Editorial
Dial 'M' for Media Education

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When the idea for establishing this journal was first conceived – at a Media Education Association event in 2008 where David Buckingham gave his obligatory keynote – the world had yet to hear the words 'Leveson' or 'Hacked Off'. Looking back at MERJ editorials since then, our position has remained constant: that we must move 'subject media' (McDougall, 2006) on from medium specificity, towards what we have called a 'flattened hierarchy' of texts, with attendant shifts to a more 'inexpert' pedagogy. The Leveson inquiry and subsequent debates reveal much about how policy makers and scholars still view 'the media', and this has significant implications for media education practitioners.

Marshall McLuhan, arguably more fashionable than ever in our current 'transmedia-scape', called for education to facilitate understanding of the 'grammar' of media technologies and communication (1964). After decades of failed promises from 'subject media', five years ago we could be forgiven for thinking we could finally get started on this (incomplete) project. 2008 was a time of optimism, as it looked as if the new 14–19 curriculum could offer the type of media education that those such as David Buckingham (keynote speaker at our own forthcoming 2013 Media Education Summit) had been proposing for many years, and McLuhan had foreseen, among with so many other things, perhaps.

It is now easy to forget that in 2005 there were 145 consortia, covering 95 local authorities. The pilots began in 2008, and a further 197 were approved in the following 12 months. In 2010, UCAS reported that 100 universities supported the new Diploma qualification. At the same time, OFCOM were funding and supporting media literacy education, albeit with a regulatory premise. The perennial (internal) dissensus amongst the community of practice over the falsely polarised academic and vocational modalities aside, these were good times for media education.

But the Diploma was doomed from the start; the then Prime Minister Tony Blair publicly stated that the GCSE/A-Level axis was here to stay, and the Diploma was confined to just 14 subject areas. The exam board EdExcel was also very critical, but 11,500 students did sign up, growing to 40,000 in 2010. The Creative and Media Diploma was by far the

most popular choice.

However, the incoming Conservative-led coalition government scrapped it completely in 2010 as part of £13bn of funding cuts and the Creative and Media Diploma's relatively quick death, like the failure to act on Tomlinson's broader recommendations before, marks a massive missed opportunity. This current administration, unlike the previous one, does not shy away from large-scale reform of GCSEs and A-Levels either, but in order to re-establish canons and hierarchies, not challenge them for a more progressive and inclusive alternative as Tomlinson had proposed.

We are not alone. Many respected historians have voiced concerns about the new proposed History curriculum designed in part by Niall Ferguson, who recently made some controversial remarks about John Maynard Keynes's sexuality. These moves will only serve to narrow the field of textual inquiry in schools across the UK, to the great detriment of young people. As Buckingham (2012) puts it, we are living and working in hard times, delivering 'the new nineteenth century curriculum'.

The birth and demise of the Diploma book-ended *Guardian* journalist Nick Davies' 3-year investigation into phone-hacking at the *News of the World*. The events are well known to media educators. The Leveson Report, published on 29th November 2012, carefully avoided recommending full-scale statutory regulation of the UK's press, but instead proposed a new regulatory body which would have the power to impose fines and direct corrections and apologies. The pressure group, Hacked Off, fronted by the actor Hugh Grant, lobbied hard for the Leveson proposals to be implemented in full. The Prime Minister, David Cameron, however, was reluctant to do so, preferring to ask newspaper editors to come up with their own proposals. The film producer, and now Labour-peer, David Puttnam even attempted to table an amendment to the deformation bill, to force the setting up of a statutory regulatory body to oversee the UK's press.

The fall-out from Leveson has divided media academics, especially those with previous or current 'form' as journalists. Whereas Stephen Jukes holds the ground for a free press on the basis that it is not responsible for the actions of some notable 'Hacked Off' campaigners who enter the disputed arena of public interest by their own volition, James Curran cites the unique status of Leveson as a response to public indignation and then tilts the focus to the 'elephant in the room' – concentration of media ownership and a culture of impunity (Jukes and Curran, 2013).

It is clear from the post-Leveson policy decisions and manoeuvrings that the focus on one medium as a constituent part of a wider 'media-sphere' still persists. This is despite the fact that 'the press' now exists in a variety of forms, on a variety of platforms, augmented by the chatter of social media; a newspaper is no longer a fairly stable text, but it is part of

a bigger conversation, which ranges across all media, largely unrestricted. If the 'Wikileaks' affair (which we discussed in a MERJ editorial for issue 1 (2) – see Berger and McDougall, 2010) has taught us anything, it is that the Fourth Estate is now akin to a system of commuter towns, all belted together by numerous information highways. Antonio Lopez asks 'Can convergence and the participatory culture arising with new media practices challenge hegemony?' and offers ectonal 'boundary spaces' as potential contexts for an environmental media education to offer resistance to neoliberal capitalism (2012: 48). What's clear from the Leveson fall-out is the scale of the chasm between the hegemonic 'centre ground' and such counter-cultural ideas. Media education oscillates between both.

Many media scholars were quick to fill in any gaps in the 'post-Leveson' conversation: in a collection edited by John Mair, entitled *After Leveson?* (2013), former Director of the BBC's World Service – and now journalism professor at Cardiff University – Richard Sambrook, along with Deirdre O'Neill, argues that better training is now needed for journalists; Bob Calver calls for more 'ethics' teaching in journalism schools and Phil Harding suggests that mid-career and seasoned journalists were the ones who needed to be taught new skills. So, the medium specific view persists, even in post-Leveson post-mortems.

In their rather self-aggrandising memoir of the phone-hacking scandal Tom Watson and Paul Hickman state that the events were:

> …the worst scandal in British public life in decades, touching almost every pillar of British society: the royal family, the government, the civil service, the courts, the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and, of course, the media. (2012: 275)

All of these institutions will survive, virtually intact. Those that dismiss the Leveson findings outright, such as *Private Eye* editor Iain Hislop and political blogger Paul Staines, argue that there were laws already in place to deal with this type of wrong-doing. The rich and the powerful have their lawyers and their well funded Hacked Off campaign to protect them, but with the Legal Aid budget being cut, that option is not available for most people. During the inquiry it had been 'the stories of ordinary people whose lives had been callously ruined that had the greatest impact in the packed courtroom' (Dean, 2013: 432). For the 'ordinary' victim, things would never be the same again.

While many make great claims about the benefits of a media education, we would not suggest here that a more informed – or 'media literate' – British public would have necessarily been any better off. And what role media literacy should – or could – play in this is at the heart of long-standing discursive tensions between critical / protective and

creative / employable discourses about our relationship to 'the media'. This balancing act of freedom and constraint is well captured by Dehli (2009) as 'whether and how the self-positioning of teachers and the positioning of students frame the media education classroom as a particularly fertile site for the production of neo-liberal subjects' (2009: 5).

But certainly the post-Leveson policy making has explicitly displayed how out-of-step our institutions are in dealing with a cross-platform world (see Berger & Woodfall, 2013). The decline, then, of the Creative and Media Diploma was at the very least a missed opportunity to put media education at the heart of the 14-19 curriculum. Media education has *always* been about a more plural approach to the creative industries and the texts they produce:

> Children's media culture increasingly crosses the boundaries between texts and between traditional media forms. (Buckingham, 2003: 28)

Similarly, Len Masterman's words, almost 30-years ago, have probably never been more pertinent in a post-Leveson education context:

> Media education…is one of the few instruments which teachers and students possess for beginning to challenge the great inequalities in knowledge and power which exist between those who manufacture information in their own interests and those who consume it innocently as news or entertainment. (1985: 11)

However the fault lines between the critical/protective and creative/economic versions of media education are drawn, by not allowing children and young people any sort of media education, we are perhaps denying them the tools with which to critique, hold to account and ultimately *shape* the powerful institutions which lie in wait for them on/behind social media platforms, at the multiplex, on television and across the web. Training (or re-training) the media practitioners who caused the problem in the first place, as Richard Sambrook and his colleagues suggest, is the wrong solution for a completely different problem; it is education and training which are required. Perhaps it is important to clarify here (although we shouldn't need to) that we do not consider the diploma to be a form of 'vocational' training, set against an 'academic' alternative, but in the spirit of Tomlinson, we celebrated its hybrid form and the way it *obliged* us to change our teaching and to embrace convergence and the aforementioned 'flattened textuality'.

The Leveson inquiry has laid bare the widening fissure between media producers and media audiences; this fissure is not drawn along technological lines, and we certainly

would not employ the term 'digital divide' here, but it certainly is an educational one: Paris Brown, a 17-year old and the UK's first Youth, Police and Crime commissioner had to resign her post when journalists discovered that her Twitter account still contained tweets from when she was 14-years old. These tweets were (rightly) deemed offensive and derogatory towards some social groups; in India, human rights worker Jaya Vindhyala was jailed for 14-days, for comments she made about two politicians on Facebook; and in the United States, Cameron D'Ambrosio has been charged with terrorism offenses after posting a self-composed rap on Facebook which police considered to be a bomb threat. As Andy Ruddock succinctly puts it:

> The young people who need access to media and media education…are those who have least access to it. (2013: 177)

How quickly times change in education. Just four years passed in between Buckingham's keynote presentation to the new MEA in 2008, at the conference where MERJ was conceived, and his 'Hard Times' address at another MEA gathering in 2012. Our sober conclusion is that whichever way you carve up media education – into the formal and 'academic' context of 'Subject Media' as it stands, with the innovative and more 'boundary space' dwelling diploma or across the curriculum – abandoning Creative and Media and then increasing the general side-lining of creative arts and media education in schools can only restrict access, critical understanding and participation in the public media sphere still further and take us even more steps back from McLuhan's very modest proposition.

In this first edition of the fourth volume of MERJ, we address some of these issues more directly, as Jerry Jacques, Pierre Fastrez and Thierry De Smedt explore how the competences related to the organisation of media as social objects fits into a broader vision of media literacy. And we publish three articles which approach our regular themes from new angles. Craig Batty goes to the heart of theory/practice modalities with his account of the key complexities underpinning the practice-based PhD, namely its development and execution in relation to modes of research. Amy Tinns offers empirical evidence of pastoral challenges in secondary education for female students presented by online anonymity. And Neil Redfern provides a case for statistical literacy as a priority for film education.

In the review section, Pete Fraser helms 'Laughey's Canon', this time re-appraising Henry Jenkins' *Textual Poachers*. Marketa Zezulokova reviews the third edition of *Children, Adolescence, and the Media*, edited by Starsburger, Wislon and Jordan, and Kris Erickson has some problems with Evgeny Morozov's *To Save Everything, Click Here: Technology, solutionism and the urge to fix problems that don't exist.*

Finally, we hope to see you at this year's Media Education Summit in September. This year the Summit is hosted by Sheffield Hallam University. David Buckingham, Natalie Fenton, Susan Orr and Warp Films' Barry Ryan provide our keynotes. This will be our sixth conference, and as usual, there will be a MERJ pre-conference event, featuring Sarah Pink, plus the usual 'MERJ Conversations' strand running throughout the two days. You can find out more here: http://www.cemp.ac.uk/summit/2013/

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