

STEVE CONNOLLY, *Knowledge and Knowing in Media and Film Studies*, London: UCL Press, 2025, pp. vii + 171, ISBN (paperback): 978-1-80008-249-6, ISBN (epub): 978-1-80008-251-9, open access: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.9781800082489>

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Steve Connolly's *Knowledge and Knowing in Media and Film Studies* addresses a fundamental yet surprisingly underexplored question: What constitutes knowledge in Media Studies and Film Studies, and how is that knowledge enacted within educational practice? Rather than limiting his discussion to the content that should be included in curricula or to the competencies required for critical media literacy, Connolly tackles a more profound epistemological problem. He asks what it means to know in disciplines whose objects of inquiry are in constant flux, whose boundaries remain inherently porous, and whose epistemic practices encompass theoretical understanding, analytical inquiry, cultural experience, technological practice, and creative production.

Published by UCL Press in 2025, the monograph focuses primarily on Media Studies and Film Studies as school subjects within the British educational system. This focus is important, as the book is not intended as a general theory of Media Studies as an academic discipline but rather as an attempt to reconstruct and defend its epistemological status within formal education. Connolly explicitly situates his discussion within schools and colleges, where questions about knowledge are translated into curricula, examinations, assessment criteria, vocational qualifications, and the everyday practices of teachers and students.

The central premise of the book is that Media Studies and Film Studies cannot be adequately understood through dominant models of school knowledge. They fit neither the traditional conception of subjects grounded in a stable canon nor the view of vocational fields concerned solely with the acquisition of practical skills. Their genealogy is inherently interdisciplinary; their objects of inquiry range from popular culture and media industries to representation, technologies, audiences, and media production; and their content continually evolves alongside transformations in the contemporary communication environment. For this reason,

Connolly argues that these fields require a considerably more complex and layered conception of knowledge than that offered by influential educational frameworks such as the knowledge-rich curriculum or powerful knowledge.

The book's principal ambition is therefore to develop an epistemology appropriate to media and film education. Connolly reconstructs the historical and theoretical foundations of both subjects, examines the forms and structures of knowledge they entail, defends popular culture as a legitimate object of scholarly inquiry, conceptualises media production as a process of generating and revealing knowledge, analyses the relationship between Media Studies and media literacy, and ultimately proposes an original epistemological model grounded in Aristotle's concepts of *episteme*, *techne*, and *phronesis*.

1. Discipline, field, or school subject? In the opening chapter, Connolly examines the institutional and epistemological status of Media Studies and Film Studies, positioning them at the intersection of an academic discipline, an interdisciplinary field of inquiry, and a school subject. Drawing on Basil Bernstein's concepts of region and recontextualisation, he argues that school-based media knowledge is not merely a simplified version of university knowledge but rather the product of selective transformation carried out by policymakers, regulatory bodies, teachers, and educational institutions. The chapter's central claim is that the rapid evolution of media technologies, the close relationship between media education and popular culture, and the integration of critical analysis with media production make it impossible to accommodate either Media Studies or Film Studies within traditional conceptions of subject knowledge.

Connolly also highlights the distinct genealogies of the two fields. Media Studies emerged at the intersection of communication studies, sociology, cultural studies, education, mass media research, and professional media practice. Film Studies, by contrast, has a more clearly defined intellectual lineage rooted in auteur theory, film criticism, psychoanalysis, and French film theory. This distinction becomes particularly significant in later chapters, especially in Connolly's discussion of canon formation and knowledge structures.

At this early stage, however, one of the book's central weaknesses already becomes apparent. Connolly occasionally moves from the defensible claim that Media Studies possesses distinctive characteristics to the considerably stronger assertion that it enjoys a form of epistemological exceptionalism. Yet similar forms of hybridity can also be found in subjects such as arts education, computing, citizenship education, and technology education. While the book convincingly demonstrates the need for a distinctive epistemological framework for Media Studies, it is less successful in establishing its exclusivity. Many of the

characteristics presented as unique to Media Studies could equally apply to other hybrid, practice-oriented fields of education.

2. Formal knowledge and the theory–practice divide. The second chapter examines the forms of knowledge that underpin media and film education. Connolly begins with Gilbert Ryle’s classic distinction between knowledge-that and knowledge-how, but argues that in Media Studies and Film Studies the two are fundamentally inseparable. Knowledge of concepts, technologies, conventions, and media industries acquires meaning only when it is mobilised in analytical interpretation or creative practice. Drawing on the work of Hirst, Deng, Ferguson, Alvarado, and Corner, Connolly conceptualises media knowledge as discursive, contextual, and dynamic, while simultaneously insisting that it requires conceptual organisation and coherence. He also challenges the conventional distinction between academic and vocational education, arguing that media production can foster theoretical reflection just as theoretical knowledge finds its fullest expression through practice.

At the same time, the chapter reveals a degree of conceptual ambiguity. Connolly introduces the notion of epistemic exceptionalism, yet never defines it with sufficient precision to permit empirical examination or comparative analysis. It remains unclear whether the term refers to a distinctive constellation of knowledge forms, a unique relationship among those forms, a particular institutional status, or the exceptional pace at which the field evolves. While the concept is rhetorically compelling, it lacks the analytical clarity necessary for a robust epistemological category.

3. Knowledge structures, concepts, and canons. The third chapter is among the most conceptually compelling parts of the monograph. It explores the epistemic structures through which the ever-changing body of knowledge in Media Studies and Film Studies can be organised and taught. Connolly argues that the coherence of Media Studies need not rest upon a stable canon of texts but can instead be sustained through a conceptual framework comprising such key notions as representation, audiences, media language, and institutions. These concepts provide a methodological architecture that can be applied to an evolving range of media objects and cultural forms. Film Studies, by contrast, more commonly structures knowledge around filmmakers, movements, genres, and the canon of significant cinematic works. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu, Connolly demonstrates that the canon functions not merely as a means of organising knowledge but also as a mechanism for legitimising particular tastes and cultural hierarchies.

Nevertheless, Connolly's sharp distinction between Media Studies and Film Studies raises certain reservations. Although he rightly emphasises the greater importance of conceptual structures within Media Studies, contemporary Film Studies likewise organises knowledge around analytical categories, theoretical frameworks, and research questions rather than exclusively around the cinematic canon. Conversely, Media Studies has itself developed a corpus of foundational theories, canonical authors, and influential texts that, in practice, function as a disciplinary canon.

Equally debatable is the suggestion that abandoning the notion of a canon resolves the problem of curriculum design. Dispensing with one mechanism of selection does not eliminate the necessity of making choices. Every curriculum must still determine which media forms, platforms, genres, and case studies are to be regarded as representative. This inevitably raises the question of what normative criteria justify such selections once appeals to enduring notions of quality, significance, or representativeness have been set aside.

4. Popular culture as a legitimate object of knowledge. The fourth chapter offers a robust defence of popular culture as a legitimate object of scholarly inquiry. Connolly rejects the assumption that popular cultural texts – from video games and popular music to content created by social media influencers – are inherently unsuitable for rigorous academic analysis. The intellectual value of analysis, he argues, depends not on the cultural prestige of its object but on the conceptual sophistication of the analytical framework and the quality of the questions it poses. He then turns to the notions of participatory knowledge and networked knowledge, drawing on Pierre Lévy's concept of collective intelligence and Henry Jenkins's theory of participatory culture. Within contemporary digital culture, knowledge about media is collectively produced, distributed across networks, and continuously negotiated, fundamentally reshaping the relationship between teacher and student.

At this point, the book engages with current scholarship on the circulation of knowledge within digital platform ecosystems, yet it does not fully explore the implications of this literature. Connolly refers to social media as "epistemology machines", but discusses them primarily as environments for participation and knowledge production. Considerably less attention is devoted to the role of algorithms, platform business models, asymmetries of visibility, profiling, and the commercial governance of information flows. Networked knowledge is not simply the outcome of grassroots participation; it is also structured by recommender systems, data infrastructures, and the political economy of the attention economy.

The chapter succeeds admirably in establishing the legitimacy of popular culture as an object of academic inquiry. However, Connolly's use of the notion of the hostile problem risks dismissing criticism of popular culture too readily. Not all reservations about incorporating popular culture into education stem from conservative prejudice. Legitimate concerns remain regarding commercialisation, representativeness, inequalities of participation, and the extent to which curricula become shaped by short-lived cultural trends.

5. Production as a mode of knowing. The fifth chapter is both the most original and arguably the most intellectually significant part of the book. Here, Connolly argues that the production of a film, magazine, website, or any other media artefact is far more than a technical exercise; it is a process through which conceptual, technological, critical, and creative forms of knowledge are integrated. The chapter's central theoretical contribution is the concept of *techne pedagogy*, which describes an approach to teaching media production in which technical practice remains inseparably connected to an understanding of media language, audiences, institutions, and representation. Drawing on interviews with teachers, Connolly illustrates the changing role of the educator: from an expert who transmits knowledge to a mentor who fosters students' autonomy through questioning and a deliberately cultivated form of "inexpertise". In doing so, he extends the pedagogical tradition established by David Buckingham and Julian Sefton-Green in *Cultural Studies Goes to School*. Media production thus becomes a mode of cultural analysis: students gain a deeper understanding of how media texts operate precisely because they must make their own decisions about framing, editing, narrative, representation, and audience.

Ultimately, *techne pedagogy* is defined as the integration of critical, conceptual, technological, and creative knowledge, co-constructed by teachers and students. The concept represents a genuine theoretical contribution because it captures a pedagogical practice that is not fully explained either by Shulman's notion of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) or by the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework.

It is also at this point, however, that the book's principal methodological limitation becomes apparent. The empirical material relies predominantly on teachers' accounts of their own practice. More extensive classroom observations, analyses of students' media productions, and, above all, the perspectives of students themselves are notably absent. Nor does Connolly clearly specify under what conditions media production genuinely leads to the creation of new knowledge. Is that knowledge new for the student, the teacher, the classroom

community, or the discipline itself? The book does not consistently distinguish between subjective, pedagogical, and epistemic forms of novelty.

Despite these limitations, the fifth chapter constitutes the monograph's most substantial original contribution. The concept of *techne pedagogy* offers a promising theoretical framework that could stimulate further empirical research not only in media education but also in broader studies of creative practice, knowledge production, and practice-based pedagogy.

6. Media literacy: Competence or a form of knowledge? The sixth chapter explores the relationship between Media Studies and media literacy. Connolly challenges the growing tendency to reduce media education to a set of measurable competencies, such as recognising disinformation, using the internet safely, or acquiring technical proficiency. Engaging with the work of David Buckingham, Len Masterman, W. James Potter, Renee Hobbs, Henry Jenkins, and Paul Mihailidis, he argues that genuine media literacy must also encompass knowledge of media institutions, political economy, representation, audiences, and media production processes. Competencies detached from this broader body of knowledge risk becoming little more than tools that enable individuals to adapt to the existing media environment rather than to understand it critically.

Connolly offers a persuasive critique of the instrumentalisation of media literacy. Competence divorced from knowledge of media institutions, political economy, and representation can easily become a mechanism for social adaptation rather than critical engagement. Nevertheless, the chapter would have benefited from a more substantial discussion of some of the defining features of today's digital media environment, including platformisation, datafication, algorithmic profiling, and generative artificial intelligence. For a book published in 2025, this omission is noteworthy. Contemporary media education requires more than the critical interpretation of media texts; it also demands an understanding of recommender systems, automated decision-making, generative AI, the commercial circulation of data, and the infrastructural power exercised by digital platforms.

7. Towards a new epistemology of Media Studies and Film Studies. In the concluding chapter, Connolly synthesises the book's central arguments and presents his own epistemological framework. Rather than seeking to define the essential nature of Media Studies and Film Studies, he emphasises their fluid, contested, and inherently permeable boundaries. The phrase that gives the chapter its title, "Knowing Less About More and More", does not imply a decline in knowledge. Instead, it captures the idea that the continuous expansion of the media environment makes comprehensive mastery of its ever-growing

content impossible. Under such conditions, conceptual understanding, critical judgement, and the capacity to reorganise knowledge become increasingly important.

Connolly brings together the preceding arguments by proposing an epistemology grounded in Aristotle's three modes of knowing: episteme, techne, and phronesis. Episteme refers to systematic conceptual knowledge, techne to knowledge manifested through media production and creative practice, and phronesis to practical, ethical, and critical judgement. This framework is further enriched by the concepts of funds of knowledge, Bildung, Didaktik, inexpert pedagogy, and the distinction between conceptual coherence and contextual coherence. Within this model, teachers contribute primarily by providing conceptual organisation and theoretical structure, whereas students bring current knowledge of platforms, media texts, and contemporary cultural practices. Knowledge therefore emerges through a collaborative, though not entirely symmetrical, relationship between teacher and learner.

The model is both intellectually stimulating and suggestive, yet it remains largely programmatic. Connolly himself acknowledges that it is incomplete. The book does not specify the mechanisms through which episteme, techne, and phronesis interact, nor does it identify the conditions under which their integration genuinely occurs. Likewise, the decision to associate representation primarily with phronesis requires further justification, since representation simultaneously functions as a theoretical concept, an analytical tool, and a social practice.

Knowledge and Knowing in Media and Film Studies is an ambitious, original, and highly valuable contribution. Its greatest achievement lies in demonstrating convincingly that the fluidity of its object of study does not imply either the absence of knowledge or a lack of intellectual rigour. Media Studies need not rely on a fixed, closed corpus of canonical texts and theories to constitute an intellectually demanding field of inquiry. Media production is not the antithesis of theory but a means through which theoretical knowledge can be applied, tested, and transformed. Likewise, students' knowledge should not be regarded merely as everyday understanding to be replaced by formal schooling; rather, it can become a meaningful component of the epistemic process. The teacher's authority, in turn, rests not on exhaustive familiarity with an ever-changing media landscape but on the capacity to organise concepts, frame critical questions, and cultivate reflective inquiry.

The book's most original contribution is undoubtedly the concept of techne pedagogy. Connolly convincingly identifies a pedagogical practice that integrates

technical, conceptual, critical, and creative forms of knowledge. This framework has considerable potential as a foundation for future empirical research on media production, film education, arts education, and project-based learning.

At the same time, the book's contribution is primarily synthetic and disciplinary rather than fundamentally epistemological. Connolly does not develop an entirely new philosophy of knowledge; instead, he offers an original synthesis of ideas drawn from Bernstein, Deng, Hirst, Aristotle, Heidegger, Buckingham, Jenkins, the funds of knowledge tradition, and inexpert pedagogy. His principal achievement lies in applying these intellectual traditions to media and film education while demonstrating their practical educational implications.

The most significant limitation of the monograph is its strong focus on the British educational system. Connolly is entirely transparent about the scope of his analysis, yet some of his conclusions are presented in terms that invite broader generalisation than the evidence warrants. The status of Media Studies, the role of media production, the place of media literacy, and the relationship between school subjects and academic disciplines vary considerably across educational systems. Comparative research would therefore be valuable in distinguishing those elements of Connolly's model that are specific to England from those with broader international applicability.

A second limitation is the insufficient engagement with the contemporary digital media infrastructure. Although the book acknowledges the rapid pace of technological change, it pays relatively little attention to algorithms, digital platforms, artificial intelligence, datafication, and the automation of media production. Yet these developments are fundamentally reshaping the relationships between knowledge, production, authorship, and media competence.

A third limitation concerns methodology. The monograph is primarily theoretical and argumentative, while its empirical component serves largely an illustrative function. It lacks a systematic review of the literature, a sustained comparison with other disciplinary fields, and a sufficiently detailed account of the qualitative data analysis procedures. These limitations do not undermine the overall value of the project, but they do reduce the strength of some of its broader claims.

Nevertheless, *Knowledge and Knowing in Media and Film Studies* represents a significant contribution to contemporary debates on the status of media and film education. Its importance lies in rejecting the false dichotomy between stable disciplinary knowledge and the unrestricted cultivation of competencies. Instead, Connolly presents Media Studies and Film Studies as fields in which

knowledge emerges through the interaction of theory, practice, popular culture, technology, critical judgement, and social experience.

Perhaps the book's greatest strength is its ability to conceptualise what many media educators and scholars have long recognised intuitively: that creating media texts can itself constitute a form of analysis; that students' knowledge can enrich teachers' expertise; that conceptual frameworks are more important than fixed canonical lists of works; and that critical competence cannot exist independently of knowledge about institutions, representation, and power.

The book does not, however, offer a fully developed epistemological theory. Its concluding model is better understood as a research programme than as a completed epistemological system. It requires further conceptual refinement, operationalisation, empirical validation, and expansion to incorporate research on platformisation and artificial intelligence. This should not be regarded as a disqualifying weakness but rather as a characteristic of a work that opens more questions than it ultimately resolves.

Overall, *Knowledge and Knowing in Media and Film Studies* deserves to be recognised as a valuable, intellectually ambitious, and important contribution for scholars of media education, film studies, curriculum theory, and the sociology of knowledge. Its greatest accomplishment lies not in providing a definitive answer to the question of what constitutes knowledge in Media Studies and Film Studies, but in demonstrating persuasively that this question can no longer be ignored.

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