, teaching and the curriculum of state education” have failed because of their “inability to connect a radical critique to a popular movement.” Similarly, he adds, “so much of recent cultural criticism has failed to work for the penetration of its arguments into the mainstream of cultural and political life” (1986:7). The framework written by BC educators is an ambitious attempt to make media literacy simultaneously common and radical: we can take pleasure in media, it argues, while building the essential skills of critically engaged citizenship. I cannot help but wonder what kind of impact such a document might have had if it had reached a greater audience.

Finally, on page 90, in the second appendix to this framework, the authors acknowledge the existence and efforts of the AML and their Eight Key Concepts (which the authors then point out derive quite clearly from the work of Len Masterman). The appendix begins with a discussion of “key concepts” in general. Key concepts, they write, “are not the content of media education but rather a systematic way of achieving two learning goals: first, organizing students’ learning, analysis and production of media texts and, second, linking those processes to students’ knowledge” (1994:90). As such, they write, defining media education in terms of concepts, rather than simply through “facts or skills” allows teachers and learners alike “to examine texts which they deem relevant and encourages them to connect media education learning outcomes to their own private or public encounters with the media” (ibid.). Similarly, in his 1998 M.Ed. thesis McKendy elaborates on CAME’s 10 key concepts, linked to the AML’s initial seven concepts, with
the warning that such concepts themselves should never be taught directly. “Although they provide a seductive, compartmentalized division of a highly complex phenomenon,” he warns, “the media’ is not experienced in compartments and should not, therefore, be analyzed in this way” (1998:26). Key concepts, McKendy adds, are merely the “template” through which “we can think of media messages as we present them in our classrooms” (ibid.). In reviewing media literacy resources and textbooks (almost entirely from Ontario), McKendy notes that Duncan et al.’s 1996 “Mass Media and Popular Culture, Version 2” is an excellent text for young learners, even though “the authors have, without explanation, decided to teach the key concepts, which in my experience is a mistake” (ibid.:39). In both the CAME framework and McKendy’s analysis, BC media educators position themselves in contrast to their Ontario colleagues through their implicit working through (rather than explicit teaching of) key concepts.

The Conceptual Framework document produced in 1994 is in many ways illustrative of the BC media literacy scene as a whole: it situates BC’s unique efforts in a national and global context, while passionately advocating for original advancements and distinctions; it critiques elements of the AML model developed in Ontario, while effectively endorsing the legitimacy and authority of that model; it attempts to include many parties and subjects under a single tent, but it is ultimately a reflection (as is any such document) of the disciplinary skills and experiences of those involved in its creation. The document is ambitious in its scope, and as such proved difficult to apply in everyday contexts. As Blake himself admits, “you’d really have to be very committed and intent on doing the work and know the literature to actually pick it up and use it,” adding, “it really needed to have accompanying documents that elaborated on the outline,” as well as some kind of “implementation plan” (interview with Kari Dehli and the author, 2011). Without such an
implementation plan, the document was effectively left on the shelf, to the point that tracking down a surviving copy today proves rather difficult. Additional barriers, such as the lack of media literacy training in most pre-service teacher education programs, as well as a general lack of funding to develop such initiatives, certainly contributed to the document’s disappearance into obscurity. The ongoing work of media literacy in BC may unknowingly share certain genealogical strands with this mostly forgotten document, but the spaces and actors involved are no longer directly tied to professional bodies such as the BCTF.

Today, media literacy remains a cross-curricular subject in the BC curriculum, taught in earnest by a group of passionate classroom teachers, included in passing or outright ignored by others. While media literacy became a formalized, legitimized school subject in Ontario, it has not attained this status in BC. A couple of educators I interviewed in BC see this as a failure – a half-completed project, or a work-in-progress for the next generation of media literacy advocates. This history of media literacy as a school subject, however, is only part of the whole story. As I discuss in the next chapter, a school-centered focus on subjects such as media literacy places entirely too much emphasis on what happens in classrooms, ignoring a whole range of pedagogical practice taking place in and around the province. The school subject known as media literacy may not seem particularly developed, but the media literacy scene in BC is vibrant and growing.
Chapter 6
British Columbia’s Media Literacy Scene

We contacted people we thought would be natural allies [...] it all happened very grassroots and quite organic. (Anna, interview with the author)

In this chapter I demonstrate how media literacy education in BC can be productively analyzed through the concept of “scene.” The history of the school subject and its development outlined in chapter five helps provide a foundation for studying media literacy in BC today, but it tells only a partial story, failing to capture much of the richness and diversity that presently exists in the province. Drawing on the genealogical considerations from chapter three as well as the methodological model I advanced in chapter four for studying scenes, I approach media literacy in BC as more than just a school subject, more than just the institutionally legitimized statements concerning classroom instruction and learning. Subjects transcend school systems, particularly when they are as connected to everyday experience and individual identity as media literacy is. The official statements about media literacy exist in a handful of contexts, uttered by particular figures and organizations; the lived experience of media literacy, however, occupies any number of spaces all around us. This chapter attempts to take a snapshot of a dynamic subject, moving through BC’s Lower Mainland, re-making city space around itself, mutating and travelling in wholly unpredictable ways.

To begin to consider the media literacy scene in BC, I first discuss the critical role played by the two major research universities in the province, the University of British Columbia (UBC) and Simon Fraser University (SFU). While their Faculties of Education have been intricately involved in curriculum production and professional development, these
universities have also functioned as nodal spaces for the exchange and circulation of all manner of creative energies. As I argue below, large universities in urban centres are precisely the kind of space where scene-based analyses are most useful, as they may be directly or indirectly involved in the generation and evolution of political movements, artistic endeavours, cultural re-imaginings, etc. From the jumping-off point of the university, I trace the circulatory energies of major film organizations (the National Film Board of Canada and the Pacific Cinématèque, in particular), as well as a range of non-profit organizations, arts groups, and independent media events. Each of these organizations and institutions operates within its own set of peer networks and funding streams, which has inevitably led to multiple points of overlap and collaboration with one another. A single youth film production project, funded through grants and donations from specific community partners; a student in the School of Communication at SFU researching local artists for a seminar course; an advisor at the Vancouver School Board attending an exhibition at a conference, looking for new classroom materials: each of these individual acts are interesting in their own way, but it is the largely invisible connections between them that capture my attention here. A British Columbia media literacy scene is at the centre of this chapter, drawing together and categorizing data according to the (often transitory) nature of community cultural practice in and around Vancouver over the past thirty years.

6.1 Book-Learnin’ and Beyond: BC Universities and Media Literacy

The BC media literacy scene has been produced through a wide variety of creative exchanges, often concentrated around a small cluster of locations and organizations. The two major research universities in the province, UBC and SFU, have tended to play
critical yet sometimes indirect roles in this process, bringing together scholars, researchers, students, artists and activists into temporary partnerships. Produced by and working within the space of the university, many of these collaborations have approached media through a critical lens that foregrounds issues of class, privilege, power, race, gender, sexuality, etc. At SFU, for example, the School of Communication was home to several people with an interest in media and education in the 1990s. In 1996, Martin Laba created a media education course in the school, influenced in part by the emerging curriculum documents created by Ungerleider and others. At around the same time, several cohorts of graduate students (including Shari Graydon and Stuart Poyntz) passed through the department, working with Laba, Rick Gruneau, Stephen Kline, and others, helping to create and transmit a growing body of work concerned with media and its influence on everyday life. Graydon and Poyntz took over Laba’s media education course in the late 1990s, and Poyntz went on to start his own media education course at UBC in the early 2000s, this time in the Faculty of Education (as part of the professional development program for pre-service teachers).

Looking back on this era, Poyntz sees the School of Communication at SFU acting as a kind of “invisible networking hub,” adding that “in the alternative media community that crosses over from film, photography, urban design and environmental activism, the number of people who have some connection [to the school] is quite remarkable” (interview with Kari Dehli and the author, 2011). What he seems to be describing when he discusses the School of Communication at SFU is precisely the surplus of creative practice (and/or knowledge work) that Straw says is at the heart of most scenes. "Universities everywhere generate forms of learning and expressive practices that are in excess of their intended function as places for the imparting of formal, disciplinary
knowledge,” writes Straw, and as such “universities are important sites for the accumulation of social and cultural capital” (2004:414). University departments such as the School of Communication at SFU are filled with professors and graduate students doing research around the city, working with local organizations and activists, and, in the process, travelling the invisible pathways of circulation that make scenes meaningful in everyday life. Whether researching local independent media production, or delivering public lectures (at SFU’s downtown campus, located on Vancouver’s well-known and badly misunderstood Hastings Street) on urban sustainability, the academic practice of “university life” is essential to the growth (and, sometimes, death) of artistic scenes, to the point that academia itself becomes a scene all its own.

It is easy to get lost in the imagined pathways of a scene, focusing on ephemeral circulation and exchange. The materiality of scenes, however – the real spaces and people of a city, contributing to its daily life and cultural energy – are at the heart of scene-based analysis. The significant contributions of scholars (faculty and students) at UBC and SFU do more than just animate city life in BC’s Lower Mainland: they inform policy at various levels of governance; they translate into classroom teaching at both the K-12 and post-secondary levels; and they foster the collaborations with community partners that help drive scenes forward, upward, and outward. Of course, not all of the media-related research generated at universities deals explicitly with the school subject media literacy. In fact, I have found that a great deal of the research that ultimately contributes to the BC media literacy scene comes from scholars and from fields not traditionally associated with media literacy itself. Urban geographers, anthropologists, resource and environmental management students, and even many scholars of education produce
research relating to media without ever using such keywords as “media literacy” or “media education”.

One area of scholarly research in particular that has been particularly helpful for my own understanding of media literacy (and its conditions of possibility) in BC looks at the highly pragmatic barriers to technology use in schools. When it comes to Internet access, for example, many schools in Vancouver “don’t lend themselves infrastructurally to easy use of wireless … and even hard wiring in some cases” (Poyntz, interview with Kari Dehli and the author, 2011). While some who teach media literacy insist that contemporary technology (be it television, radio, cellphones, or tablets) is less important than the theories and ideas themselves, lack of basic access to the technologies may discourage some teachers from either doing media literacy work in the classroom, or simply from learning more about media themselves. Simple access to the technologies involved in particular kinds of media education compounds the existing issues of technical proficiency and the skills needed to engage in media production. This ongoing struggle over competency and expertise remains a barrier in many jurisdictions, simultaneously offloading responsibility onto teacher training (or professional development), while postponing meaningful conversations about media until such time as teachers feel ready to work with media in the classroom. One BC teacher, who works in both Social Studies and English, expressed the concern that her colleagues may not be discussing media because they themselves do not work with media very often, leading to a situation where “some teachers are not taking up media education because they feel like they need to be an expert on production in order to do it” (Molly, interview with the author). As this teacher adds, “there’s this assumption that if we have the technology then the teachers are trained to actually teach media literacy.”
Access to (and comfort/competency with) technology is further complicated in the case of BC’s Lower Mainland by shifting demographics, or what can be seen as the neo-liberalization of 21st century urban environments. As Mitchell writes of Vancouver, “In terms of the urban imaginary, the city was ‘rescaled’ as a key node in the global economy, a crucial urban gateway to the booming economies of the Pacific Rim, and a core city for Canada’s ongoing development” (2004:42). This rescaling helped to produce greater distinctions and divisions between neighbourhoods and communities, which continue to define the city today. Several of the research participants in this study indicated that media literacy work in Vancouver could be divided into two broad categories, according to the city’s demographics. There is West Vancouver (the West end of the City of Vancouver, and not the actual city of West Vancouver; Vancouver is a very confusing city, both geographically and linguistically), and then there is East Vancouver. Those teachers and scholars working with media see East Vancouver as the more working class area of the city, while West Vancouver enjoys far more affluence and privilege. (Both halves of the city are quite culturally diverse, though East Vancouver tends to be home to more first and second-generation immigrant families; once you get established and “make it,” so to speak, you buy a bigger home further West.)

These shifting forms of economic and cultural diversity can make teaching and learning quite challenging in the Lower Mainland. As one educator observes, “urban settings are a place where you’ll see the most diversity in any city,” and since Vancouver’s schools are so diverse, “some teachers have a misconception that because we have culturally diverse students in our classrooms, we don’t have any issues around diversity” (Pamela, interview with the author). On the West side of Vancouver, for example, Pamela has often heard the opinion “Oh, we’ve never had racism here before!” in and around
schools. While I hesitate to say that West Vancouver schools are newer, or more architecturally suited for modern technologies, years of anecdotal evidence from teachers would certainly suggest that there is some truth to such a claim: as with so many other cities around the world, Vancouver has pockets of extreme wealth and privilege, and the public school system reflects (or is a reflection of) this reality. The schools in both East and West Vancouver may draw from the same pool of qualified teachers, but the realities of working in actual buildings, in the middle of actual neighbourhoods, may encourage or discourage very particular kinds of media literacy.

While interviews with individual teachers gave me snapshots of these broader social issues, scholarly research from SFU and UBC has been essential in providing data and analysis that reaches farther (through time and space) than I could possibly generate on my own. The scholars examining issues of infrastructure, class and privilege in BC schools rarely connect their work explicitly to media literacy, but I see these works as critical contributions to a broader cultural discourse about schooling, as well as to the nexus of ideas and actions forming BC’s media literacy scene. In SFU’s School of Communication, for example, Weaver (2009), MacIver (2010), Orlowski (2011) and Leroux (2014) are just a handful of recent graduate students who have written thoughtful theses/dissertations on topics of media, culture, and city life in Vancouver. These projects range from an analysis of resistance groups during the 2010 Olympics to a case study of a youth media outreach organization in the city’s downtown Eastside. In SFU’s Faculty of Education, Samiei (2008) and Hansen (2012) used their dissertations to study formal sites of teaching and learning, while considering how other informal partnerships contribute to education as a whole. And across a range of departments and disciplines, Linden et al. (2013) consider the intersections of schooling and cultural life in Vancouver’s downtown
Eastside, drawing much needed attention to the role education plays in addressing poverty, addiction, mental health concerns, etc.

While the professors and graduate students at UBC and SFU have helped to generate the theoretical lenses through which a scene-based analysis such as my own is possible, their direct involvement in the media literacy scene established by the first-wave in the 1980s is less significant. By the time of the early 2000s media literacy Summer Institute series at the BCTF, for example, Ungerleider had largely pulled back from the process. His feeling at the time (and today), was, “If this is going to thrive, it’s got to be beyond just a couple of people. Other people have to take over, they have to have ownership” (Ungerleider, interview with Kari Dehli, 2011). Unfortunately, as he recalled, “we weren’t successful in getting another cadre of younger teachers engaged” (ibid.). It might have been easier had there existed a PSA specifically working around media literacy, but, as Ungerleider notes, “that would have worked at cross-purposes with integrating it across the curriculum” (ibid.). Media literacy, as it had been developing in BC, worked best in its cross-curricular format. This necessarily provided additional institutional and bureaucratic obstacles to the long-term stability of the school subject. Instead of a single-purpose organization that could oversee the development of media literacy, BC had a loose affiliation of teachers working toward similar goals, all the while hoping to recruit the next generation to take over what they saw more as a movement than a cohesive subject. In Ungerleider’s words, “If it’s always the same people, then it’s not a movement” (ibid.).

This raises a difficult question for those involved in media literacy to answer: are the people with long-term institutional job security (such as tenured university professors or
classroom teachers with seniority in a federation or union) obligated to “stick with” an advocacy group, to help ensure its continuing growth, relevance, and authority? Stability of leadership (and, as a result, consistency of message and tone) played a large role in the AML’s history in Ontario. In BC, however, some saw the idea of stability as the natural precursor to stagnation and irrelevance. Certain early figures in the BC media literacy scene, such as Kline at SFU, became involved with CAME through particular research projects. However, when these scholars move on to other projects and pursuits, they may not have the time (or, indeed, the interest) to help sustain the organizations and movements they previously helped develop. If media literacy is a “movement,” then perhaps Ungerleider is correct: new blood and new energy are essential to the movement’s ongoing vitality and influence. But if the movement helps produce a school subject, then perhaps there is value in having a handful of “key figures” act as mentors, advisors, and even historians of the movement.

The ongoing role of major universities in BC’s media literacy scene is multi-faceted (not to mention inconsistent). As hubs or focal points for scholarly research and community engagement, these schools help provide the spaces for scenes to develop; they can help incubate the kinds of practice that allow new scenes, new collaborations, and new ideas to emerge; and they can (but do not necessarily have to) provide the institutional stability for any number of scenes to remain sustainable in the long term. As I argue in the following sections, however, perhaps the greatest contribution made by SFU and UBC to BC’s media literacy scene has been a steady stream of students and scholars with an interest in media and familiarity with the fertile ground needed to develop their own initiatives, often well outside of schools and outside of the universities themselves.

Where the AML in Ontario had its first and second waves of pioneering teachers in
classrooms, BC has been home to its own vanguard of media educators, loosely centred around (but not always working within) the hubs of creativity and activism at SFU and UBC.

The major research universities in and around Toronto have also undoubtedly played a role in the growth and spread of media literacy education in Ontario, but the presence of a teacher-driven advocacy organization there may have, in effect, filled a leadership void of sorts. A stable, institutionally legitimate group (the AML) was doing the work of media education in schools, so it was not as urgent that professors and graduate students take the lead to promote the young subject themselves. Most of my own encounters with the AML fit this model: they were the experts and the leaders, and while my research might contribute to their teaching practice, I was essentially late enough to the party that I wasn’t urgently needed. The AML had laid the groundwork for the young school subject; the AML was working with in-service teachers to develop their skills with media literacy; the AML was hosting and organizing events around Toronto to spread their ideas and teaching practices. The first time I met Barry Duncan, he very generously gave me a copy of his most recent media literacy reading list: a kind of annotated bibliography detailing the various books and journal articles he’d most recently come across on topics relating to the subject. Years later, when I reflect on this first meeting, I see some of the key differences between Ontario and BC’s distinct media literacy histories: the event itself was held at the University of Toronto, but the conversations were led by the AML; the academics in the room were seen as important collaborators, while the classroom teachers were effectively the “experts” on media literacy. None of this is meant to critique the AML members involved in these events. Rather, I see it as a fascinating example of the role played by post-secondary teachers and researchers in the development of a school
subject, rather than as part of an emerging media literacy scene. Issues of power and hierarchy do not go away in a scene, but they also do not necessarily mimic those found in more traditional institutions such as public education.

6.2 Stars of the Silver Screen: The Role of Film and Film Studies

While the BCTF and its Specialist Associations were developing the institutional side of BC media literacy (particularly as a school subject), and while UBC and SFU were generating scholarly work on a range of topics connected to media literacy, another group of educators and activists was building its own infrastructure. These organizations have, at times, contributed to the school subject of media literacy, but they are far more central to the broader scene of teaching and learning about media in BC. Their development stems in large part from a pair of twin financial pressures in the 1990s. As one interview participant says of this era, “Here in Vancouver, between the arts funding and the education funding being simultaneously slashed to bits,” many small organizations had to get very creative, both in terms of their funding streams and their educational mandates (Susan, interview with the author). Two film organizations – one national, one local – have developed such mandates in and around Vancouver, with quite different results.

The National Film Board (NFB), based out of its Pacific Region office, used to work with Lower Mainland teachers on film literacy programs. For several years in the 1980s and 1990s, the NFB published a magazine, Blinkity Blank, featuring work for and by BC teachers working with film. Dan Blake was kind enough to share a few issues of this magazine with me, and it is remarkable to see the kinds of pedagogical concerns addressed. See Figure 6.1 as an example. (If I am able to track down a larger collection of
back issues, I hope someday to write about this brief period of media scholarship.) By the late 1990s, the NFB had scaled back their educational projects in BC, around the same time as other groups with an interest in film and media were emerging. A number of small organizations around BC received small amounts of seed money from the Ministry of Education in the late 1990s, to help “put some training money in place for educators to do professional development programs of one sort or another, at various locations” (Poyntz, interview with Kari Dehli and the author, 2011). The BCTF was “actively involved and encouraging that and seeding workshops, seeding programs” around the province, using “curriculum advisors” in the various Specialist Associations to bring new initiatives directly to teachers (ibid.). These programs were seldom if ever located at the two major universities in the province (SFU and UBC), however, which Poyntz notes “was both the strength and the weakness” of the effort: “it got the issue and the practice on the table but never in a way that was sustaining” (ibid.). Instead, these workshops and programs sought the institutional stability of groups such as the NFB, who could provide both the location and the media resources required for media literacy. In addition, the Ministry of Education worked with Open Learning in BC to deliver (by distance

Figure 6.1: Blinkity Blank, Vol. 5 No. 1 (1991).
education) media literacy programs around the province. In 1998, Open Learning developed a high school level film and television studies course, which the Ministry assisted in delivering. This helped get media literacy into a greater range of educational spaces, beyond the traditional K-12 classroom. The handful of teachers interested and engaged in these initiatives tended to focus on film studies, rather than other media forms; until more of the educators involved pushed for a broader focus across multiple media, the subject stuck with the issues and resources most readily available to it.

Where ministry programs, university initiatives and federal bodies such as the NFB struggled to remain sustainable, smaller, more local groups were able to (and indeed forced to) survive through smaller scale efforts and projects. The Pacific Cinématèque, for example, created its own education department in 1995, hiring Stuart Poyntz as its first manager to do outreach work around the Lower Mainland. The position of education manager was created in part through an EI/UI top-up known as a “Section 25,” as Poyntz recalls of this. Seeking funding and support from a range of sources was typical of that era:

The easy critique of it is that this is the neo-liberalization of non-profit organizations and the non-profit sector. And that is true. Because … a big part of it was government claw-backs, Tory and then Paul Martin claw-backs, on funding to the Canada Council which forced organizations to become more creative in accessing different revenue lines. (interview with Kari Dehli and the author, 2011)

While the position of education manager originally focused on the medium of film, the Cinématèque now works with a wide range of media and technologies. The current education manager, Liz Schulze, was first drawn to media literacy when she worked with
Learning Through the Arts, a national organization run out of Toronto. At the Cinématèque, she inherited a collection of media resources (mostly film studies guides), which she sees as “film education” tools. “I don’t mean to be demeaning them in any way,” she says, “but they’re very basic in terms of their approach” (interview with Kari Dehli and the author, 2011). Schulze sees these film education resources as having “no acknowledgement of students’ prior knowledge and engagement in such media, certainly no acknowledgement of the fact that they’re very savvy” (ibid.). While early waves of Canadian media literacy may have sought a kind of legitimation through “serious” study (deconstruction and exegesis) of a particular media format (film), contemporary media literacy – even when housed within an institutional space dedicated to this format – seems compelled to move beyond film. As Schulze puts it, her job is not about “just catching up” with the latest media, adding, “that’s not possible,” as media is “just moving too fast” (ibid.).

One of the great advantages of these informal, out-of-classroom organizations (such as the NFB and the Cinématèque) is the way that they build pedagogical expertise without necessarily making additional demands on in-service teachers. By working with teachers, rather than simply seeking to train teachers to do the actual work of media literacy instruction, community organizations recognize both their own skillset (often developed over many years of practice) as well as that of classroom teachers. Schulze puts it this way:

So we’re going to take a teacher whose full-time job is to facilitate all these things plus field trips, plus administration, plus report cards, plus parent-teacher meetings, plus all of the extra things that are going on … and let’s not forget the foundational skills assessment tests and all the other provincial examinations that
go on. Oh yeah, that person’s supposed to also know all the logistics of media production and media literacy and flawlessly integrate those into their existing activities. (interview with Kari Dehli and the author, 2011)

As the manager of her own education department at the Cinématèque, Schulze is free from other demands and restrictions, adding that she is “not constrained by the same things that teachers are, that everyone else is, who works inside of a concrete system” (ibid.). As a not-for-profit organization, she notes, the Cinématèque has “total liberty to engage in whatever issues come up in the moment, to be able to meet whatever needs are present, in that same way that others can’t” (ibid.). This neatly mirrors Straw’s notion that scenes often involve partnerships between experts and beginners, turning the verticality of a master-apprentice relation sideways, "into the spatial relationship of outside to inside; the neophyte advances 'horizontally', moving from the margins of a scene towards its centre" (Straw 2004:413). Community activists and artists develop their own pedagogical skills through the workshops and seminars they facilitate, while in-service teachers may gain valuable professional development time (often in their own classrooms), learning from those who work with media on a daily basis.

Echoing Schulze’s comments on the work done by the Cinématèque’s education department, Poyntz remembers, “If you bring in an outside organization you can often push the limits of the discourse and the practice and the themes that are taken up” (interview with Kari Dehli and the author, 2011). The Cinématèque collaborates with a range of community groups and organizations, such as the City of North Vancouver, the West Vancouver Police Department, the Portrait Gallery of Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and many others. “Often a municipality or a community group will have some sort of pre-defined objective,” says Schulze, in which case they approach the
Cinématèque directly (interview with Kari Dehli and the author, 2011). Much of the Cinématèque’s work is done offsite from their actual film exhibition facility in downtown Vancouver. This is partly because of space constraints and limited resources, and partly because it allows them to go out into the community and work with media in the everyday lived experiences of young people. As Schulze observes, many school districts in BC have central facilities for professional development work with teachers, whereas student workshops can be challenging when it comes to finding an appropriate space.

“Institutionally,” argues Poyntz, the history of media literacy in BC “is very different because the school system and the ministry haven’t had such a centralizing role as kind of the anchoring disciplinary bodies in shaping the practice and the meaning of the practice” (interview with Kari Dehli and the author, 2011). As a result, he notes, “it’s like every single month, you’re re-inventing the wheel” (ibid.). Without stable funding sources or institutional partnerships, smaller media organizations were unable to deliver some of the kinds of programs they envisioned. This precarious existence, however, also helped to create environments in which highly innovative media literacy practices could develop, as Poyntz and Hoechsmann argue in their (2012) overview of media literacy. Partly owing to their relative instability, many media literacy practitioners in BC “saw their work as pushing the seams of alternative practice,” as if to “uphold a kind of radicality in one’s practice, in a utopian sense” (Poyntz, interview with Kari Dehli and the author, 2011). Some even saw this alternative spirit in contrast to traditional media literacy work in Canada; as one teacher told me, the knowledge that “the Toronto mafia” didn’t really pursue similar goals in similar manners was part of the enjoyment of the BC work (Albert, interview with the author). As Poyntz puts it, “there have been some real upsides” to the lack of a centralizing, institutionally anchored media literacy organization in
BC; “there’s been some really innovative and exciting programs” that may not have come about otherwise (interview with Kari Dehli and the author, 2011). Without stable, long-term practices and programs to draw upon, media literacy educators in Vancouver, notes Poyntz, end up investing themselves very deeply in these “one-off” events and partnerships. He says that Vancouver is home to:

[A]n alive investment in an ideology of an alternative media practice in this city. So there’s a sense of ‘Can I get hold of this? Can I participate in it?’ … And that crosses in music and video and mobile media now. And it doesn't necessarily follow strict boundaries of artistic practice, meaning it’s not only film. (interview with Kari Dehli and the author, 2011)

Even within the short history of BC’s media literacy scene, there has been a marked shift away from the centrality of film studies, even while film remains a crucial site of creative media production (as I argue in the next section of this chapter). The role played by the NFB and the Cinématèque in anchoring various media literacy projects has been essential: these spaces of film exhibition and study have helped provide some of the material resources necessary for other projects to emerge and develop, without over-determining the content of the new projects.

6.3 Media Literacy’s Third Way: Not-For-Profit Pedagogy

Media literacy in BC continues to thrive outside of classroom spaces, which many involved see as both an important point of distinction between BC and other provinces, as well as a particular strength of the BC model itself. As Poyntz argues, “the connection with non-profit organizations and art institutes of one sort or another has meant that creativity, as a broad category of concern, has been a key piece of how media education is understood” (interview with Kari Dehli and the author, 2011). Today, the BCTF, the
Ministry of Education, as well as the individual school boards around the province have been supportive of these media literacy initiatives, in principle, if not always through substantive financial assistance. “But when we talk about funding, when we talk about support for schools on an actual, practical, financial level,” notes the head of one such group, “I don’t see that happening” (Schulze, interview with Kari Dehli and the author, 2011). While an organization such as the NFB could rely (at least for many years) on stable government funding, smaller groups at the provincial and local level find themselves reviewing funding structures and even mandates every year. The central issue of funding is both an ongoing existential threat to BC’s media literacy scene and, somewhat paradoxically, the very force that has helped establish connections and practices that now sustain the scene itself.

One media educator in Vancouver notes, “Those of us who are doing this work are working in isolation,” which means, “finding allies that support what [we] do has been key to this work” (Pamela, interview with the author). Angela Brown, who works as the Anti-Racism and Diversity Mentor at the Vancouver Board of Education, regularly partners with a wide range of organizations and institutions, including the Vancouver YWCA, Love BC, Citizen U (a community-based program in Vancouver), and the Centre for the Celebration of Diversity in Education (CCODE) at UCLA. “Oftentimes,” she observes, “I’m relying on colleagues that are working in this area privately”; while “the circle is small,” she adds, “it’s growing” (interview with the author, 2013). While the partners already discussed in this chapter have certainly been a part of these growing circles, not-for-profit organizations were identified in several of my interviews as being at the heart of BC’s media literacy scene. Whether through a shared sense of budgetary precariousness, a common agenda seeking social justice and change, or simply the
serendipitous encounters that bring people together in everyday city life, these organizations have worked closely together in BC for almost 25 years.

The Gulf Island Film and Television School (GIFTS), for example, was created in 1996, and its work has had a major influence on other BC programs, including the Cinématèque’s own education department. Using an old forestry site on Galiano Island, a small group of filmmakers and editors started running summer camps for young people, giving them the tools and skills needed to make their own films. While GIFTS continued to serve a fairly local community, it also gave rise to offshoots and side projects. From the original film school, Deblekha Guin (another SFU Communication graduate), created the Access to Media Education Society (AMES) in 1997, to develop and deliver similar creative activities for youth around the Lower Mainland. In its early years, AMES ran a series of programs, getting media production tools into the hands of various marginalized youth groups. As Guin told me, there was “one week for indigenous youth, one week for youth of colour, one week for queer youth, one week for HIV positive youth, and one week for street-involved youth,” for example (interview with the author, 2014). Each seminar or workshop series involved 15 to 20 students, as well as at least one mentor, usually an experienced media practitioner from the community. Many of these workshops started with a media literacy workshop, but for Guin the real lessons of media literacy were embedded within and throughout the program. In the editing room, for example, mentors helped students “acknowledge how much their own imaginations had been colonized by mainstream media” (ibid.).

Both GIFTS and AMES work with a range of at-risk, marginalized, queer, or Aboriginal youth, partnering with various funding sources for individual projects. With an emphasis
on media production work, these organizations are doing a very particular kind of media literacy, centred on youth *voice* and *expression*. Given that the inclusion of production work in a media literacy curriculum remains another of Hobbs’s “Great Debates” within the field, it is questionable whether or not GIFTS or AMES would even be seen to be doing media literacy at all, at least in the eyes of some educators around the world. But it is the intriguing variety of partnerships and alliances with BC’s school boards that makes GIFTS and AMES such fascinating members of the BC media literacy scene. These are not film schools, in the instrumental sense of producing skilled filmmakers for a kind of mainstream job market: these are organizations combining social justice with artistic empowerment, encouraging youth to take control of media environments and shape them for their own purposes.

I myself was invited to help at an AMES event a few years ago, during which young Aboriginal filmmakers (who had completed a filmmaking retreat with the AMES staff and mentors) presented their work directly to senior Vancouver School Board administrators, including at least one Board trustee; the event itself was held at the Vancouver School Board’s main facility, which is often used for professional development and training. Seeing young people screen their films, many of them addressing issues of identity, representation, and marginalization, I felt that I was seeing media literacy at its very best. Here were young learners (some of whom admitted, very frankly, that public education in BC had failed them in very concrete ways), learning about media to create their own expressions of who they are, what they aspired to, what frustrated them, etc. They were not simply mastering technological skills in order to pad their video portfolio, always ultimately seeking employment in the 21st century
Knowledge Economy; they were producing precisely what I’ve read about in Freirian essays for over a decade.

AMES has no official, sustained relationship with the major education institutions in the province, and as a result it has had to seek funding from a wide range of sources. In Guin’s words, “We’ve survived almost 20 years without any core funding,” noting that “When we were working with sex trade workers, [funding] came from National Crime Prevention. When we were doing work with indigenous and of-colour communities, we got money through the province, …[and] the BC Anti-Racism Portfolio. We got money from BC Gaming, from Vancouver Foundation, quite a range” (interview with the author, 2014). When AMES started their work in 1997, the videos produced by participating youth were often unusual, even controversial, compared to more standard media literacy resources used in classrooms across Canada. AMES screened many of these videos at public events, to share the work with a broader community. In Guin’s words, one such screening in the late 1990s, held at the Vogue theatre, brought together “talented artists, hip people … charismatic, fun, committed to social change” (ibid.) These people helped bring the work AMES was doing into a greater range of artistic and educational networks. Future events would “re-charge” the enthusiasm for this work, and bring new mentors and collaborators into the AMES network.

While neither the local school boards nor the provincial Ministry of Education have provided any ongoing support or resources to an organization like GIFTS or AMES, short-term collaborations have produced a number of significant opportunities for longer-term connections to form. After a few years of overseeing youth media projects, for example, Guin took the AMES videos to the Social Justice Educators Conference in BC,
as well as to *Fast-Forward*, an education conference where teachers from each school
district in BC came to purchase video resources for their classrooms. One such teacher
was Angela Brown. Brown’s job involves supporting teachers, support-staff workers, and
administrators at 94 elementary and 18 secondary schools in the district. Vancouver is the
only district (out of 60 in the province) with a staff member to work on multiculturalism
policy and diversity issues. Brown was impressed with the AMES videos, and she placed
a large order: “I started using those resources, and sharing those with teachers, and then I
basically just emailed [Guin] and ordered two resources per secondary school” (interview
with the author, 2013). Within a couple of years, however, the videos were “getting a bit
dated,” and Angela wanted “to collaborate with [Guin] to develop something more
current” (ibid.). This led to a new media literacy project, called the *YouthMADE Program*
(*MADE* stands for Media Arts Diversity Education and Empowerment). Brown and Guin
recruited youth from around the province, age 13 to 18, and went to Galiano Island (to
the GIFTS facilities) for a two-week anti-oppression program. Teams of youth worked on
scripts to make videos, and they ultimately produced six different modules: four videos,
and two animations. Brown then helped write a teaching resource (with lesson plans) for
each, and put them online, using a Creative Commons licence, to encourage sharing,
remixing, etc. The youth involved in this program have now helped to facilitate over 200
workshops around Vancouver. Brown sees this ongoing partnership with youth to be a
central feature of the program: “In my role, as much as it’s powerful for me to connect
with students, the response to having the youth presenter is … [it] has an impact that’s
different. They see themselves in their stories” (interview with the author, 2013). The
ongoing workshops are done “under the umbrella of AMES,” but with financial support
from Brown’s own budget at the school board (ibid.).
This partnership, between a support staff worker in Vancouver and a media educator working primarily with community organizations, illustrates nicely how the Vancouver media literacy scene has been produced and sustained over the past 25 years. Without a clear institutional mandate in schools to do this kind of work, various groups pop up to help fill the void; they seek funding and assistance through government channels, but often end up operating on an ad hoc basis, jumping from project to project, grant cycle to grant cycle; they share the work they produce, both to increase viewership of the excellent work being generated, and to further connect with the artists and activists who will help make the next round of projects possible; and eventually they end up partnering with teachers, education researchers, and others working within more formal educational spaces, to create longer-term alliances. Would it have been simpler to start with a central, province-wide advocacy group, under whose umbrella the teachers and community partners could work together to pursue common goals? Possibly. But would a support organization (a BC version of the AML) necessarily produce the same volume (or even kind) of media work that presently circulates in BC? Both Brown and Guin make it clear that certain kinds of media work are best left to the “partners,” and not to the in-service teachers themselves.

Teachers work within a particular set of regulations and prohibitions, even if their own pedagogical impulses are to challenge these very restrictions. At the end of the day, a guest speaker in the classroom can get away with pushing at the boundaries a bit more, as there is simply less at stake in the long-term: a parent may complain about the media texts being discussed, and the worst that may happen is that the outside organization isn’t invited back to that particular school the next year. Guin admits, for example, that AMES may have been a bit too “radical” to receive long-term support from the provincial
ministry. Some of the videos AMES has produced over the years have generated controversy, even among the very groups that funded those particular projects. As it turns out, this is not an uncommon experience when it comes to working with youth and media. In her 2007 doctoral research on youth videomaking projects, Isabelle Kim argues that informal educational organizations have a number of advantages over formal classroom initiatives, including a greater freedom to generate potentially controversial content. Kim sees informal spaces providing more opportunities for mentorship (as opposed to instruction), as well as smaller groups that include a greater age range of learners (2007:202). More importantly, Kim notes, informal sites of videomaking place far less emphasis on evaluation, recognizing both “the importance of process” and that “videomaking is an iterative learning activity by nature, where students often learn best from their mistakes or accidental discoveries” (ibid.:205-206, italics in original). When AMES participants do media literacy work, it takes place within a structurally and ideologically different atmosphere than their counterparts experience in BC classrooms.

Brown’s newest project (in 2013) was called “Inside Out: Stories of Identity,” and incorporated the Canadian government’s National Video Project for secondary students with Brown’s own projects that allowed for the inclusion of elementary students too. This project uses the schools themselves (the exterior of each building) to tell stories from the lives and experiences of young people. While the project takes place within the schools of a single board, it relies on the time and resources of an entire community. “The idea isn’t to credit anybody, it isn’t to spend a lot of money,” says Brown, “but it’s to tell people about it, and have them volunteer time, space”; she adds that the Vancouver Fire Department was involved in putting the images up on buildings, while parents and family members in the community helped provide art materials, food, building spaces, etc.
As relatively stable organizations (at least in terms of community visibility and recognition, if not in terms of financial sustainability), groups such as AMES and GIFTS have been able to establish quite complex networks for collaboration and support.

Unlike their colleagues working at SFU or UBC, these groups lack the more institutional forms of legitimacy needed to forge long-term partnerships or secure government funding streams; unlike their colleagues at the Cinématèque or the NFB, these groups lack a focused media mandate that can consistently attract partners in need of expertise or even bookable space for media literacy work. Rather than seeing these differences simply as disadvantages, not-for-profit media groups in BC have turned instability and unpredictability into opportunities to fill a number of unaddressed niches in the province’s media literacy scene. In this way, they have much in common with a final group of individuals and organizations involved in producing this scene.

6.4 The Indie/Alt Scene: Teaching and Learning In Everyday City Life

The organizations and activists discussed so far in this chapter work in the public and the private sector, as well as the murky territory in between the two; some have institutional stability, others have to seek temporary benefactors each time they begin a new project. The final cluster of creative energies involved in the production of BC’s media literacy scene only somewhat overlaps the others I’ve identified. The critical difference here lies in how certain members of the scene identify their efforts: I am not sure any of them would even recognize that what they do falls under the category of media literacy. How then does one claim membership on behalf of people who do not see
themselves as belonging to the scene itself? Understanding and analyzing a scene may involve casting our research gaze on the outer fringes, in search of those interactions and exchanges that would otherwise be caught outside the boundaries set out by essentially arbitrary methodological decisions. In the case of BC’s media literacy scene, this means looking at the efforts of scholars, artists, and activists doing media literacy, often without knowing it (or at least without explicitly categorizing their own efforts in any vernacular familiar to those within media literacy circles).

Scenes may include such “unaware members,” to coin a phrase, precisely because of the kinds of forces generating and sustaining them. As Straw argues, the production of a scene is sometimes the result of “excess” creative energy from another area of cultural life, spilling over into new territories with unintended consequences: “Just as they draw upon surpluses of people, scenes may be seen as ways of ‘processing' the abundance of artifacts and spaces which sediment within cities over time” (2004:416). The media literacy scene in Vancouver has been produced, in part, by the surplus creative and intellectual energies from another scene, which was fed in part by the local artistic scenes, and so on. Scenes may be seen to feed one another, gaining mutual collective benefit from such simple acts as making a local café available for fundraising art auctions, gathering local musicians for a panel discussion during an academic conference, or even just meeting research participants at a local coffee shop to introduce like-minded educators to one another.

Vancouver’s Purple Thistle Centre is one such example of a multi-purpose space, a highly generative nexus for various artistic and activist scenes. It is one of approximately 175 youth media production sites mapped out by the Youth Digital Media
Ecologies (YDME) project, a SSHRC funded research initiative led by Stuart Poyntz and Michael Hoechsmann. The YDME project is mapping youth media activity in three Canadian cities (Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver), to show where the creative lives of young people unfold in urban spaces. On their project website (ydme.ca) they describe the Purple Thistle Centre as a “youth-run arts and activism centre,” occupying a space that is a “mix between an open community and resource centre and an artist-run studio” (YDME 2014). Opened in 2001, the centre uses the term “de-schooling” to support individual independence over “a more structural type of education” (ibid.). They offer production classes, creative workshops, as well as a workspace for young artists. Funding comes from a very wide range of sources, including Service Canada, BC Hydro, Industry Canada, the City of Vancouver, and the Youth Philanthropy Council. With a primary focus on art and activism, the Purple Thistle Centre is not a conventional media literacy organization, but it has helped to produce a wide range of texts and teachers that do the work of media literacy all around the city. Unfortunately, at the time I am completing this dissertation in 2015, the Purple Thistle recently closed its doors. In a letter on their website, they mention “hard funding cuts” in recent years, and suggest that, “The Thistle was never meant to be an institution” (www.purplethistle.ca/letter-to-the-community/).

Vancouver’s multiple arts scenes (and their overlapping geography and practice with what I’m considering as the local media literacy scene) often overlap in strange and serendipitous ways. A recent SFU graduate has written a fascinating paper on a particular site of creative production and community formation that nicely illustrates this confluence of cultural energies. Gala Milne, a student in the SFU School of Communication, completed an excellent example of scene-based analysis in the Spring semester of 2011 for a fourth-year seminar (CMNS 439), taught by Stuart Poyntz. (Milne
Milne’s work focuses on the various impacts of a single Vancouver-based company, *Babylon Buttons*. Babylon’s owner, Melva Forsberg, has been making buttons for over 25 years in Vancouver, and Milne traces some of the varied connections made possible by these common items as they move through the city. As Milne writes, these simple “focal objects” function as the kinds of “tangible tool[s]” needed for “understanding the development of social movements, and communication spaces within a city” (unpublished 2011). *Babylon Buttons* produces buttons of all types, but it has been particularly visible and relevant during moments of cultural and political turmoil: after major elections (the 77-2 seat victory of the BC Liberal Party over the NDP in 2001, for example), or during heated public protests (over logging activities or First Nations land disputes). While spaces for organizing and collaborating, such as the Purple Thistle Centre, are essential for the growth of a scene, simple focal objects such as these buttons produce the daily connections needed to sustain the scene. Recognizing one of Forsberg’s creations can lead to spontaneous conversations that forge new friendships and collaborations; ordering 100 of her buttons may help to promote an event, but it also produces material reminders, visible on jackets and courier bags all around the city, that our causes are alive and well, being broadcast one button at a time by a scene’s members.

The BC media literacy scene is produced through the daily rituals and focal objects described here, but it has also benefited greatly from one-off events and annual gatherings that serve to re-energize various cultural movements. The Media Democracy Project, for example, is a Vancouver group (largely based out of SFU’s School of Communication) that has been organizing an annual conference, Media Democracy Days, since 2001. Their partners include OpenMedia.ca and the Vancouver Public Library.
Though their focus is on increased democratization and engagement with the media (invoking Habermas and the notion of a public sphere), their stated goal is to get people to “Know the Media, Be the Media, and Change the Media” (mediademocracyproject.ca).

The Media Democracy Days conference is held at the public library in downtown Vancouver, and attracts hundreds of participants each year. Past keynote speakers have included Michael Geist, Sut Jhally, and Cory Doctorow. Like the screenings of youth media productions held by groups like AMES, Media Democracy Days help to connect a young, activism-driven community from around BC, as well as pioneering media literacy teachers from local school boards, graduate students from UBC and SFU, and journalists from alternative and independent presses. (An entire paper deserves to be written on the incredible range of connections established at this annual event. Hopefully, someone will take up this challenge.)

As I argued in chapter four, scene-based analysis must be sensitized to the spatial conditions of circulation and exchange that surround us in everyday life. The snapshots I have provided in this chapter offer only a momentary glimpse of BC’s media literacy scene, as it has revealed itself through a single research effort. The individuals and organizations I have analyzed here have been essential to the creation and survival of the scene, but this does not necessarily make them “key figures” in the historical narrative one might weave from this data. Rather, I see them as the faces and places constituting the cultural life of a city; they are the educational and artistic institutions helping to develop a young school subject, but they are also the radical and transformative forces helping to re-write the frameworks into which subjects are articulated and understood. Scholarly texts and authorities alone never determine what we mean by a term such as “media literacy”. Indeed, our understanding of such a term is always in flux, impossible
to define with clarity, and only accessible through momentary glimpses and fragmented constructions. This is as true of the term “media literacy” as it is of the term “math,” or “English.” Subjects are their histories, as Morgan observed, and such histories can only ever be seen in the present, at the particular moment when we happen to open the shutter and capture a frozen instance of an ever-changing world.
Chapter 7
Conclusion

I think in many ways, we’re still in the same place that we were in. We’re still making the same bloody arguments, we’re still confronting the bad press that media routinely gets. So loads of other things have changed and yet we’re still fighting. (Buckingham, interview with Kari Dehli, 2012)

This final chapter draws together the major ideas and arguments developed through the previous chapters, both re-visiting my initial research questions and looking ahead to pose new ones. I discuss some of the methodological contributions made throughout this dissertation, I tease out a number of research questions for future studies, and I consider the uses of scene-based analyses in education research and elsewhere. After studying media literacy in Canada for the past several years, I have much to say about the subject. Rather than advance a series of prescriptive policy-oriented proposals, I’d rather focus here on specific questions addressing school subjects and their histories. How, for example, does scene-based analysis help to uncover the alternate histories of (and subjugated knowledges contained within) school subjects, and why are these alternate histories so important to media literacy and to education research in general? What are the politics of representation of media literacy’s history, and what dangers exist in the singular telling and re-telling of one monolithic story?

Researching the history of media literacy in BC has helped me to uncover a number of historical, cultural, and political differences between just two Canadian provinces. Extrapolating from these differences, I have argued in this dissertation that media literacy is always more than just a school subject: it is a rich site of meaning making, struggle,
community building, and pedagogy. It extends well beyond K-12 classrooms or university lecture halls, into the most localized spaces and places of everyday life. Media literacy, as with many other school subjects, is most constructively understood as a scene. So why is this worth considering in greater detail, and what are the implications for future research?

7.1 On the Benefits and Uses of Scene-Based Analysis

In BC, the school subject of media literacy moved into (and out of) schools in a very different way than in Ontario. Simply comparing the history of a school subject in two provinces, however, fails to fully identify and appreciate the work done in either jurisdiction. Looking at the construction and articulation of these historical narratives has allowed me to consider more than just the institutional history of media literacy. Considered as a scene, media literacy in BC is far more than the sum of its institutional parts. Funding structures for work in BC varied greatly over 30 years, encouraging some forms of media literacy while preventing others from establishing themselves. An emphasis on media production work in BC, facilitated and fuelled by an industry that itself generates a surplus of creative energy, has brought media literacy work out of curricular documents and into the consciousness and imagination of a diverse community. The faculty and graduate students at two major universities have, over the course of 30 years, played a number of roles in a number of communities around BC, working in and around the kinds of fields at media literacy’s heart: activism, social justice, citizen engagement, public pedagogy, and artistic expression. Would a scene-based analysis help complicate the narrative history of media literacy in Ontario? Absolutely. Considering a web of social practice through the conceptual lens of “scene”
adds a depth and richness to education research, and the history of media literacy in Ontario would benefit enormously from such an approach. Researching BC’s media literacy scene in no way privileges the work being done in that province over others. Hopefully, it encourages others to approach the subject’s history in Ontario through a similar methodological lens, to bring to light the many unseen and under-appreciated elements of Ontario’s media literacy scene. Reflecting on the study of media literacy in BC presented here, I see a number of significant benefits to using scene-based analysis in future research efforts.

1. Scene-based analysis re-arranges the fundamental topography of social research.

Although my own methodological concerns with media literacy began with Foucauldian genealogy, “scene” has clearly emerged as the most productive research concept in this study. Other scholars have analyzed the history of media literacy according to existing conceptual frameworks, each of which contains its own limitations and drawbacks. While I certainly do not claim that scene-based analysis is free from flaws, I do think it helps to avoid (and may even embrace the productivities contained within) many of these problems. Media literacy is being taught in classrooms, and it is being practiced, shared, and taught in many informal educational spaces too. Structurally limited/limiting models of causation or influence, however, will not help to explain the relationships between the formal and the informal.

In Lee’s analysis of Canadian media literacy history, for example, new school subjects such as media literacy are often (but not always) tied to social movements, such as the environmental movement, various social justice initiatives, etc. (1997:42). While Popkewitz (1987) argues that these “movements” can only be properly understood once
we look at the actors involved, their relative positions within educational institutions and hierarchies, and the social dynamics pulling/pushing them in various directions, Lee questions this approach, arguing that it is “unsatisfactory in explaining the relation between the State and the education system,” as it “fails to distinguish the interest of the State from the interest of the dominant groups” (ibid.:44). Framing an emergent school subject such as media literacy as a social movement certainly can and should bring up questions of political economy and the State, and I think Lee is correct in identifying some of the other social forces at work in school subject formation.

Where I depart from her analysis, however, is in the starting assumptions about social movements and the spaces/places they occupy in society. Media literacy, as a movement, may begin with concerned parents and community groups, or it may have its genesis in the classrooms of motivated teachers. It may also begin as a branch of an existing academic discipline, which seeks formal legitimation in public school curricula. It is difficult to untangle these various historical threads, but one must ask: how might researchers look at complex social/instructional phenomena such as school subjects and their histories without relying on models or concepts that isolate a single phenomena from all other related and relevant ideas? Lee’s analysis of media literacy as a social movement, beginning with the lobbying efforts of the AML (and the broader project of legitimating a school subject) effectively reproduces the idea of a “top” and a “bottom.” Other actors (community groups and university scholars, most notably) are here seen as mere third-party actors in this struggle, and not as the generative force behind highly influential teaching (and even lobbying) efforts in their own right.
Similarly, in their 2009 analysis of different “digital literacy” initiatives in Europe and in Australia, Sefton-Green, Nixon and Erstad consider only two possible models for school subject development: the “top-down” and the “bottom-up”. Top-down refers to the creation of government policy to address “some form of ‘technological literacy’ with respect to digital technologies” (2009:108). Bottom-up, on the other hand, refers to the fact that “sociological and ethnographic studies of young people’s media participation” often occur well “outside of formal education” (ibid.:108-9). In developing school subjects such as media literacy, then, one either must start with the “top” (official institutions of the State, such as a ministry of education), or at the “bottom” (anywhere from community organizations to lived media experience of youth at home in their bedrooms). Even when youth media participation is seen as the point of departure, this vertical alignment continues to privilege a “higher” position of authority and control over young learners.

In Goodson’s analysis of another school subject, geography, he notes that the historical narrative of how the subject was produced “is not of the translation of an academic discipline […] into a pedagogic version” to be used in schools:

 Rather the story unfolds in reverse order and can be seen as a drive from low status groups at school level to progressively colonise areas within the university sector […] The process of evolution for school Subjects can be seen not as a pattern of disciplines ‘translated’ down or of ‘domination’ downwards but very much as a process of ‘aspiration’ upwards. (1981:176, italics in original).

As with this case study of geography, media literacy is more than a set of pragmatic pedagogical exercises, shaped by key scholars in the field (Masterman, Buckingham, McLuhan, Hall, etc.). Media literacy is tied to conversations about global capitalism and
rapidly shifting/dwindling labour markets, as well as to a technological futurism/fetishism that sees a bright white, wireless, cloud-based utopia ahead. These conversations are happening in many schools, but it remains to be seen whether or not formal sites of education are really directing this conversation, upwards, outwards, or in any particular direction at all. The emergence and movement of school subjects is not simply the result of a few pioneering figures and their stated intentions. Where Goodson and others see a vertical axis of “domination” or “aspiration,” I see iterations of lateral growth, a healthy rhizome testing new directions with no particular vector privileged over any other. And really, why must education researchers (or anyone studying social phenomenon, for that matter) settle for just two points of entry along a vertically oriented axis of power and control? What about all of the points that would fall somewhere in the contested middle ground, where various pedagogical initiatives are conceived, executed, understood, and evaluated? What compels us to search for an “up” and a “down” in the first place? What if the energies building and sustaining school subjects are, in the best possible sense of the term, directionless?

Scenes don’t really have an “up” or a “down” to define the flow of ideas and practices. That is certainly not to suggest that scenes are freed from existing power differentials and imbalances in the cultures that produce the scene. In the BC media literacy scene there are clear traces of such struggles: certain voices in the scene tend to find a greater audience than others, owing in large part to forms of institutional authority/legitimacy produced by (and producing) deep-seated inequalities in these systems. (A university tenure system, for instance, that continues to disproportionately favour heterosexual white male professors.) Power and struggle remain in any scene, just as in any socially produced construct. By straddling a range of institutions and communities, however, a
scene is not simply defined by the conventional power dynamics of any one single space. The BC media literacy scene, therefore, has helped to produce both the school subject and the social discourse of media literacy without succumbing to the institutional imperatives of the BC Ministry of Education, the Faculty of Education at either UBC or SFU, the BCTF Specialist Associations, etc. The influence of any of these individual institutions may be detected at various points in media literacy’s history, but on the whole there is a marked absence of any one single dominant influence. Perhaps, then, Goodson’s description of a school subject’s development just needs a simple revision: it is a process of aspiration simultaneously moving outwards, inwards, round and round in circles, and back-and-forth. The movement in a scene is less an arrow or a spiral, and more a meandering flow through a complex circuit.

2. Scenes exist “in-between” the individual and the structural levels of daily life.

Scene-based analysis helps to complicate the ideas of school subjects and disciplines, turning a vertical relationship (between governments, school boards, and professional bodies on the one hand, and classroom teachers, community organizations, artists and activists on the other) into a lateral exchange, or circulation of knowledge and creative energies. A strength of scene-based analysis is therefore its sensitivities to the various “middle grounds” that may appear in social research. Scenes are composed of more than just institutions and citizens, leaders and followers, musicians and fans, teachers and students: there are whole ranges of people and practice that exist in between these binaries. The BC media literacy scene has been produced by institutional texts (the BCTF’s Conceptual Framework), by community organizations (AMES, GIFTS, the Purple Thistle, etc.), by university researchers, classroom teachers, East Vancouver
coffee shops, and many others. Scene-based analysis doesn’t privilege individual groups or actors, nor does it privilege particular categories (such as groups themselves). As Popkewitz writes, social research has a kind of obligation to focus on “the intent and purposes of social actors,” as this “places people and their social worlds in history” (2001:167). To remove people from social histories, he adds, “is to make the world seem deterministic and outside the possibility of intervention” (ibid.). When you ignore the individuals involved in a social phenomenon, you remove the humanistic core from what is inherently a social endeavour.

But when you focus too much attention on individuals, you risk ignoring the social forces involved in producing individuals. “The practical consequences of an unquestioned centering of a subject,” Popkewitz writes, “entail multiple issues of power that are hidden in the rhetoric” (ibid.:168). Drawing on Judith Butler’s work, he adds:

> When the subject is taken uncritically as the locus of struggle for knowledge about enfranchisement and democracy, scholarship draws from the very models that have oppressed through the principles that govern the production of subjects. Such a strategy is both a consolidation and concealment of those power relations. (ibid.)

Scene-based analysis operates at the meso-level between individual action and social structure, between lived experience and the webs of power producing the conditions of daily life. In the BC media literacy scene, this analysis situates “pioneering” teachers and government ministries fairly equally, alongside non-profit organizations and the everyday materiality of city space. The individuals involved in a scene are neither the driving actors nor mere spectators acted upon by forces from on high. The institutional sites of higher learning (and knowledge production), too, are simply participants in the scene.
itself, no more or less important to the overall production of the scene than any individual educator working in formal or informal spaces of learning.

3. Scene-based analysis helps connect local cases to global phenomena.

As a result of the first two benefits identified here, I believe that scene-based analysis is particularly well suited to researching local phenomena, as it is conceptually grounded in between the local and the global, the exceptional and the axiomatic. In the first chapter of this dissertation, I argued that the BC media literacy scene provides a kind of illustrative case for studying school subjects, in part because of the subject’s relative newness in formal spaces of teaching and learning: the fairly recent history of this young school subject can help cast light on the creative myths that continue to sustain more established subjects, such as math, English, etc. The greater contribution to the study of other school subjects, though, is really in the methodological usefulness of scene-based analysis itself.

In order to analyze a single school subject (be it media literacy, environment education, social justice education, etc.) as a scene, one must think through the various spaces of circulation and exchange producing that subject.

The sensitizing nature of the core concept, “scene,” directs the researcher’s gaze towards connections and ruptures, both temporal and spatial. What kinds of relationships does this particular school subject have with others, and how have they influenced one another’s ongoing development? How does this specific scene, as captured at a particular time in a particular place, work to produce itself across multiple dimensions – local, regional, national, global? Are these multiple dimensions distinct from one another, or is there a kind of fractal symmetry uniting them, such that researching the Canadian media literacy scene might look structurally and operationally similar to the provincial scene analyzed in
this study? The BC media literacy scene is undoubtedly part of a national (and international) scene, and many of the constitutive elements of the BC scene would undoubtedly appear in a scene-based analysis of the subject in Ontario: that is the nature of a scene, spreading and growing in any number of directions at once, without a clear goal or purpose in mind. The creative energies helping to produce a scene may be focused locally (while drawing on ideas and histories with a far greater reach), or they may be inexorably tied to global patterns of exchange. The simple act of sharing youth-made media productions on a YouTube channel, for instance, effectively connects a local space of teaching and learning with a global community of educators and students. The pathways of movement and exchange at the heart of BC’s media literacy scene are also used by world travellers and online navigators, many with overlapping interests, many with wildly different goals (who may nonetheless take up the texts they encounter to build upon and recycle for their own purposes). While the technologies of the Internet may or may not factor into individual media literacy initiatives, they radically transform the terrain (and the communicative potential) across which media literacy scenes unfold.

7.2 Looking Ahead: Additional Research Questions

After researching media literacy in BC for the past several years, it is not surprising that I now find myself with a whole new set of research questions and future projects. Some of these questions are rhetorical in nature, re-stating the kinds of questions (and even the “Seven Debates” first identified by Hobbs in 1998) that have surrounded media literacy for many years. Other questions generated by this dissertation warrant their own in-depth reflection, which I hope to pursue in the near future:
1. How have various “moral panics” helped to generate and sustain media literacy scenes?

One particularly interesting element of media literacy’s history in Ontario, briefly mentioned by Lee (but nowhere else in the literature I reviewed for this study), is the role played by community and religious organizations in the early days of the school subject’s development. Concerned parents and community leaders helped in the organization of early conferences and meetings dealing with “the media” and its (almost always assumed to be) harmful effects on young people. Lee discusses this protectionist strand of the Ontario media literacy narrative, suggesting, “the Christian church in Ontario has always been concerned with the adverse effect of mass media and takes an initiative to tackle the problem” (1997:167-8). Media literacy in Ontario developed in part from such concerns that media was exerting too much negative influence over our lives, with young people being particularly vulnerable. As Lee notes, this attitude towards media (and thus the need for a particular kind of media literacy) has faced criticism from many, including media educators in Ontario, for being overly pessimistic and even infantilizing in its positioning of media consumers. Christopher Dornan, for example, refers to the Ontario media literacy programs as “scapegoat sociology,” accusing them of “building up an image of the media as manipulative and reactionary agencies of mind control” (cited in Lee 1997:323). When positioned as fundamentally manipulative, media forms are always already suspect in the minds of many who teach media literacy, making media production work a potential trap for young learners. It is therefore assumed that young learners can’t safely try their hand at video editing until they have clearly demonstrated an understanding of media grammar, meaning-making, political economy, etc.
The moralistic version of the protectionist model may have only played a minor role in the school subject’s history in Ontario, but it certainly is an ideological trend that recurs with cyclical regularity: each new medium (cable TV, then video gaming, then social networks, now smart phones) allows and encourages new kinds of activities, some of which may be considered “dangerous” or “harmful.” In every iteration, Kirsten Drotner argues, these “panic activists” struggle for “rationality and common sense,” thereby making it difficult for others to counter the activist position: “one cannot argue with panic proponents, and it is no good trying to prove irrationalities or logical flaws” (Drotner 2006:618). When a broad coalition assembles with the goal of “protecting” young people from dangerous media, opposition to such an effort is easily demonized. Recent efforts of this kind in Canada include the introduction of anti-bullying legislation in Ontario, as summarized by McCaskell (2012), which also included a number of religious organizations. As McCaskell argues, the shift of terminology itself – from harassment to bullying – reflects both the changing technological landscape, and a cultural movement towards individualism, away from structural and institutional relations of oppression (2012:63).

In the BC media literacy scene, however, making media is an essential element of media literacy, as it gives young learners the hands-on experience of constructing media messages, hopefully making deconstruction more natural in the process. Instead of simply starting by deconstructing the mass-produced, cynical, commercial texts of mainstream media culture, young learners in BC are being taught to think critically about the media through acts of storytelling and personal expression, through the very channels deemed “dangerous” by certain adults.
Media literacy in BC has nonetheless been shaped at various times by the kinds of protectionism articulated by concerned groups in the early days of school subject development in Ontario. For example, a group called the Coalition Opposing Violent Entertainment (COVE) produced and distributed a media literacy pamphlet in BC in the early 2000s. The pamphlet, titled “Violence is Not a Game,” (figure 7.1) warned parents and teachers that “we must all act to protect our children and to eliminate the culture of violence to which children are exposed.”

COVE is made up of various members, including the BCTF, the North Vancouver RCMP, SFU School of Communication professor Stephen Kline, and the BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils. Despite (or perhaps ignorant of) the large body of scholarly work on the pedagogical uses and positive benefits of many video games (Gee 2003; Grimes 2014; Yee 2014; etc.), the concerned parties of COVE still perpetuate the narrative of “harmful” media forms and “vulnerable” youth. (The pamphlet itself features an image of young children, literally “in the crosshairs:” the obvious “targets” of a dangerous media landscape.)

To what degree, then, has the BC media literacy scene (and, indeed, the media literacy scenes elsewhere) been produced by creative energies that seek to limit (or at least restrict the conditions of interaction within) young people’s access to media? While the COVE pamphlet was the only tangible artifact I could find in my research that such energies are at work in BC, other hints and traces are detectable, such as the various funding partners...
assisting programs and projects at the Pacific Cinématèque and through AMES. Many individuals and groups are willing and eager to support media literacy if it works towards their own stated aims: this is as true of progressive social justice organizations in BC as it is of state policing agencies and religious organizations concerned with youth crime or the imagined effects of “violent media.”

The dangerous media discourse might be understood as the mirror image of the digital natives discourse: where the latter imagines young people being “at home” in 21st century media environments, the former sees youth as strangers in a strange and hostile land. In terms of their pedagogical implications, both discourses simplify the concepts of agency, authority, and ideology to the point of near invisibility: teachers are either bewildered tourists in a landscape best understood by the locals, or they are almighty gate-keepers, protecting fragile young minds from the horrors of the adult world. It may be rare to encounter such extreme examples of either discourse, but in their various gradations and subtleties these ideas remain potent. I wonder, then, how these two discourses – both understood here as kinds of moral panics – may at times be produced by overlapping, rather than competing forces? I think it is worth researching the genealogical strands of each idea in greater detail, to contrast the various voices and efforts attempting to warn us about “the media,” either as a site of risk or as a perceived promised land of knowledge work and new industry.

2. In what ways might the production of a media literacy scene be hindered by Internet technologies?

I have already considered some of the productive, generative functions of Internet technologies in a scene, such as increasing the connections between local and global
energies. Reflecting on the materiality of scenes, however, I wonder if there are certain drawbacks to taking scenes online, as it were. There may be creative possibilities enhanced by (and indeed unique to) social media tools, but there may also be actions and relationships wholly unique to offline activities. Newer, “higher” technologies may or may not improve the classroom conditions for media literacy – that is a question for an entire dissertation of its own. Are the conditions necessary to create and sustain scenes, however, discouraged in any way by the fundamental affordances of the Internet itself?

From my own interactions with the people, places, organizations and everyday objects of the BC media literacy scene, I am specifically concerned by the potential loss of the scene’s materiality as it moves increasingly online. In its current iteration (or at least in the iteration that existed during the research phase of this study), the scene is inseparable from the real-world spaces where it is produced, experienced, and shared. Virtual spaces may provide an enhanced set of tools for publishing and accessing texts, but they lack the immediacy and physicality that sustains many relationships. Darin Barney, among others, writes about the importance of such “focal things” in our lives, arguing that everyday social life is made possible by things as simple as a seminar table in a university classroom. When we replace the seminar table with online course management tools, we may be granting additional access (to those who live a great distance from the university), but we are quite certainly losing something as well:

The table vanishes as a focal thing when the practices that focus upon it disappear into the brilliant ease offered by technological devices and commodities. In this instance we are deprived, technologically, of a site of engagement with the commanding and eloquent reality of the world, and of communion with other people. (Barney 2006:60)
Some of the supposedly “convenient” tools for collecting and sharing media literacy resources thus backfire rather spectacularly, in part because they lack the lived significance found in “offline” activities. In an effort to bring more people into a scene, these technologies risk limiting the kinds of relationships and activities that can exist within the scene.

Can a scene exist entirely in online spaces, where focal things are replaced by shared documents and virtual gatherings? Certainly, there are ways in which Internet tools can help to strengthen an existing scene – by amplifying voices (particularly those voices silenced or marginalized in other spaces), collapsing spatial and temporal distances, and making previously (prohibitively) expensive production tools widely available to more people. The co-existence of online and offline practices in a scene may in fact encourage greater rates of participation and involvement, as suggested by Ian Reilly and Megan Boler’s (2014) study of political engagement among internet fan communities, and Sara Grimes’s (2014) analysis of young video game players engaged in do-it-yourself (DIY) communities. I still believe it is worth considering the importance of materiality in scenes, particularly in their local dimensions and instantiations. Can online scenes create the kinds of meaningful interactions found in the BC media literacy scene, and if so, how? I am somewhat sceptical of the Internet’s potential to reproduce the offline encounters sustained by everyday life in a city such as Vancouver or Toronto, but I believe more research on this question is needed. As with scenes themselves, the Internet can be understood to bridge (or transcend) multiple dimensions, transform our understanding of the spatial and temporal, and in fact help to produce the conditions necessary for future cultural activity to occur. Used to supplement real world scenes, these digital tools can be engaging, inviting, inclusive, and (dare I suggest) emancipatory.
Used to replace existing offline activity in a scene, however, the same tools may be alienating, atomizing, and perhaps even toxic to the health and sustainability of a scene.

Ultimately, the two questions posed in this chapter are extensions of the dissertation itself. One addresses a particular element of the media literacy scene (a protectionist discourse which was largely invisible at the time I conducted my research), while the other demands a further methodological reflection on scene-based analysis itself – examining how best to consider a scene that exists in both online and offline spaces. Both the case study and the research framework developed in this dissertation have helped me to better address my original research questions, and have now, in turn, generated a further pair of focused questions. Rather than conclude this chapter with hopeful predictions for the future of media literacy, or with pithy re-phrasings of my initial instincts, I believe these two new research directions best speak to my conclusions: scene-based analysis is not meant to provide answers, but it is an excellent way to start asking better questions.
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Appendices
Appendix A

Interview Protocol.

This interview protocol was developed as part of Dr. Kari Dehli’s SSHRC-funded project, “Contested Subjects: Media Education in Policy, Politics and Practice.” Dr. Dehli invited me to contribute my own questions to this protocol, so that my dissertation research and her project could both benefit from the data generated.

Key informants: interview guide.

(These interviews will be somewhat structured, but open-ended; it is anticipated that participants will elaborate and extend on questions asked, and that topics specific to individuals and place will emerge.)

Describe how you became involved in media education.

How would you describe/define media education or media literacy? (Which term do you prefer?)

Why do you think it is important to teach about the media at school?

How would you describe your use of media?

Could you describe some of the efforts to promote media education here?

What are some of the individuals and groups that have been involved in this work?

Who supported your efforts? Who disagreed with you?

What strategies have you and your colleagues used to influence policy and curriculum?

How successful do you think these efforts were?

How would you assess the state of media literacy education at the moment?
Could you comment on the resources available for teaching media?

How well prepared are teachers for this subject?

What are some of the challenges facing teachers of media today?

What is the nature of your involvement in media education now?

Could you suggest the names of other individuals who might speak with me about media education?
Appendix B

Pseudonym Use and Biographies.

Five interview subjects in this study are represented pseudonymously here to protect their identities. While most subjects consented to have their real identities used in published works, I chose to use pseudonyms for these five people. (I explain my reasoning in chapter one.) Below is a brief summary of each subject. I have balanced a need for biographical detail (supporting their status as knowledgeable informants) with a need to protect my subjects.

‘Albert’

Albert is an experienced media educator in BC, who has worked in both formal and informal teaching spaces. He was identified in several other interviews as someone with a strong institutional memory and knowledge of media literacy in the province.

‘Anna’

Anna has worked in both the academic and community-centered sectors of media literacy in BC. Other interview subjects identified her as a kind of “central node” in the media literacy scene I have studied.

‘Molly’

Molly is a media educator in Vancouver who has worked in both the K-12 and post-secondary sectors. Two interview subjects, both representing the “first wave” of media literacy in BC, recommended that I meet with Molly for my research.
‘Pamela’

Pamela works in-between the public school system and the community of media educators operating in more informal spaces, helping to make the kinds of connections that I identify as central to BC’s media literacy scene. Just about everyone I spoke with over the past four years told me that I needed to sit down with Pamela at some point. I’m very glad she found time for me.

‘Susan’

Susan works for one of the community organizations discussed in this dissertation. She teaches young people about the media, and navigates BC’s media literacy scene to find expertise, funding, and other forms of assistance. Her own academic background informs the work she does, to combine appreciation of media texts with critical analysis.
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