Chapter 2
Designs of Meaning: Redesigning Perceptions of School and Self Using Tactics of Resistance

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ABSTRACT
This chapter focuses on Colleen, one of 22 youths who took part in a two year qualitative study designed to explore young adolescents’ use of information communication technology (ICT) and popular media texts to make sense of themselves and their world. The rationale for the study stemmed from limited research concerning the overlaps and schisms between adolescents’ use of ICT and popular media texts in their everyday lives (home, community, peer group) and how adolescents’ engagement with ICT and popular media texts affects established social institutions. The New London Group’s (1996) conception of multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) and an activity theory-influenced framework (Beach, 2000; Cole, 1996; Engestrom & Miettinen, 1999) were used to guide the study. Colleen’s use of ICT and popular media texts, both in and outside of school, illustrates the non-linear, non-hierarchical complexity of the pedagogy of multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000).

INTRODUCTION

To: Author
My god! It’s almost the end of the year! my last day of class is tomorrow and then i just have to finish finals. Blah. Well, I’ll get to the point. Lately, I’ve been watching this really great cult 60’s show called The Prisoner starring Patrick McGoohan. the plot goes something like this: a man resigns his position from a top-secret British intelligence agency and is immediately kidnapped and taken away to a strange “village” which is totally isolated from
the rest of the world. the people here are taken
to either protect or to extract the information in
their heads. They have no names-just a number.
The man I speak of is number six. in this place,
cameras are everywhere-nothing goes unnoticed
and no one has yet escaped. Conformity is the key
in this community-but the prisoner doesn't want
to crack or conform- he just wants to escape. so
in every episode, a new tactic is used to try and
break number six's will-and fails. The perimeter is
guarded by this killer weather balloon thing called
“rover” It’s job is to knock out and retrieve or kill
the escapees-but since number six is so valuable
to the people of the village, his encounters with
the rover are merely a “nasty experience’, as they
are called there. i though you might be interested
because the principles of the village reminded me
of life in middle school-keep the students happy,
but don’t give them any real freedom. Squash out
their individuality like a bug and if they try and
be different or stand up- god forbid! So-in sort of
a conclusion, i give you number six’s statement
to number two in the arrival episode:

“I will not be pushed, filed, stamped, indexed,
briefed, debriefed or numbered! My life is my
own!”

*sigh*

(I'm hopelessly addicted to that show now:)

“I AM NOT A NUMBER-I'M A FREE MAN!”

Colleen dePointe du Lac, the Anti-Britney, aka
rocket queen

high priestess of ozz, disposable teen, Taltos,
sister of Ashlar, mistress of axl rose & profes-
sional builder of mechanical animals hail to the
almighty ozz god! (They call me Mr. Tinkertrain,
so come along and play my game, you will never
be the same!) ‘you know where you are? you’re

From September 2001 to June of 2003, 22 sub-
urban adolescents ranging in age from 12 to 15
shared with me how they interpreted aspects of
their world, as well as how they worked to resist
and change aspects of established social systems
they encountered. Due to their age and the various
positions they held within these social systems,
many of the changes and challenges they initiated
were of a covert nature. The preceding email was
composed by Colleen. This chapter highlights
Colleen’s use of information communication
technology and popular media texts to define
herself and her place in the world.

For Colleen and her peers, interpreting the
multiplicity of messages surrounding them re-
sulted in what at times appeared to be disorganized
rips in an existing social order. These adolescents
are different than the youths of the 1960’s and
1970’s who directly confronted political and
social hierarchies with the intent to change them.
This early 21st century cohort of suburban teens
caused disruptions in social systems by the very
nature of who they are and the world they live in.
Rather than being intent on “raging against the
machine,” Colleen and her peers were willing to
work within existing social systems in order to
achieve their personal goals. “Disorganized rips”
refers to the individual challenges and changes that
occurred within existing social systems as these
adolescents designed ways of reading both their
world, as well as establishing their role within it.
These rips became identity markers noting changes
in how these adolescents interpreted their world
as well as the often-unintended changes they
brought to the world they lived in and the texts
that supported it.

Although Colleen and the other students in
this study would fit into the definition of “middle
class” it is important to note the wide socioeco-
nomic range this term covers. Colleen’s parents
were successful professionals who prioritized
their daughter’s education above all else. Several
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