

Chapter 1: Setting the Scene

I think media is really important for everyone actually because that's the main way we can voice our views and opinions, [and] tell people more about ourselves (Husna, young participant)

[Mediabox started from] the recognition that the media is powerful and that young people are portrayed in the mainstream media very poorly and that young people had already at that point had already started using the media to have their say... and I think the government wanted to put a structure around that – I don't think to control it so much as to enable it to happen (Leigh, youth media funder)

I believe that young people are not just the future, I believe that they are the voice of now and it is for us in government to build, not break, their ambitions. I am only going to make one promise to young people for the future. We will be listening. This is your chance and your time to shine. (Dawn Butler, Minister for Youth Engagement HM Government 2009)

Establishing shot

It's a sunny Saturday afternoon near Whitechapel market. Throngs of shoppers peruse fabric swinging from the scaffolding of metal stands, as hawkers announce the falling price of inexpensive fruit and vegetables. A group of men in Islamic dress stand outside the exit to the Tube giving out leaflets and speaking to passers-by. Amidst the clamor a small band of young filmmakers, accompanied by a group of adults, is choosing where to set up the camera. Rahim, the director, wants to get a long-shot of the market, to “establish” where in London we find ourselves and to show the diversity of the street scene. Ghassam, the cameraman, awaits Rahim's direction but meanwhile goes with Tom, the facilitator, to get a few shots of street signs written in Bengali and graffitied walls. He wants to include because they look “mashed up.” Aswini, the young producer, tells me her worries about whether they will be able to get the interviews they need to explore the topic of their film – the growth of the anti-terrorism (and anti-gang) tactic of “Stop and Search.”

The young people are part of a filmmaking initiative called *Reelhood*, sponsored by the organisation Muslim Young People (MYP) and funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). These young men and women have elected to be part of a filmmaking initiative in their free time, on weekends over a period of months. They learn how to use the camera, come up with ideas for interview subjects, write questions, and contribute to the

MYP blog about their experiences. The chosen theme for their documentary project is the impact of the Home Office policy of “Stop and Search” on Muslim communities in the wake of the 7th July 2005 bombings in London. That topic arose from a collaborative process between the young people and the organisation. MYP has bid for and received money to make films about “political engagement” and assigned this group the task of coming up with a topic of “national” interest. Within this, the young people have chosen the specific theme but are working in close contact with the adult filmmaking facilitators and the project organisers from MYP.

This thesis is an examination of the process of youth filmmaking exemplified by this brief glimpse of the *Reelhood* project (explored at greater length in Chapter 4). In common with the case studies cited throughout this thesis, the *Reelhood* project represents an intersection between government policy, organisations, young people, and the social, creative, and technical processes of filmmaking. The conscious and unconscious selections of the young filmmakers regarding content, aesthetic choices, technical options, negotiations over the locations and framing between young people and adult facilitators, and the initial contract between MYP and the sponsors at DCLG are examples of how the collaborative work of youth filmmaking is a salient example of the operationalisation of wider political ideas relating to young people and young peoples’ incorporation or contestation of those values. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, this research seeks to examine the empirical reality of youth filmmaking initiatives – the playful and contentious relationships between participants, choices made by facilitators, and the political economy of seeking and receiving funding, among other topics – within wider discursive understandings of young people’s role in British society.

The *Reelhood* project, then, is just one of a significant number of youth filmmaking initiatives discussed here which is grounded in broader social values and assumptions. Rather than funding youth filmmaking simply as a means for the mechanical acquisition of “hard skills,”¹ increasingly public funding bodies see youth filmmaking (and associated media) as a way

¹ Within youth filmmaking organisations and funders, “hard skills” are considered technical or mechanical skills gained through filmmaking including: editing, learning about relevant software packages, using a camera, learning how to storyboard or to an extent, write a script, conducting research or interviewing. “Soft skills” are instead affective or

of giving young people the opportunity to act as “active citizens.” Youth filmmaking is one of a range of educational interventions in the “citizenship” practices of young people, and understandings of citizenship are as varied as they are powerful. Importantly, the concept has come into frequent use in recent years under the New Labour government in the UK from 1997-2010, who put forward sweeping national programmes relating to their conception of citizenship. For instance, in the 1998 report which formed the basis for the introduction of Citizenship as a subject area to the National Curriculum, the authors wrote,

A healthy society is made up of people who care about the future. People who willingly contribute to its development for the common good. People who reject the ‘don’t care’ culture, who are not always asking ‘What’s in it for me?’ People who want to be practising citizens. Before this can happen they need to have a sense of belonging – of identity – with the community around them.... Our goal is to create a nation of able, informed and empowered citizens who, on the one hand, know, understand and can enforce their rights; and, on the other, recognise a that the path to greatest personal fulfillment lies through active involvement in strengthening their society (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 1998a: 61)

This statement places rhetorical emphasis on particular aspects of the requirements for “practising citizenship.” It accentuates that prior to participation as a citizen, one must feel a “sense of belonging” with a “community” and be “informed and empowered.” By defining both citizenship and the pre-requisites to it, the authors of this influential report are discursively creating a desirable goal to which young people, with their intervention they imply, should move towards achieving.

These quotes from the report underscore the politically laden process through which discursive understandings of citizenship result in tangible outcomes. This thesis engages with answering the question of *how these discourses of citizenship are circulated, incorporated and contested in the practice of youth filmmaking initiatives*. In seeking to understand the transactional life of “keywords” like citizenship (and associated concepts like “voice”), I have used ethnographic methodology to work with informants at all levels of engagement – including project funders working for central government funds, adult programme organisers and facilitators, and the young people themselves. This thesis is therefore an ethnographic exploration of how abstract conceptions of

interpersonal skills such as: working as a team, gaining self-esteem, approaching new situations/individuals with confidence or expressing oneself creatively. The citizenship aims described in this thesis – including creating a sense of “engagement,” “empowerment” or “belonging” are “soft skills.”

youth citizenship are practically enacted as policy interventions through the funding of youth filmmaking programmes. Further, I use this empirical material to reflect on how the abstract goals pervasive in discursive conceptions of youth citizenship are challenged and re-evaluated by youth filmmaking initiatives.

While there are a number of different programmes within and outside formal education aimed at enabling young people to become “active citizens,” this thesis focuses specifically on the practice of youth filmmaking. A number of reasons motivated my choice of filmmaking as an entrée into a wider examination of the expectations placed on young citizens and the ways in which ideas of citizenship are circulated. First, while a substantial amount of youth filmmaking projects have existed in the past, a significant growth in filmmaking initiatives has occurred in recent years. Changing technology (both in filmmaking and distribution) and a wider interest in “media literacy” and “critical literacy” for young people has facilitated this surge. Given the very recent advent of some key funding sources for youth filmmaking (see Chapter 3) I anticipated that greater institutional memory would be more readily accessible regarding justifications for the projects as opposed to focusing on something that “has always been done” (Rivière 2004: 61).

Second, youth filmmaking often is offered as a “counter-discourse” to dominant “negative” depictions of young people in the mainstream press – in contrast to the representational process of mass mediation which appropriates young people’s images but often not their “voices.” Filmmaking initiatives position themselves uniquely from other art forms in this respect because of their particular textural, temporal or performative properties. They are both “process” and “product” (see discussion below) and, therefore, are uniquely able to be circulated beyond the context of production in a way that drama, as a similarly emotive art form is not. Third, I posit that filmmaking is exceptional as an educational intervention, even within arts education, because of the nature of the technology and form of inquiry. Filmmaking is unique in drawing on many different sensory engagements and capabilities simultaneously. One cannot make a film without considering sound, and one cannot film without a corporeal presence in a “location” where the film is being shot. As one of the facilitators of one of the projects I studied described, “There are some amazing benefits [to working with film], like just looking at

your environment in a different way because it's a *looking* activity, you have to look for shots, suddenly you see your everyday environment in new eyes. You have to go talk to people; you have to get permission to film so you have to talk to adults... It's about representing yourself and the people around you." The involvement of so many processes at once, not only sensory but also creative, technical, and social, makes filmmaking a rich ethnographic process to study.²

While filmmaking projects with young people occur nationally, I chose to site this research within London, a diverse metropolis of nearly 8 million people, which inevitably brings a different perspective to youth filmmaking than had I focused on projects occurring in rural areas or in less multicultural cities. I also chose London because I was aware of the high concentration of initiatives already underway which would contribute to the possibility of engaging in full-time, multi-sited fieldwork (see below) about a critical mass of filmmaking programmes happening simultaneously or proximately in time. Further, having worked in London previously, I had a pre-existing network of colleagues and organisations to contact readily. Equally important to my motivation for the study and its London locale, in particular, was the backdrop of youth crime in London, which dominated local and national press during the period of my fieldwork. This provided direct and locally relevant media representations and imagery against which a number of projects positioned themselves.

In seeking to investigate the circulation of discourses of citizenship, I approached my fieldwork with little preconception of how these terms would be circulated. While citizenship as a labile and nebulous term is relatively all encompassing, emerging from my empirical research over the course of nearly two years were recurring terms and shared thematic interests. Based on my fieldwork, my central argument is that citizenship as a concept is used as an organising principle within youth filmmaking initiatives in three central (yet mutually constituting) ways: projects relating to notions of "engagement," "empowerment" or "belonging." These are

² I also chose to study filmmaking in order to draw on a rich tradition of media production studies from both anthropology and media studies. Work by visual anthropologists on "indigenous media" or the use of film and video by indigenous groups as "as new vehicles for internal and external communication, for self-determination, and for resistance to outside cultural domination" (Ginsburg 1991: 92) influenced this study. Production studies of the process of creating media (Michaels 1986; Powdermaker 2002; Silverstone 1985) have shown the ways in which filmmaking is inherently embedded within extant social contexts. As my case studies taught me, "the act of video making itself... begins to 'mediate' a variety of social and political relationships" (Turner 1992: 7) such that how the project is administered and by whom it is controlled will have significant impacts" (Turner 1991).

intentionally vague terms; I have not authored them but have borrowed them from practical discourse as disseminated by policy-makers, funders, facilitators and, to an extent, the young people themselves. These were recurring terms I regularly heard during my fieldwork; they were not part of an analytical frame I had placed on my investigation from the start. In order to organise the material presented in this thesis, I have used these terms to name each of the three chapters that best correspond with the ethnographic material that engages with that term. Yet, I note that these categories are isolated merely as a heuristic organising device and, in real terms, have a significant degree of overlap.

These three terms were generated not only within my fieldwork, but also within wider political debates about youth citizenship. Firstly, the term “engagement” has been the subject of much recent attention within citizenship discourse. For instance, in 2009, then-Prime Minister Gordon Brown specifically created the new post of “Minister for Young Citizens and Youth Engagement” (held by Dawn Butler, quoted above). The term engagement, as it is used in policy discourse, generally is directed at developing the idea of feeling a sense of emotional involvement and commitment. It is frequently used in terms of “political engagement” – wherein young people are construed as being “disengaged” from mainstream politics (see Chapter 4). In the 2009 “youth engagement” report, the authors describe how the “Government’s ambition is to ensure that young people have more opportunities to engage with the issues they are passionate about, because we firmly believe they should be empowered as citizens, connected to the political process and offered a meaningful say in the decisions that affect them (4).

Engagement thus overlaps with “empowerment” considerably, in that the latter is focused on what can be felt and experienced as a by-product of being engaged. Empowerment is often used to describe feeling in a position of authority and control over one’s involvement in civic, political and social communities. For instance in the quote above from the Youth Engagement Report, empowerment is described as a central aspect of citizenship in that it provides a means through which young people are “empowered” to act on issues of concern. “Empowerment” is often also defined in terms of the equally vague discourse of “voice,” in which it is presumed that young people will be “empowered to have a voice” or “have a say”

through the process of taking part in youth filmmaking initiatives. According to Couldry (2009) “all human beings have the capacity for voice, to give an account of their lives. This is an irreducible part of their human agency” (580) but that “voice” without the requirement of another to listen strips the interlocutor of his or her power.³ Youth filmmaking initiatives, thus, are often described in terms of empowerment by enabling young people to convey an “authentic voice” (Dowmunt 1980), in part by becoming critically literate about the processes of representation. The process whereby youth filmmaking initiatives establish themselves as a mechanism to create a “counter-discourse” to mainstream media representations of young people, and thus presumably empower young people, is described in Chapter 5.

The third way in which discourses of citizenship frequently emerged within youth filmmaking projects is in terms of “belonging.” As the quote from the citizenship commission indicates, “belonging” is seen as a central aspect of citizenship in that it invokes a formation of identity that hinges upon involvement in and attachment to geographic and metaphorical communities. Jackson (2002) describes the feeling of belonging as the belief “that one’s being is integrated with and integral to a wider field of Being, that one’s own life merges with and touches the lives of others” (12). Within youth filmmaking initiatives, this concept frequently emerged in relationship to ideas of “place.” In Chapter 6, I describe a raft of recent filmmaking initiatives which invoked the idea of belonging directly and indirectly by organising their work around and within places and exploring in greater depth notions of “past” as a way of belonging to places. While many filmmaking projects were used as a way for young people to mitigate their experience and knowledge of “places” (often through broadening their awareness of the “past”), the idea of encouraging young people’s “belonging” to places also contradicts the wider literature that problematises young people’s use of space in terms of “problematic territoriality.”

In these ways, I describe youth filmmaking projects as operationalised versions of wider citizenship discourse - as a form of “practising citizenship.” In writing about young people as media audiences, Buckingham (2000b) describes watching the news as an opportunity for young people to “practice being informed,” in that it allows young viewers to “construct and define

³ Couldry (2009; Couldry 2010) has named a “crisis of voice” as the result of the politics of neoliberalism where offers of “voice” are being continually offered and yet simultaneously retracted (see also Ross 2003).

their relationship with the public sphere” (18). The term “practice” then is paramount, in that it defines an on-going process of repetition and incremental change in which the activity in question (in this case, filmmaking) is but one step on the continuum, an aspect of the “process” rather than the final “product.”

This research, therefore, is necessarily charting ephemeral processes, both in terms of the circulation of “keywords” (as I demonstrate in Chapter 3, the guiding terms behind several policy interventions have changed substantially even in the past decade) and the transitory nature of the projects themselves. As short-term projects with specific locations in time and space, the results or “outcomes” of youth filmmaking initiatives, in a broader sense, are yet to be determined. This research, of necessity, cannot evaluate whether filmmaking initiatives make young people into “better citizens.” Even if an agreed-upon definition of this concept exists (and, as I will discuss in Chapter 2, far from universally agreed notions are extant), this type of research would require a longitudinal and a differently oriented survey than I have aimed to provide here. What interests me, and what I assert may have some implication ultimately for answering the question of how one measures “success” in terms of youth citizenship, is the practical manner in which projects function, and how ideas are contested or subscribed to within empirical examples. In creating an ethnography of youth filmmaking I see their transitoriness and mutability as vital proof that they are, as Falk Moore (1987) describes, illuminating “diagnostic events” which “reveal ongoing contests and conflicts and competitions and the efforts to prevent, suppress or repress these” (730).

Youth filmmaking initiatives, as a practical manifestation of wider discourse, are inevitably embedded within wider systems of power, including the political economy of funding, political machinations, and the processes of mediated representations. My research underscores that while much is offered to young people through the context of their participation in filmmaking programmes, nonetheless, the wider context in which these initiatives are placed raises troubling questions. In seeking to understand how discourses of citizenship are trafficked between and among youth filmmaking projects (both vertically and horizontally), I was inevitably confronted with the ways in which young people are intentionally and unintentionally “framed.”

Implicit in the process of funding based on citizenship objectives is the principle of deficiency; that is, in order to justify public value, organisations (however unwilling) must subtly describe young people as “problems” which they therefore can purport to solve. One outcome of the concentration on “problems” is the inevitable reliance on visual tropes which, confusingly, mirror the very mediated representations they seek to challenge. Fleetwood (2005a) describes this as “realness” or the reliance on a “racialised” urban aesthetic in the name of “authenticity.” Not only does this manifest itself in the actual products of youth filmmaking initiatives, but also it reinforces and replicates the culture of “box-ticking” which increasingly accompanies funded initiatives.

Starting with a theoretical discussion of “keywords,” in this chapter I give an overview of some of the central ideas that both influenced the design of this thesis and emerged as central organising principles once I began to turn my fieldwork into analysis. “Keywords” are used here as a way of describing my interest in and engagement with the circulation of nebulous ideas, such as “voice” or “empowerment” between and among youth filmmaking sites. Following a theoretical discussion of the importance of such labile “keywords” in determining the outcome of projects – though the terms themselves are contested – I define the “sector” of youth filmmaking under scrutiny here. From youth centres to cultural organisations, my case studies were initiated and conducted in a diverse array of contexts across London. Before moving into the ethnographic chapters that follow, I next describe some of the areas of overlap that determined and motivated my selection of fieldsites. This thesis represents a conscious choice to focus on youth filmmaking rather than, more generally, on community filmmaking or community media/journalism (many names have been proposed for similar or comparable practices). I then describe how young people and “youth” as a category have been problematised within academic, popular and media discourse. In the second half of the chapter, I describe my methodologies in conducting my research and how I gained access to my fieldwork case studies. Finally, I conclude by identifying key “common themes” which emerged from my fieldwork and which will become evident in the chapters which follow. Drawing parallels between different ethnographic examples, these common themes run across my case studies including: tensions

around process versus product; difficult relationships with funders and the necessity to “box-tick;” the central role of the facilitator in his or her vision of guiding and determining the process; the product of youth filmmaking; and the positioning of young people in terms of “realness” or authenticity. Each of these themes emerged not solely in a single case study but across all of my research and, therefore, demands specific delineation here.

Keywords: Traffic of Ideas

In examining the instrumentalisation and utilisation of transient and mutable terms like “empowerment” and “belonging,” I put forward an ethnography not only of the abstract goals of youth citizenship, but of how these ideas are translated into real-life practices through government policy and on-the-ground initiatives. These words defy a straightforward explanation and often are tethered to the context in which they are used. Instead of proffering closed definitions, I choose to foreground the assignment of meaning as a definitional process in its own right. These “keywords” are indexes to wider discursive constructions, and, as such, each is “inextricably bound up with the problems it [is] being used to discuss” (Williams 1983: 15).

Williams (1983) describes how “keywords” (or “buzzwords” as they are sometimes called) emerge in language as a way of expressing new relationships, or changes in existing relationships through “the invention of new terms... [or] in the adaptation and alteration (indeed at times reversal) of older terms” (22). He cites words like “society” or “civilisation” as keywords that defy simple dictionary reference to define, because they not only express an idea but also in their very usage and circulation remake the idea itself. Williams notes that this process is one that is continually regenerating, that meanings are never fixed and are constantly being negotiated as they are circulated from site to site.

From an anthropological perspective, the consolidation of complex meanings into “keywords” like “citizenship” (and the corollary words that are used throughout this thesis like “engagement” or “participation”) is of increasing interest. As Dresch et al. (2000) propose, “standardised terms... are traded among governments as chiefs and empire-builders in tales of

pre-colonial times used to swap glass beads... 'The users of such language, for all that they share terms, bring to them very different assumptions which demand exploration at both ends or all ends of shared usage' (13). What they point to is that the use of a term or concept in a particular set of circumstances cannot be considered self-explanatory. Rather the work of the anthropologist engaging with these ideas is to ground them within the context of meaning and practice, and that the "necessity to interpret" common terms "brings the inheritance of anthropology into fresh focus" (14).

Appadurai (1996) has created a theoretical basis for this study in his term "ideoscapes." These are the circulation of "master terms" which recall a "chain of ideas, terms and images" (36) and are exchanged liberally between and within sites of exchange (be they physical, metaphorical, or virtual). However, Appadurai also notes that ideoscapes mean that introducing these "keywords" into new contexts invariably "inject[s] new meaning-streams" (37). Yet the liberal exchange of these ideas through the circulation of keywords is not a wholly organic project. As I discuss in Chapter 2, Foucault's idea of "discourse" indicates that the production of language and meaning is, in and of itself, indicative and constitutive of wider processes of power.

This research, however, is not merely discourse analysis. Here, I ground wider debates about youth citizenship within the context of a very specific policy intervention – funding for and running of youth filmmaking initiatives for young people in London. Thus, this research is an ethnography of the *ideas* of what and how young people should be – as expressed in keywords like "citizenship" or "engagement," "empowerment" and belonging" – and how these ideas are operationalised within government *policy* and in on-the-ground interventions.

Lankshear and McLaren sound a note of warning, however, saying "We do well to treat [buzzwords] cautiously. If anything, buzzwords are likely to be avenues to nowhere much worth going than to provide helpful guidance to reflection and practice" (1993: xii). Equally, "buzzwords" are often seen to have a limited lifespan, for instance as Pottier (1993) comments, old or out-moded buzzwords "still have to prove that they have something significant to offer. They may make an impact where other approaches have failed; they may also end up in the graveyard where so many buzzwords have already gone to rest" (13-4). Although buzzwords are

often vague and transitory, in the short term they result in actual *events* and *things*: from Saturday morning sessions in youth clubs to videos planned, shot and produced and put onto DVD. Youth projects and funders, thus, are engaged in a dynamic process of co-creation of purpose, in which funders disseminate guidelines and organisations bid for these funds and are evaluated on their use of the same rhetoric (through the liberal use of “buzzwords”) and ability to capture a coincident purpose and ethos of the fund to which they are applying. But the tangible manifestations of intangible concepts do not simply mirror the original intent; the keywords are contested and re-defined in the process, although often there are limited mechanisms to allow these (re-)definitions to travel back “up” to their policy originators (see Chapter 4).

The youth filmmaking “sector”

My research focuses on youth filmmaking initiatives in London, but this “fieldsite” in and of itself requires some definition. First, I use the term “filmmaking” throughout this thesis even though the actual technology used in all of my case studies was digital *video* recording rather than 35mm (or 8mm or 16mm) film stock, as had more often been used historically (see Chapter 3). As is true across the film industry, a turn towards digital technologies has increased because of ease of use, accessibility, and cost; nonetheless, it is still known as the “film” industry. In my mind this is because “filmmaking” is not only a technical competence (as in the ability to splice pieces of film together) but also a process of storytelling and interpretation that is mediated by technology. To use the term “videomaking” over “filmmaking” seems an unnecessary privileging of the technology over the wider process that of which technology is but one aspect. Further, this distinction also may be a holdover from a time when video artists wanted to consciously separate themselves from “filmmakers” in terms of their professional associations and ethos (interview with Andy Porter, Boyle 1985; 1997).⁴

The “sector” of youth filmmaking initiatives I refer to throughout this thesis (of which my

⁴ Throughout this thesis, I mention specific technological processes and pedagogical techniques as part of my case studies (see, for example, the discussion of editing in Chapter 5). My focus here is on the processes of filmmaking as a manifestation of ideas of citizenship and as a social and creative process. Therefore, I have not unduly bracketed technical considerations but have included them in detail within my ethnographic descriptions where relevant.

case studies are but a small percentage) is *far* from a formal, organised syndicate. Rather I describe a wide constellation of different sites where filmmaking is used as a method of working with young people. The choice of phrasing of “working with” is intentional. There are many formal curricular or training programmes that *instruct* young people in the use of film and video technologies (for instance aspects of the Media Studies curriculum or Business & Technology Education Council [BTEC] degrees). Rather than instructional courses, I focus on youth filmmaking initiatives that view their filmmaking work with young people not just in terms of “hard” skills accrual but more explicitly in terms of “soft” skills, like “teamwork” or “confidence.” In theory, this also could include some of the filmmaking activity that takes place within schools – the British Film Institute (BFI) Education department for instance recommends aspects of filmmaking as a useful tool for research and social skills in subjects like History, PSHE and Citizenship.⁵ However I have specifically chosen not to focus on filmmaking in formal education for two reasons. The first is that significant amounts of research or instructional material on filmmaking as a pedagogical device in schools, in particular within the Media Studies curriculum, already exists (see Bazalgette 1991; Bazalgette 2000; Boyd-Barrett et al. 1992; Buckingham et al. 1995; White 2006). This material is useful in terms of context and raises some of the same issues described here.⁶

The second, more central, reason I have chosen not to focus on filmmaking with young people in the context of formal education is that I am interested in particular in definitional processes. Importantly, the funders, facilitators and participants in non-formal⁷ educational initiatives, like the youth filmmaking programmes I discuss here, must consciously engage in a discursive process to construct meaning. This is particularly true in contrast to programmes whose value is more traditionally understood or easily perceived (e.g. sporting programmes which

⁵See British Film Institute (2010), for example.

⁶ There is further considerable research on young people’s “consumption” of both “old” and “new” media (Bennett 2008; Couldry et al. 2007; Livingstone 2002; Livingstone 2009), which provides useful context for this thesis.

⁷ The term “non-formal” education is used here to describe learning programmes initiated outside of formal educational contexts (i.e. in schools/colleges as mandated by a centralised or set curriculum). There is increasing interest in non-formal and informal learning as a way of making “visible the entire scope of knowledge and experience held by an individual, irrespective of the context where the learning originally took place” (Colardyn & Bjornavold 2004: 69). There is considerable overlap between “non-formal” and “informal” learning, to the point that they are often defined more in terms of what they are not, i.e. school, rather than what the differences are among them (see also Coffield 2000; Colley et al. 2002).

clearly benefit fitness and have a long tradition) or are statutorily-mandated and do not need frequently and consciously, to articulate their value (e.g. schools). In the process of creating, disseminating, applying for or utilising funding, each individual or institutional actor must decide how to discursively position *why* they do what they do. Additionally, because the vast majority of the funds that enable youth filmmaking projects in London come directly or indirectly from public sources (there are some notable exceptions to this in the form of private philanthropy or corporate sponsorship, see Chapter 3), a conscious and direct articulation of public value is required. In bidding for and receiving public funding, the projects are attributed with a transformative value, and the terms they use to describe themselves transform abstract rhetoric into project objectives.

That being said, even within “non-formal” initiatives using filmmaking to work with young people, organisations vary significantly in form. A recent “mapping exercise” conducted by Film London, the Regional Screen Agency (branch of the UK Film Council [UKFC]) for London, found that a “patchwork of provision” of different organisations work with film and media outside of formal education (Burns Owens Partnership 2004). This report covered only “independent training providers” organisations set up with a “training” remit in mind, but many of these also conduct “outreach” projects with community members who might not otherwise be interested in or able to access their provision – young people, pensioners, refugees, young offenders etc. Organisations for young people (including youth clubs) which do not have any media or film remit also initiated film projects (see, for instance, the organisation Muslim Young People’s running of the *Reelhood* project described in Chapter 4). Another model was partnerships between organisations, for instance an organisation for “at-risk” youth in Hackney would contract with a local youth and community media production company to co-draft a funding proposal.

In this sense, then, I define this “sector” more by output than by construct. While a myriad of different organisational formats are encompassed within the projects I studied, they share the working method of filmmaking (though its practical expression differs greatly, as my case studies illustrate) and, in most instances, a “target group.” As I describe further below, in

order to justify the “public value” of funding, youth filmmaking funders and facilitators in London often marshal a discourse of “disadvantage” (or “disaffected” or “at-risk” or “disengaged”) to explain or justify the need for their intervention. The wide claims made for youth filmmaking initiatives have led to some skepticism. As Buckingham (2003) describes, “giving ‘disaffected’ young people access to participation in the arts and media increasingly seems to be seen as a panacea for a whole range of social ills.... it is argued [that] participation in the arts will build ‘self-esteem’ and release ‘hidden talents’, and thereby bring about the social and economic regeneration of disadvantaged communities” (193). Despite the relatively brief periods of time for the youth filmmaking initiatives I studied, much is expected of them. This creates tensions between product and process (see below). My ambition is not to evaluate the success or failure of each individual case study against the criteria that they set out for themselves but rather to question the discursive underpinnings of the goals themselves, the interplay between rhetorical positioning and practical reality, and the role of each party (funder, facilitator and young person) in creating meaning within this heady context.

Why youth?

Youth filmmaking is a subset of a wider category of initiatives that has been called “community media” (Boyle 1997; Juhasz 1995 see Chapter 3). However the targeting of young people as a specific category of intervention is noteworthy. As anthropologists have established, no universal conception of “child” or “young adult” exists; indeed, any distinct demarcation between the two also is not clear. (Kertzer & Keith 1984; Lancy 2008; Scheper-Hughes & Sargent 1998). In early literature on the subject, Margaret Mead (1942; Mead 1943) described the socialization of children and young people and the degree to which “adult” values are directly or indirectly inculcated as enormously culturally variable. One of Mead’s central premises was that neither childhood nor young adulthood was inherently an experience of trauma as conceived of

by psychologists (Hall 1905), but rather was a time when the young person would be subtly “moulded” to fit the shape of their particular society.⁸

Contributions from anthropologists and other social scientists (Griffin 1993; Kehily 2007; Lesko 2001)⁹ have allowed for the de-naturalization of categories of youth, both within academic as well as public and policy discourse (France 2007). For instance, as Lesko writes, “adolescence enacts modernity in its central characterisation as *developing* or becoming – youth cannot live in the present; they live in the future, that is, they exist only in the discourse of ‘growing up’” (2001: 137). Viewed in this way, young people often are described either in terms of what they are in the *process* of becoming or in terms of what they *cannot yet* do or comprehend (Buckingham 2000a). In response to this framing of children and young people as being in a state of “becoming rather than as a legitimate state of being-in-and-for-the-world” (Scheper-Hughes & Sargent 1998: 13), more recent scholarship rests on the idea that children and young people should be seen not via what they are not, or what they have not yet become, but primarily in terms of what they *already are* (see Jones & Wallace 1992; Wallace & Cross 1990; Weller 2007).

My own research adopts this position. I perceive the young participants in the film projects I studied as interlocutors of equal weight to the adult facilitators and public funders who created the programmes in which they took part. However, while I agree with the premise that young people are social actors able to represent their own experiences with equal ability to adults, they, nonetheless, are importantly “framed by age-specific policies,” contexts and institutions (Heath 2009). The majority of the young people who participated in the film projects I studied were between the ages of 12 and 19 and, as such, were imbricated within a constellation of institutional positions and practices outside and within the filmmaking programmes in which I met them. To a certain extent, this holds true for any research subject, but notably young people

⁸ Scheper-Hughes and Sargent (1998) posit that while anthropologists often implicitly have studied children and young people, they actually have been the “background” rather than the forefront of research agendas. Notable exceptions are van Gennep’s work *Rites of Passage* (1960), which details the passage from one life “stage” to another, and more recent work on the social worlds of young people that influence their experiences of education and the world of work, as explored by Jenkins (1983), MacLeod (1995) and Bourgois (2003) amongst others (see also Eckert 1989; Heath 1983; Levinson et al. 1996). Lancy (2008) provides a comprehensive, if general, overview of a number of different anthropological writings on childhood and youth.

⁹ For further classic psychological understandings of youth development, see Hall (1905), Erikson (1968), Winnicott (1989), Wolf et al. (1972), and for understandings of youth from Cultural Studies theorists, which focus on “sub-cultures,” see Hall and Jefferson (1976), Hebdige (1979) or Clarke (1976).

are more likely to be involved in institutions which are organised specifically around contexts of age and “age imaginaries” – particularly, schools and training programmes (Alexander n.d.).

While young people are able to represent their own experiences in its full complexity and richness, they, nonetheless, are institutionally placed and constrained. As I describe in the following chapter, young people in particular have been a key policy focus for the past two New Labour governments in the UK (Mizen 2004), which lead to the creation of the citizenship curriculum amongst other more vocational or punitive initiatives (France 2007). The attention to young people within the diversity of government-funded youth training initiatives is indicative of the fact that young people are often regarded as a “social barometer” (Jones & Wallace 1992) for the health of the nation and the symbol of wider insecurities and anxieties. Viewed alternately as either “folk devils” (Cohen 2002) or “the future” (Lesko 2001) young people are subject to a number of different political interventions. Youth filmmaking programmes are just one of these, but are, I argue, especially revealing of wider understandings of young people and expectations placed on young peoples’ citizenship practices. Therefore, my choice to focus on young people’s filmmaking projects, as opposed to any other participant in community media schemes is intentional and rooted in empirical realities and theoretical constructs. In surveying community media organisations in London, a markedly higher numbers of projects geared towards young people fit the criteria I most sought to interrogate, as laid out above (of targeted “soft skills” programmes rather than “hard” training) than any other social category (some initiatives which are intergenerational or targeted towards “lifelong learners” i.e. older people, might fit this particular criteria as well). In this thesis, then, I seek to demonstrate how youth filmmaking is a unique lens through which to view discursive understandings of youth citizenship because of the way in which these are created and circulated within the dynamic process of funding, creating and circulating youth media.

Accessing “the field”

This thesis, as with much academic work, grew organically around a set of questions, observations and experiences that coalesced over a period of time. Before returning to academia, I had worked for several years for a small non-governmental organisation (NGO) in New York that had initiated a series of film-based programmes in refugee camps. With FilmAid, I traveled to the Dadaab Refugee Camps in Kenya and researched community-conceptualised video there for my Masters field research. Back in the UK in between my Master's and doctorate, I worked as a freelance project manager for the educational and outreach efforts, mainly focused on young people, for the London Film Festival.

Through my work at the educational outreaches of the film industry, I increasingly began to hear about local grass roots media projects. At every social or professional occasion, it seemed like someone would tell me about a friend who was using video (or photography or radio occasionally) to work with young people to explore ideas about gang violence/teen pregnancy/drug use or to create dramas/music videos/soundscapes, or other similar ventures. The ubiquity of these projects was striking; yet, I had seen little acknowledgement of these types of projects within academic research. In the descriptions of the projects themselves, often there were epistemological assumptions, from an enthusiastic emphasis on “having” or “using their voices” to the idea of “telling their own stories.” Having worked professionally for arts education organisations or as a facilitator, I shared some of this enthusiasm for filmmaking projects but, informed by my academic background, felt strongly that such abstract and labile terms would benefit from a more rigorous tethering.

This research, thus, grew out of a desire to ground these nebulous terms in empirical reality. During 2006-08, I lived and researched in London and worked with¹⁰ a cascading and overlapping slate of youth filmmaking initiatives across the city. In order to conduct this research, I adopted a multi-sited fieldwork methodology in order to identify appropriate case studies according to the criteria of the “youth filmmaking sector” discussed above. Generally, I

¹⁰ I use the term “working with” throughout this thesis as a way of expressing my research relationship to and with the organisations I studied. Though I was at a remove from the day-to-day operations of my fieldsites, I considered the organisations and participants research partners as much as subjects or informants. The term “work” also expresses not only my role as an active participant (as much as an observer) of the “work” of these organisations but also my practical roles within the projects – for example, as an ad hoc assistant facilitator or evaluator which I conducted as part of my fieldwork.

found the case studies through professional contacts developed the London Film Festival and other professional networks, referrals from funders, informants (sometimes young people, often other facilitators), newspaper references, social contacts and visits to cafés and arts spaces where fliers led me to new contacts. I purposely selected a broad swathe of organisations with which to work, although the selection of case studies for more detailed follow up was driven by content choices as well as expediency – in particular, which organisation or person had received funding to begin a project during my fieldwork period.

In introducing my research chronology as I have here, I acknowledge the essentially personal and constructed nature of my inquiry, as is true for all anthropological study (Clifford & Marcus 1986). My own positioning as a young female North American researcher new to London undoubtedly contributed to my experience as well. Although disciplinarily, my research fits within the category of “anthropology at home,” given I was less than sixty miles from my home university, this is a somewhat limiting characterisation.¹¹ Although I was comfortable in the UK and in London prior to the commencement of my fieldwork, nonetheless, important differences demarcated me as an individual researcher. In some respects, I believe these differences facilitated my research. For instance, my American accent made it both difficult to deduce my class position and of immediate interest to some young participants, who almost uniformly asked me, “Where in America are you from?” As fellow North American researcher-in-England Tanya Luhrman wrote, “I was comfortable, then, in England, but very aware that its society was unlike America’s. This may have made me more observant; certainly it eased entry into the field, if only because it freed me from the shackles of caste that the English accent can place on its users” (1989: 10).

Multi-sited research in a global city

Studying youth filmmaking projects required working with groups of young people and adult practitioners in several sites for cumulatively short periods of time but, on many occasions,

¹¹ See Hannerz (2006) for a relevant discussion on the ironic label of being an anthropologist working “at home” as a Swedish researcher working in Washington DC.

over several months. While each of these sites may have been comparatively short-term, my overall research period for this project comprised almost two years of non-continuous fieldwork. In order to identify individual sites, as well as seek out the connections and disparities between them, I had to adopt a strategy of multi-sited fluid fieldwork and returned to the same sites on multiple occasions for either intensive short-term bursts or over many months in sporadic visits.

This fieldwork methodology mirrored the experience of the facilitators of these projects who dipped in and out of many sites and often had several film projects occurring simultaneously. This transient community of filmmaker facilitators became some of my central informants in addition to the young people who participated in the projects. As many of these facilitators came from a similar professional and socio-economic background as my own (see discussion below), and I had worked as a freelancer, as described above, outside of my research, I would place myself within Hannerz's category of "studying sideways" (2006: 24).

In employing this peripatetic and cascading methodology in my fieldwork, I have found myself departing from the oft-mythologised single-site ethnography "fetishised" by many not least within my department in Oxford (see Dresch et al. 2000). Instead, I have employed what can be termed "multi-sited" or "multi-locale" fieldwork and used my role as an ethnographer to seek out the interactions between sites and trace the situatedness of one set of practices and language within the context of others. Following the publication of works by Gupta and Ferguson (1997), Marcus (1998), Clifford (1997a), amongst others, the term "multi-sited ethnography" gained increasing prominence in the mid-1990's. In each of these works the authors complicate the paradigm of deeply local, essentially territorialised fieldwork.

Multi-sited fieldwork, then, is a shift away from anthropological fieldwork as defined by long-term residence in a single location and towards the notion of ethnography as a particular type of intellectual engagement with the subject matter. Clifford describes this in terms of shifting towards considering the field a "habitus" rather than simply a physical locale, a constellation of both intellectual and embodied behaviours, questions and practices (1997b). However, even proponents of multi-sited fieldwork acknowledge that there are central, and sometimes limiting with regard to depth of knowledge, respects in which it diverges from static

immersion in a single site. Coleman and Collins (2006), for instance, worry that multi-sited fieldwork may turn ethnography into a “partial and unfocused” glance (8). Hannerz (2006) agrees that multi-sited projects will not necessarily involve the same sort of relationships as single site studies, but that the methods need adapt to the object of study and that what he terms “anthropology by appointment” can contribute valuable insight. Frohlick also writes of the utility of maintaining a fieldwork mobility that mirrors that of one’s subjects. She describes how “‘immersion’ is not necessarily achieved through sustained conversation in a single locale but can be realized, however serendipitously, by placing oneself in the overlapping circuits of social relations and exchanges embodied – and strived for – by our research subjects” (2006: 96).

Frohlick’s point is that by being present for the points of exchange and greeting – what I could crudely call “networking” between subjects – the ethnographer gains a new type of insight. For example, my fluid methodology allowed for attendance at conferences, days when new funding sources were announced and explained, training from public bodies and other relevant events.. In being present at these networking opportunities, I not only could discover crucial linkages between sites but also gain key insight into how organisations represented themselves to funders and to each other. As Coleman and Collins underscore, social anthropology deals with social relationships, so as informants cross paths and have shorter and longer term associations, so should the researcher (2006: 12). This also allowed for me to “network” for my own research and discern what new projects were in the offing which might be amenable to having a researcher in attendance.

While my research was multi-sited, it was all within the same (albeit enormous) city. A diverse, multicultural city like London inevitably combines the “local and the long distance” (Hannerz 1996: 132) in that both individuals and wider social, economic and political institutions are connected between their particular London locality and far-flung interconnections (Appadurai 1996). Equally, London itself requires “long-distance” travel, journeys to my fieldsites varying from a few minutes’ walk to a journey of a few hours. However, even sites that were a mere walk around the corner from my home in Brixton, South London involved stepping into a world that ran parallel but utterly disconnected from my own. McCarthy Brown describes

this slippage within her own fieldwork in New York, “I was no more than a few miles from my home in lower Manhattan, but I felt as if I had taken a wrong turn, slipped through a crack between worlds and emerged on the main street of a tropical city” (in Clifford 1997b: 188).¹²

In Chapter 6, I distinguish my own movement in London with those of some of the young participants I studied. Though many young people retained connections to family across the globe, often they described how they rarely left their immediate London locality. In contrast, I was frequently on the move. There were some drawbacks to this methodology. In practice, I sometimes found it difficult to “juggle” sites at times, both theoretically as well as practically. Often times project timetables would change and I would find that I had inadvertently double-booked myself on a crucial night. It remained difficult to incorporate myself sufficiently into the culture of some organisations; thus, they would occasionally forget to tell me about important dates, forget that I was scheduled to come to a session, or fail to call me to tell me a session had been cancelled. These are challenges faced by many fieldworkers, something I learned to alleviate somewhat by increasingly offering a practical benefit to my research for my partner fieldsites – help with evaluation (see below).

The greatest methodological challenge was the limitations on time presented by multi-sited fieldwork of short-term projects. I strove to have my research mirror the life of filmmaking projects. I would begin working with the sites during the planning stages where possible, attend all of the filmmaking sessions and screenings, and, once the project had concluded, ideally return for some form of follow up (in many locations due to the types of organisations and young people involved, this was not possible, which I discuss further below). As each project varied in length, so too did the length of time I was able to spend with each different group of young people – ranging from a few days to lengthier interactions over the course of weeks or months.

In the end, I based my research on ten case studies, often carried out by more than one organisation working in partnership (in total eighteen organisations were involved with the case study projects and were those with whom I had significant and extended contact). These case

¹² Passaro (1997) describes the critique she received at the idea of conducting multi-sited fieldwork on homelessness in New York when someone told her “you can’t take the subway to the field!” The suspicion with which anthropologists working in the context of urban lives have been viewed in the past is described in Low (1996) who proposed (at the time of her writing) that cities had been “undertheorised in anthropology.” Later research has begun to investigate the ways in which urban dwellers form attachments to cities as “charismatic entities” (Blom Hansen & Verkaaik 2009).

studies were based across London; however, a distinct concentration of initiatives were located in the boroughs of Hackney (three case studies) and Lambeth (four case studies). Other case studies were based in the boroughs of Tower Hamlets and Kensington and Chelsea, and two other case studies were based across more than one location. Additionally, I interviewed individuals from or attended sessions at another twenty-six filmmaking organisations or funding bodies. The distribution of the case studies was not random, as I discuss below, as areas deemed to be economically “deprived” were the sites of a concentration of initiatives. Equally, as described above, my “snowball” methodology also meant that I frequently was given contacts based in similar geographic areas (and as many of my case studies arose from my work at the London Film Festival, based on the Southbank, Lambeth also had a higher concentration of programmes). Early in my research I pursued useful contacts at the City Learning Centres in Hackney and Lambeth, in particular, which allowed me access to their projects and those of related organisations. Further, emerging throughout my research was a tendency for project facilitators to gravitate towards running projects near their own neighborhoods, and the high concentration of facilitators living in or near Lambeth and Hackney translated, in part, to the higher number of projects in those locations.

Of these ten case studies, I have chosen to highlight three as organising devices for the three ethnographic chapters which form the heart of this thesis. I chose these cases based on their exemplifying a particular area of citizenship discourse I describe as “engagement,” “empowerment” or “belonging.” I also utilise material from additional case studies where appropriate. These three also represent some of the longer-term case studies (although not exclusively) which I studied and allowed for greater depth of analysis than concentrating on very short term case studies would have allowed. As I describe in the ethnographic chapters, I engaged in a different way with each of these case study projects; in some, I had more sustained time to interview the young participants, whereas in others I concentrated more exclusively on the facilitators.

Research with young people

The methods adopted in each of my case studies varied based on the institutional arrangements of each of the programmes. Consistently, however, my research informants were a combination of interacting with young people, adult facilitators, and, for many projects, funders. I attempted to treat each of these interlocutors as more or less equal, not bracketing off young people as being unable or unwilling to answer complicated questions about citizenship practices, filmmaking, or representation. I chose to adopt a research methodology of research *with*, rather than *on* young people (Mayall 2000); I allowed them to choose the questions they wanted to answer, to steer the conversations, and, in many instances, to determine informally the direction of the research questions. While I do not distinguish young people from adults as an *a priori* distinction based on competency (Christensen & Prout 2002; Christensen & James 2008), I did note that often the young participants were institutionally demarcated from adults and, as such, required different forms of methodological engagement. I particularly needed to be conscious of how they might view me - for instance as aligned with teachers or facilitators or as a potential disciplinarian (Punch 2002).

As I note in my ethnographic chapters, how much time specifically was set aside for me to speak with the young people diverged greatly among the projects. . In initiatives such as the *This is My Story* project, described in Chapter 5, the organisers did not set aside specific times for me to speak with the young people, and my access to them and their internal conversations was limited to what I could fleetingly grasp between or during other project activities. This was compounded by my own self-consciousness about approaching a group of mainly young men, in this particular project as I worried that they might perceive me as “spying” on them or controlling their activities in some way. Alexander’s work (2000) resonated for me when she described a similar hesitation, writing, “I could see no reason why they would want to talk to me, a total stranger, and partly I could not think of anything sensible to ask” (31-2). My research agenda somewhat mitigated this problem as I was specifically present to study youth filmmaking, rather than generally to probe young peoples’ lives (as in Alexander’s research). My access was by initiating conversations about the activity recently completed or underway. Alexander’s

experience studying a group of young men also underlines the fact that my identity, as a North American woman, both facilitated and made more difficult my integration into groups. For instance with groups of young men, I found acceptance more difficult than with young women, although this also varied considerably by age and whether the group knew each other before coming to the project. For instance in the *Reelhood* project, the participants were slightly older than in other case studies and did not know each other previously. Both factors seemed to facilitate my access to the young male participants.

Across my fieldsites, work with young people in the UK raised a number of ethical and methodological concerns (Heath 2009). Before beginning my research, I sought and obtained ethical clearance from the central body at University of Oxford, which facilitated a means for thinking about ethical approaches to each case study and led to my developing a “Memoranda of Understanding” (MoU) with each locale (see below). Additionally I rehearsed how to introduce myself to the young people and present them with written information about my project.

I had agreed with the ethical committee at Oxford that I would create a formal document of agreement with each organisational partner and notify the young people of the research orally and in writing, but I would not be required to ask for parental signature on participation forms (this was due to the anonymous nature of the research and the nature of the activity). While filling in forms was a common and accepted aspect of youth filmmaking projects (organisers often asked the participants to fill in or ask their parents to sign consent forms, monitoring forms, contact forms, evaluation forms and others) had I been required to receive specific parental consent, I believe this would have been a major impediment to my research. In many instances, project organisers with whom I spoke told me how much time they spent chasing down missing forms (in one instance, leading an organiser to fake parental signatures on release forms). I also was concerned that using my own forms for image release would not only contribute to the young people seeing me as yet another teacher-figure but also complicate the administrative tasks of the organisation.

While it is considered good practice in anthropological research (Banks 2001) to ensure that the subject of any visual method (for instance photography) is aware of and has agreed to

having their picture taken, in my example of the use of photography of children – in particular in the UK – there are additional stringent legal obligations (Wiles et al. 2008). As such, while I use the images generated by and of research participants in the copy of my thesis for examination, public copies will require anonymisation of the young people's images. This in turn raises ethical considerations of perpetuating a visual motif that seemingly equates young people with deviant behaviour (see for example the anonymised images in Weller 2007 which have black bars across the eyes of the young people) and in effect significantly editing images that young people themselves might have preferred to disseminate unaltered (Wiles et al. 2008). On balance, however, due to the multi-dimensionality of my research, this trade-off was necessary.

Methodology

As described above, I adopted a relatively free-floating “snowball” method in identifying potential fieldsites, in which one often would lead organically to the next. Initially, I would interview an adult in charge of the organisation, or a project manager or facilitator who had been delegated to speak with me, and analyse any available written or visual material on the organisation (press cuttings, annual reports, marketing material, websites, and other sources). The timing of the project, the target group the project was working with (roughly the age range I had targeted as well) and the content of the project (looking for initiatives with a wider social remit rather than simply “training”) largely defined which initial contacts crystallised into full case studies. Importantly, I did not select projects that aimed to work with any specific group based on ethnicity, gender, religion, disability, sexuality or economic “disadvantage.” Nonetheless, it is notable that all of the case study film projects described themselves as working specifically with young people from one of these labeled communities (discussed further below).

In my first meeting with each of the different project organisers, I introduced myself, explained the context of my research, and gave them a “Memoranda of Understanding” (MoU) to codify my relationship to the fieldsite. The MoU explained the anthropological methodology

of “participant-observation”¹³ and how it involved “deep hanging out” (Geertz 1998), along with the other methods I would use including: semi-structured interviews, group discussions, and additional creative methods (described below). In each MoU, I agreed that I would make all data anonymous as far as possible (including changing all organisational and individual names) but that organisations could choose to use their real organisational and individual names (although not those of the young people) after reading the final chapters. Of the three main case studies included here, two organisations have elected to use their real organisational and personal names, and one has chosen to remain anonymous. I have used real names for organisations which did not become a complete case study (and therefore did not come into contact with participants) and for funder interviews. Therefore, as applicable, the names used throughout this thesis are either the real names of organisations and individuals or are pseudonyms I have chosen. This dichotomy impacts particularly on the naming of projects. I have tried to convey the sentiment of the original title of the initiative even in instances in which it has been made anonymous although certainly the assignment of names of projects, such as *Reel Lives*, *This is My Story* or *Reelhood*, is in and of itself an important analytical frame (see discussion of “realness” below and in Chapter 7).

Central to my intent in conducting this research was the hope that it would provide material that might be of some use to the organisations who generously gave me their time. In this respect, I think of my research as “applied anthropology” (Kedia & van Willigen 2005). While many applied anthropologists are contracted to answer specific questions or work on an identified “problem” area to offer recommendations or solutions, others simply may conduct their anthropological research in a non-interventionist capacity but later use their research in applied contexts (Schensul 1999). I hope that my research will have some contribution to practitioners working in this area after it is concluded, although I am not intending to measure the “success” of youth filmmaking projects. However working with informants, including young

¹³Jenkins (1994) describes the practice of participant-observation as “the single distinctive feature of anthropological method” (433). Yet the precise specifications of the methodology defy exact description – in part experiential, in part analytical, participant-observation is rooted in the specific interaction of the anthropologist with regard to the particular field situation. On the one hand, participation requires a relinquishing of authority in order to be able to partake in an experience with others as equals, while, on the other hand, the act of observation sets an individual apart from his or her surroundings.

people, facilitators and funders, I intend to disseminate the findings in this thesis in non-academic and condensed language for utility of use.

More central to my research than generic thinking about possible future, non-academic dissemination of the final outcome was the input which resulted from the working relationship I established with each fieldsite. In each MoU was a space in which the partnering organisation could request a specific form of support, such as sharing a CD of my photos from the project or help in informing their on-going evaluation work. Often I also acted as a de facto project assistant in the course of doing my fieldwork, helping set and clean-up project sites, micro waving pizza, helping collect forms and other small scale tasks. This served two functions: it allowed me to create a practical structure or reason for being with projects and participants, and it allowed me to specifically “give something back” to organisations who generously enabled me to attend sessions and conduct the more goals-free participant observation that formed the basis of much of my research.

In some cases, in particular towards the end of my research, I worked with organisations to collect anonymous qualitative material for their evaluations. As is apparent in the depth and insight from the young people expressed in Chapter 4, this approach reaped dividends for me in terms of access to the young people in situations in which my specified time with them also had a utility for the organisation. In other case studies, I had to fit my interviews with participants in between activities or after sessions, which worked well for the most part (especially in projects with more “down time” as in Chapter 6) but less well during projects that had compressed timelines due to late arrivals and other structural difficulties (see Chapter 5). Where I offered help with evaluation, I was at pains to ensure that, in so doing, I would not compromise the academic integrity of my research or the anonymity of the young participants. Because I had previously worked as a project evaluator, in some cases I worked with organisations to help them consider how research and data gathering might help their evaluation processes in the future – including the introduction of other creative and media-based methods.

Although I was studying filmmaking, I decided before beginning my research that I would not use video (made by myself) as a data-gathering mechanism. Although other

researchers have often asked me why I did not use video, I felt that to engage in my own filmic practice inherently would have interfered with my fieldwork. For all the triumphal championing of ethnographic filmmaking as a research tool, I know from filmmaking experience that to balance the exigencies of making a good, insightful and technically proficient (let alone visually interesting) video recording takes time, energy and care. For me, balancing my notebook alone was challenge enough, and I fail to see how the requirements of filming would have greatly enhanced my fieldwork. Equally, I felt that making a video document would have created a significant distraction for the young filmmakers who were my subjects. Further, I felt that if I were to create my “own” film, it would have run contrary to the participatory ethos of the filmmaking practice in which the young people were engaged.

I did utilise several visual and audio documents as part of my research. During several projects (sometimes at my introduction and sometimes at the behest of organisers), young people would produce evaluative “video diaries” as part of their work. Where agreed upon with the young people and project organisers, I used this material as part of my fieldwork to complement the additional audio recording of interviews and discussions in which I was engaged. In all case studies, I would take photographs throughout the process, often sharing my camera with interested participants to document the proceedings. In some cases, where I was able to do follow-up work, I would print out the photographs and bring them back to the fieldsite to give to the participants and ask them to “talk me through” what was occurring in the photograph (a form of photo-elicitation, see Banks 2001). I also used several additional methods, including making hand-drawn maps, emotive time-lines and “graffiti walls” (see individual chapters) to augment my interviews and notes from participant-observation. In all cases, I used visual methods where it would enhance, or at the very least not interfere with, the activities already being conducted (as decided collaboratively between the facilitators at the fieldsites and myself). This is why I chose photography over filming as a data-gathering technique (cf Heath & Hindmarsh 2002). I also chose not to use the approach of a micro-analysis of the participants’ videos as texts in and of themselves because my goal was to foreground the process rather than

the product of youth media programmes. The final film products, therefore, are mentioned only briefly here.

In order to analyse the ethnographic material I produced as part of this multi-sited fieldwork strategy, I created a tailored indexing system based on my own “keywords” and themes identified. I created a spreadsheet based on chronological field experiences, which also allowed me to track my progress in transcribing interviews and discussions, and remind me of some of the more fleeting but no-less important fieldwork encounters. After transcribing my fieldnotes, I entered my own “keywords” as indexical references onto the spreadsheet, along with key phrases from either my notes or shared with me by informants. Once I had begun the process of reading significant theoretical material to begin my analysis, I returned to the empirical material and began to construct lineages between different field-based encounters, putting these real-world examples in concert with secondary literature based not only on theoretical perspectives, but also other qualitative social science studies. This triangulation process allowed me to generate specific themes around which this thesis is organised, and to ensure that my conclusions were based on a close reading of my own material, rather than simply theories that I found useful. This process of analysis led me not only to the three overarching categories of types of citizenship activities that I describe here, namely “engagement,” “empowerment” and “belonging” but also towards a set of common themes and areas of overlap in youth filmmaking practice. In looking back in detail through my empirical material, I noticed a set of recurring set of debates and organisational practices emerging. Here, I briefly pre-figure some of these common themes that emerged throughout my case studies, while a more in-depth discussion drawing on relevant literature and weaving across different case studies can be found in the conclusion.

Common Themes

While the term “youth filmmaking” is used broadly throughout this thesis, fundamental differences exist in the way projects are oriented. The first theme shared across my case studies to emerge from my fieldwork was the strong understanding that youth filmmaking initiatives are constituted both by the “process” of making a film and the final “product” which is circulated

beyond the physical and temporal setting of the production. Within youth filmmaking, these “products” take a variety of forms – from DVDs to on-line streaming video, to screenings, to wider campaigns – the actual dissemination of which I will describe in greater detail in relationship to each of the case studies and as a general practice in the conclusion. Within each of the case studies highlighted in detail here, and for all of the organisations I spoke with, there was a subtle but distinctive tension between emphasising the *process* of young people creating films, versus ensuring the “quality” of the final *product*. This tension emerged not only in my research, but in secondary literature relating to youth and community media, where commenters have divergent opinion, either seeing the experiential process of making as more important and the final film as “only a by-product” (Halleck 2002: 55) versus more strongly acknowledging that using professional-grade equipment to create a “high-quality film” can “focus commitment and motivation” (Sketchley 1985: 4). In some cases during my fieldwork, project facilitators described how emphasising the product was vital in ensuring the legacy of the project itself – that in having a more watchable product the work of the young people would be more likely to seen by diverse audiences. In some cases, where the project was funded on the basis of creating a video resource (for instance Eelyn Lee’s project *Beneath the Hood*, described in the conclusion) facilitators had to strike a balance between young peoples’ participation and facilitators’ input.

For the purposes of this thesis, I am largely interested in the process of filmmaking rather than offering a close analysis of the final products. However the tensions between process and product inevitably affected the actual making of the films as well. In each chapter, therefore, I give a brief description of the final product created during the filmmaking process I describe, but fuller descriptions of each film from the case studies detailed specifically are provided in Appendix A. I also describe the ways in which the films were screened or more widely disseminated, as I consider this part of the process, but save a more general discussion of exhibition and dissemination for the Conclusion (see Chapter 7).

The second key theme common across my case studies and pre-figured by the discussion of funders’ requirements in determining process versus product was the role of the political economy of funding culture in influencing youth filmmaking practice. Often, this emerged

directly and indirectly in terms of “crunching numbers” or making sure that the simplistic view of a project matched funders’ expectations in terms of “value for money.” This was articulated by project organisers, and to a degree by young people, as feeling that all funders truly cared about was hitting their own targets in terms of “bums on seats” and ensuring that certain quotas of disadvantage (often connected to ethnicity, age, employment status or disability) were met. In the context of projects, this conflict between meeting targets versus ensuring quality of experience could be observed even in the small moments when project organisers, of necessity, asked young people to fill in evaluation forms which required them to tick boxes relating to their ethnicity and education or employment status. For many projects I visited, these moments where officialdom subtly invaded the filmmaking space provided an opportunity for young people to vocalise implicit and explicit resistance to having their identities reduced to quantifiable categories. On several occasions, this manifested itself in direct questioning of the need to fill in the forms, or frustration at having to tick familiar boxes connected to race, in particular.

Further, the politics of funding greatly influenced projects through a reliance on “newness” which led funders to give money only to *projects* rather than core costs of organisations. This “contract culture” (Stanley & STEP Steering Group 2005) means that organisations often find it difficult to grow in terms of institutional capacity and staff development, as all funding that comes in has to go out on relatively short-term projects. Throughout my case studies there was significant evidence of what Andy Porter, then-head of Hi8us called “bifocality,” or having to look both “up” and “down” simultaneously to ensure that each project is meeting both the needs of funders and of young people.

Frequently, it is the project team of “facilitators” who must take on the role of buffer in between the young people and funders – ensuring that both have their requirements met through participation. Often, this vital and creative role of interlocutor is erased in discussions over youth filmmaking, in favour of the triumphal formulation “they made it themselves!” The ample evidence from the case studies presented here, and elsewhere (Soep & Chávez 2010) that the “youth filmmaking sector” is made up not only of its young participants but crucially a middle zone of adult facilitators who occupy a crucial space institutionally and politically between

fundings and organisations and young people themselves. The term “facilitator” comes from the educational and political philosophy of Critical Pedagogy (explored in Chapter 3) in which the role of the educator is not to transmit knowledge to students but to “facilitate” a process of democratised collective learning and exploration (Friere 1973).

Awareness of the role of the facilitator as guide, collaborator or supervisor is the third theme that weaves throughout the different case studies explored here. In each of the ethnographic chapters presented I demonstrate the different ways in which the youth filmmaking facilitators I spoke with conceived of their practice, and the practical ways in which they conducted sessions with young people. Through the highlighted case studies and the myriad other projects I studied or spoke with, I have created a loose system of categorizing the pedagogical practice youth filmmaking facilitation. Thus, the facilitators I observed largely fell into one of three pedagogical categories which I created as heuristic devices to organise the material: either a hands-off style of *participatory* work which emphasized process over product and provided little guidance beyond technical support for young people, a more *collaborative* approach in which the young people were the ultimate decision-makers but the facilitator more strongly contributed their expertise and opinions, and an *apprenticeship* style where the facilitator acted as the “expert” professional and the young people learned more by following instructions and observing than by having creative control. In each of the chapters I detail the actual practice as conducted within the project, and in the conclusion I will draw these together in relationship to each other.

Finally, the fourth overarching theme that consistently emerged across my case studies was the reliance on what Fleetwood (2005b) describes as the “framing” of “realness.” “Realness” within Fleetwood’s work on youth filmmaking in San Francisco is the tendency for youth filmmaking organisations to describe the work of young people in terms of its potential for “authenticity” – presupposing that young peoples’ filmic work derives its power from being a somehow “unmediated” form of expression. Fleetwood establishes that organisations, often even while celebrating the work of young people, rely on specific stereotypical tropes of young urban life (in my case studies, for example, the frequent reliance on hip hop music as a backing

soundtrack or “graffiti-style” fonts used for credits), which are also racialised symbolic forms often connected to Black urban experience. These tropes are naturalised within projects, as they when they are given names such as “Reel lives” or “Live Voice” which imply that filmmaking is a neutral conduit for young experience.

In addition to implying that youth films are somehow unmediated forms of expression, the rhetorical and practical emphasis on “realness” can also be seen as part of a more nefarious definitional process at work within youth filmmaking. Throughout my case studies and in conversations with funders, while young people’s seemingly intrinsic “creativity” was often celebrated, the culture of funding required establishing a “problem” that the influx of time and money was required to solve. The implication is that if young people were represented accurately, had no behavioural problems, had plenty to do, had wide access to the media, to creative activities and to adults – were enacting “good citizen” roles as defined by organisations and policy makers naturally and consistently – non-statutory funding would not be required to provide extra assistance.

Thus, young people were, as a category, were nearly always described in funding terms in relationship to their problematic behaviour, categories of disadvantage or lack of “voice” as a means for organisations to marshal resources. This is particularly true in Chapter 4 where the project organisers, of necessity, had to describe their work with “disengaged” young people even though the majority of those that turned up were anything but. As the case studies that follow vividly illustrate, nearly all of the projects I studied as part of my research were organised around specific ideas of youth identity – for instance in targeting young Muslims, young Afro-Caribbean men, young people from a specific disadvantaged neighborhood, disabled young people, young carers, young people who identified as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender, etc. This was actually unintentional on my part, I did not set out to study projects aimed at these or any particular target groups so much as simply “youth filmmaking projects.” However, it was notable that throughout my fieldwork many of the project specifically aimed to reach these “disadvantaged” groups, or inadvertently did through virtue of their partnerships or physical locale (the case study in Chapter 6 for example did not have any specific target

categories as far as ethnicity but by virtue of working as part of an Extended Schools programme at a school for students from mainly minority communities this happened inadvertently). Throughout this thesis, very few young white men and women were interviewed due to the simple fact that very few attended the projects in my case studies.¹⁴ As Fleetwood's work and my case studies vividly illustrate, youth filmmaking relies on its supposed ability to transmit a "real" voice, and yet simultaneously has to marshal discursive understandings of young people that value only their immovable categories of disadvantage.

Structure of the thesis

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of some of the fundamental questions that guided my research, an explanation of my methodology and a discussion of some of the key themes that emerged throughout my fieldwork. Before moving into the specific ethnographic material from my fieldwork, in the next chapter, I lay a theoretical framework with which to consider one of the central "keywords" which emerges throughout this thesis – the term "citizenship." In Chapter 2, therefore, I describe the historical origins of this heady but labile term and detail the ways in which understandings of citizenship, not only as "status" but also as "practice" or "feeling," have determined policy interventions towards young people in the UK. Prior to the elaboration of the empirical material which illuminates this abstract theory, in Chapter 3, I provide historical context for youth filmmaking, looking at the advent of community media as an intervention based around "critique" which later gave way to "identity" and "skills" and more recently to "creativity" and "participation." This chapter also explores the current political economy of funding for youth filmmaking in the UK, with particular attention to the perspective of funders in conceptualizing their own work in terms of "public value."

In Chapters 4 to 6, I turn to ethnographic material to illustrate the divergent ways in which discourses of citizenship are utilised within youth filmmaking projects. In Chapter 4, I consider the term "engagement," in particular "political engagement," as an organising principle

¹⁴ Whether this focus on specifically ethnic minority groups as a target for intervention will change given more interest of late in working class white male identity remains to be seen.

for the *Reelhood* project. In creating a typology of different ways in which notions of “engagement” are marshaled within youth filmmaking initiatives and in exploring the specific context of the *Reelhood* project, I demonstrate the ways in which the need to characterise young people as “disengaged” fails to account for the heterogeneous subject positions of the young participants. The discussion of the *Reelhood* project demonstrates not only the diversity of perspectives within one small group of young people (in terms of age, gender, experience or political involvement) but also the challenges that young people make to definitional processes of citizenship, particularly in terms of acting as “justice-oriented” rather than “participatory” citizens (Westheimer & Kahne 2004). This initiative also shows how these challenges were encapsulated within the project rather than travelling back “up” to the funders.

In Chapter 5, I consider the term “empowerment” as an organising principle for youth filmmaking. I consider the circulation of mediated representations of young people in the UK and describe how youth filmmaking projects often portray themselves implicitly or explicitly as “empowering,” in part by giving the young participants an opportunity to create a counter-discourse (or “reverse shot” as I term it here) to mainstream media. “Empowerment” as an objective of youth filmmaking initiatives is linked to the wider literacies required of young citizens, in particular “media literacy” and “critical literacy.” I contextualise my case study, the *This is My Story* project, within the wider scope of films about empowerment, in particular the ubiquitous topic throughout my fieldwork of films considering gangs and youth violence. Using this ethnographic material, I problematise the process of creating a counter-discourse while using the same language and imagery groups are intended to be resisting.

Chapter 6 foregrounds the concept of “belonging” as a facet of youth filmmaking, in particular in films about places, past, present and future. I describe the making of two films as part of the *River Lea* project, each of which considered the past and present of the local area of East London. Here, I demonstrate how filmmaking technology extended and heightened young people’s sensory engagement with “place” and enabled them to “focus in” through establishing a “sense of place” (Feld & Basso 1996). Place-making, in particular in relationship to “community,” is understood as a central pre-requisite to citizenship, and yet simultaneously

young people's relationships to place are often described in terms of deviance (Kintrea et al. 2008). Through detailing the processes of filming the two films from the *River Lea* project, as well as related examples from my fieldwork, I show how youth filmmaking is used as a way of achieving the citizenship aim of fostering a "sense of belonging" (Delanty 2003b) which stands in tension with a broader context of suspicion of young people's spatial practices.

Finally, in Chapter 7, I conclude by discussing the "after-life" of youth filmmaking products, as I describe how and in what contexts youth-made films are distributed. Returning to the concept of "realness," I describe how youth filmmaking as both a process and a product depends on the idea that, through participating in filmmaking, young people will be able to exhibit their "authentic" selves. I revisit the concepts of "engagement," "empowerment" and "belonging" – as well as a discussion of "voice" which I introduced here - to demonstrate the myriad ways in which understandings of citizenship are used discursively and practically within youth filmmaking initiatives.