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Research article

‘Caution will get us nowhere’: manifesto writing as collective practice with a diverse film-making class

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Abstract

This article puts forth a number of ideas on co-creation with film-making students, which can both enhance their own practice and critically situate it within the wider film, television and creative industries. In the case study presented here, students on a second-year module called Independent Filmmaking Practices at the University of Greenwich in 2021 wrote a collective manifesto, titled the ‘Dismantle-festo’. The case study presented here is partly for educators seeking in-class exercises which depart from mainstream thinking about the film and television industries. However, in presenting and analysing both the exercises which led to the manifesto, and the manifesto itself, this article is also partly a record of the concerns and hopes of this cohort, condensed within the radical format of the manifesto.

Keywords film-making; pedagogy; manifesto; social class; radical

There is always a danger that, when questioning and taking apart the ‘system’, students are left paralysed and demoralised. They often see only two options: fight (competing) or flight (dropping out). By collectively discussing what, at first, seems to be an individual dilemma and double-bind, we provide a frame to make visible the social issue and collective practice that

> the working world really is. Making this framework visible creates a space to step back and think differently … It is therefore very important when engaging with these issues, to present examples of other ways of working, other spaces, economies and practices. (PWB, 2017: 5)

One of the biggest hurdles in teaching creative subjects in contemporary higher education lies in presenting students with different ways of working and alternative practices, as noted above by the Precarious Workers Brigade (PWB) in their publication *Training for Exploitation*. It is in these alternative methods that creative practice students have potential to develop their agency, make work that matters to them, and, in turn, build their own creative confidence. This became clear in my PhD research into university film-making pedagogy, where qualitative interviews with film-making undergraduates revealed the extent to which they valued the time and space that their education offered to develop their practice (see Nunn, 2019).

This article intends to offer a positive pedagogic solution to some of the issues experienced by aspiring film-makers, presented in a pilot case study. In proposing some methods that can be utilised in developing students' critical and creative capacities, as well as their sense of collective engagement with the process of film-making, the ambition is that the article will offer film educators an expanded exploration of useful in-class exercises to help galvanise students in their film-making practice. One key method, which also features as a suggested exercise in *Training for Exploitation* (PWB, 2017), is the writing of a manifesto. The article will explore why the manifesto format has currency, how it can connect students to alternative film-making practices, and finally analyse a sample manifesto written by students on a module which I taught at the University of Greenwich, London, in the academic year 2021/2.

The PWB produced their booklet to encourage educators to critically make the working world more visible to students in higher education. It is necessary to ask what this means in the context of film-making. First, it would involve exposing hidden power structures within the film, television and wider creative industries, which are notorious for their use of precarious workers, exploitative working practices and significant power differentials in terms of the kinds of workers (White, male, straight) who hold the most secure employment and tend to rise to the highest levels of those industries. Second, educators would need to work to raise awareness of the fact that these inhibiting power structures and their dynamics mean that the challenges that aspiring film-making students face are not individual but collective, so that the imperative is to work to develop a group consciousness which openly acknowledges this.

Thinking about the first problem, regarding power structures, there is ample evidence in the UK context. Friedman and Laurison's (2019) *The Class Ceiling: Why it pays to be privileged* exposes the level of nepotism in film and television in the UK, noting that children of parents working in that sector are 12 times more likely to enter it themselves. This places film and television behind only medicine and law for this level of 'micro-class reproduction' (Friedman and Laurison, 2019: 34–5). While alarming, this statistic does not begin to scratch the surface of inhibiting structures that are in play if one also considers gender, race, sexuality and disability, which are articulated in the UK Government's own reports (DCMS, 2015), and more contemporarily by the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (2023) in *The State of Creativity*. Alongside Friedman and Laurison (2019), Brook et al. (2020) have captured specific qualitative experiences of cultural workers that speak to this issue. Here is one of their participants, in her early 30s, speaking frankly about her experiences:

> The UK film industry is not a meritocracy at all. It doesn't matter if you're intelligent or well-qualified or any of those things. What matters is who you know and who you've worked with. It's also massively to do with being a woman of colour. They would much rather hire the White dude, and they feel more comfortable with the White dude than the bolshy brown woman. (Brook et al., 2020: 15)

The purpose of the exercises presented in this article is to ensure that these depressing statistics and experiences are not presented to aspiring film-makers as a *fait accompli*. The point is for students to understand their own positionality within the wider milieu of the creative industries, and then to think about making a meaningful intervention.

Part of understanding the student position necessitates reckoning with economic realities. An increase in fees to attend higher education in the UK – £9,250 per year at the time of writing in 2024 (with some exceptions) – means that there is understandable anxiety for students and their families that a degree should provide 'value for money'. Mainstream discourses echo this (Griffiths and Menzies, 2024; Shearing, 2022; *The Economist*, 2023), and routinely suggest that arts and humanities subjects are, indeed, 'low value' (Ruggeri, 2019; Smith, 2024). Writing specifically about some of these issues in *Educating Film-makers*, Stoneman (2019: 14) claims that:

> Financial structures have their effect on ideas and mentalities and in time connect with moves to instrumentalise aspects of film and media studies and other humanities courses, part of an imperative to take the educational experience of young people from explorations of interdisciplinary ideas towards a focus on fixed areas of employment – whereby closed training replaces open education.

In theory, at least, educators and students possess some time and space on a three-year undergraduate course to explore more radical and less instrumentalised ideas. However, that time and space is increasingly under threat. More than ever, a 'cost of living crisis' caused by rampant inflation through 2022/3 means that many students are also never entirely devoted to their studies, with some time necessarily dedicated to part-time work and the need to earn a living. While this is not a new issue – it was also the case for this author during my studies in London between 2006 and 2009 – it has certainly become exacerbated in line with the wider marketisation and commodification of the student experience. In 2014, *The Guardian* put this figure at 59 per cent, noting that as many as '13% of students manage to hold down a full-time job, either during term time, over the holidays, or both' (Gil, 2014: n.p.), and it is very likely that this has increased sharply. As Fisher (2020: 132) points out:

> [Marketisation is] about stopping the conditions for certain kinds of consciousness developing. Because people were taken out of the workplace for a while – young people – taken out of the workplace, free from those imperatives, and it's about time, right? In order to raise consciousness you need time. And that's the difficulty, always.

In line with what the PWB outline as 'collective practice', developing a group consciousness in film-making means, partly, exposing social dynamics and power structures, while also considering some perfectly legitimate economic imperatives, such as a student's desire to ensure that the sacrifices they make during their studies (such as the accrual of significant levels of debt, and their delayed earnings potential) are both worthwhile intellectually and creatively, but also from a standpoint of economic security. This is the starting point for students understanding that the issues faced are not individual, but collective.

In discussing and debating economic capital, and in the student exercises and subsequent manifestos, it is important to reflect also on other kinds of capital. Bourdieu's starting point for this was his idea of the *habitus*, which 'differentiates actors' modes of perception, judgement and evaluation of the world, and drives the embodied practices that are improvised in relation to these' (Fowler, cited in Austin, 2016: 14). Fowler notes that '[habitus] is crucially shaped by positions of power and powerlessness, including exposure to immediate material urgencies' (Fowler, cited in Austin, 2016: 14). Through deploying habitus, it is possible to consider less tangible types of symbolic capital, such as, for our purposes, cultural and social capital. Moore notes that while these symbolic forms of capital operate distinctly from the economic, 'their logic is ultimately that of the structured inequalities and power relations of the economic field and it is in terms of this logic that such fields can be decoded' (Moore, cited in Grenfell, 2013: 104). Subsequently it is possible to analyse the student responses to the in-class exercises, and the manifesto, by considering what those responses tell us about their habitus, and, ultimately, their relations to unequal power structures.

What was not possible during this pilot study was to fully capture data on the students, so their full social and economic histories are unavailable. What can be inferred, however, is that the University of

Greenwich, a south-east London ex-polytechnic university, has a proud history of educating working-class students, the highest percentage in the UK in 2008/9 (*The Guardian*, 2010), and 58 per cent of students were in Quintiles 1 or 2 on the deprivation index in 2021/2, the year of this pilot (Office for Students, 2024). Indeed, in the same month that the students in the pilot were writing their manifesto, the Institute for Fiscal Studies ranked Greenwich as one of the top five UK universities for social mobility (University of Greenwich, 2021).

Due to the nature of my involvement in teaching the class, and being present in the room with the students throughout the process, the analysis in this article needs to be taken from my standpoint as both a situated observer, and, at times, as a participant. Subsequently, some of the account is written from the first-person perspective, in an attempt to properly contextualise how the manifesto-writing exercise was planned and executed. While there are valid critiques of a lecturer with a secure, well-paid job asking students to reflect on their precarity, it is worth noting that many lecturers in higher education are precariously employed themselves (Arday, 2022; Jenkins and Wolf, 2023; Universities and Colleges Union, 2019) and/or have experienced a significant period of precarious employment to reach a secure position. Indeed, part of the motivation behind the significant industrial action that has affected universities in the UK in the first half of the 2020s has related to the proliferation of insecure employment practices. While an acknowledgement of my relatively privileged position is appropriate, I would argue that adopting a Freirian (Freire, 2004: 19) dialogic model allows for this power differential to be recognised, but not to act as a barrier to fostering the conditions for a shared exploration of trying to understand how this group of students viewed the world, culminating in their composition of a manifesto.

Why the manifesto?

> Do manifestos bring about change? Yes – by presenting alternative visions, and in some cases outlining concrete actions. By making it clear that the status quo is not good, it's insufferable, intolerable, ridiculous. Manifestos are the first stop for visionaries. (Hanna, 2019: 12)

Film-making undergraduates are ideally placed to think about changes, particularly given the structural inequalities outlined above, and articulated by the case study students below. This is where the exploration of the manifesto format has more currency for students in terms of understanding the context of the medium they are working in: the history of the manifesto is inextricably tied to the history of film. As Mackenzie (2014: 1) notes in his expansive collection *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures*:

> Film manifestos are a missing link in our knowledge of the history of cinema production, exhibition and distribution. Often considered a subset of aesthetics or mere political propaganda, film manifestos are better understood as a creative and political engine, an often unacknowledged force pushing forward film theory, criticism and history.

To understand film history and production in their fullest context, students should at least have awareness of the impact of the film manifesto. Mackenzie's (2014) book is in part a testament to this, featuring over 170 different manifestos, and spanning over one hundred years from 1911 to 2012. Incorporating film-makers as diverse as John Grierson, Sergei Eisenstein, Maya Deren, Luis Bunuel, Francois Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Lars von Trier, Sally Potter, Werner Herzog and Stephen Soderbergh, as well as film-maker theorists such as Guy Debord and Laura Mulvey, this over-600-page collection stands as a record of the ways in which the manifesto format has shaped the history of film-making as we know it.

In an approach that recalls the PWB (2017: 5) phrase quoted in the introduction to this article, 'examples of other ways of working, other spaces, economies and practices', Mackenzie (2014: 1–2) continues to reflect on the manifesto format:

> Examining these writings as a distinct category – constituting calls to action for political and aesthetic changes in the cinema and, equally important, the cinema's roles in the

> world – allows one not only to better understand their use-value but also the way in which they have functioned as catalysts for film practices outside the dominant narrative paradigms.

Once again noting structural inequalities, it is here that the manifesto format is empowering for students who are already on the outside of dominant film and television industries. Instead of focusing teaching and learning efforts on how to get students into industry, knowing as educators the hierarchies of power that act as barriers for our students, the study and composition of a manifesto allows the opportunity to consider what alternative film practices look like, in response to or alongside mainstream industrial practice. And none of this learning necessarily excludes those students who aspire to, and indeed progress successfully to, work on big-budget film and television productions – they will just be more critically aware of what they are doing, and why.

The key to this exercise is not just the study of the manifesto format, but also the attempt at writing one. A manifesto is a form of creative praxis where 'theory', the big ideas, politics or ideology, must meet with 'practice', the creative ways in which these are disseminated. Indeed, the manifesto is a reflexive format, usually questioning not just what the creative practice needs to address, but also the ways in which it needs to address it. Von Trier and Vinterberg's *DOGME 95 Manifesto* is a striking example of this, setting out a polemical standpoint confidently in its opening: 'To DOGME 95 cinema is not individual!' (Mackenzie, 2014: 202). For Von Trier, Vinterberg and the other film-makers who made work under the Dogme banner, their movement was about the potentials of new technology for forging new ways of making films, as well as admitting new participants. But this had to be a collective act, drawn out in the way a film is made, and the subsequent 'vow of chastity' that Dogme film-makers were expected to invoke while making it (Mackenzie, 2014).

Bringing words to the fore in attempting to effect material change or to prompt action is a complex affair, however. In that sense, one issue with writing manifestos that must be addressed, and to an extent mitigated, is that artist manifestos are usually quite ineffectual, and the literature around this is clear. As Hanna (2019: 12) notes: 'if provocation is the principle mode of the manifesto, and utopian dreams are its content, failure might be its most inevitable outcome'. Mackenzie (2014: 9) concurs, writing that: 'the intended outcomes of manifestos were, for the most part, hopelessly doomed … manifestos have had, in most cases, quite short life spans'. How one deals with such consequences depends on the context in which the manifesto is being used. Far from being a reason for not writing a manifesto, the failure rate or sense of hopelessness is in fact a powerful motivator, and it especially befits the use of this format as an educational exercise. Working with students on this, educators can say, simultaneously, 'Let's try this *as an exercise*, we don't know what will come of it', and 'You are in good company with a host of historical examples of manifesto-writing artists who have tried the same thing.'

Finally, this brings forth the notion of the manifesto as a utopian form, one in which the author(s) put forth their ideas for change, be they aesthetic or political (usually both), but do so in the full knowledge that what they are putting out into the world may have little or no lasting effect or repercussions. As Mackenzie (2014: 9) writes: 'this hopelessness added to the nihilistic romance of dramatic intervention in the public sphere. This romance was fortified by the fact that manifestos were most often texts of the moment. Intrinsically tied not only to the cinema, but the immediate world surrounding the authors.' Far from being an escape from reality into fantasy, the manifesto is an attempt to bring about material change, the first step on this journey being the proclamation of bold ideas. For students, this offers a departure from mainstream film and television industries, but it is no less connected to the world. Indeed, a manifesto written by students is likely to have more connection and currency for them than many mainstream film and television productions, which, while in the 'real world', are actually very far removed from the day-to-day experiences of young people. As Danchev (2011: xxviii) writes in *100 Manifestos*: 'Revolution or no revolution, artists manifestoed, undeterred. There is something of the incorrigible optimist about the manifestoist. To make a manifesto is to imagine or hallucinate the Promised Land, wherever that might be.' For a diverse class of film-making students, that utopian-like ideal will be different, as well it should

be, but the group composition of a manifesto should be designed to help students think about what issues they hold in common, and therefore what solutions they need to work towards, together.

Towards the manifesto – preparing the students

> We are surrounded by a pragmatic discourse that would have us adapt to the facts of reality. *Dreams*, and *utopia*, are called not only useless, but positively impeding. … But for me, on the contrary, the educational practice of a progressive option will never be anything but an adventure in unveiling. It will always be an experiment in bringing out the truth. (Freire, 2004: 1)

Freire's defence is useful in trying to connect the big ideas of utopian manifestos to the grounded work of pedagogical design and delivery. No doubt manifesto authors are always reflecting their version of 'truth', but, via Freire, educators need to be drawing that out of the students, and this is no simple process. There is a great deal of 'unlearning' that needs to take place in order to approach the mindset of radical film-making, and manifesto writing. Drawing again on Fisher's (2020) description of the 'marketisation' process that the university sector has undergone, this is about consciousness development, and that takes time.

In the pilot case study presented here, the module itself was positioned to reflect these ideas. The title was Independent Filmmaking Practices, and this module comprised a mix of students from the BA in Film and Television Production, for whom it was an optional second-year module, and the BA in Film Studies, for whom it was a core. The learning outcomes were sufficiently broad that they allowed for almost anything to be brought in topic-wise. I did, however, rewrite the learning outcomes to encompass film-making practice, as well as theory, when I took over the module. Figure 1 shows a weekly breakdown of topics covered on the module.

A core question for the module was to identify what constitutes independent film-making, along the lines identified by King (2013: 2): 'three main points of orientation: the position of individual films, or filmmakers, in terms of (1) their industrial location, (2) the kinds of formal/aesthetic strategies they adopt and (3) their relationship to the broader social, cultural, political or ideological landscape'. Or: (1) economy; (2) aesthetics; and (3) ideology. 'Manifesto!' was the topic of the second week, and it was

Figure 1. Independent Filmmaking Practices: weekly schedule – seminars taught by the author (CN) and by Dr Mark Chapman (MC)

- ▶ 1.1 (27/09/21) Intro to Module (What is Independent Filmmaking?) CN and MC
- ▶ 1.2 (04/10/21): Manifesto! Independent Filmmaking Themes CN
- ▶ 1.3 (11/10/21): Methods of Art Practice in Filmmaking MC
- ▶ 1.4 (18/10/21): Feminist Filmmaking (What the F**k is Feminism?) Guest Lecture by Lee-Jane Bennion-Nixon
- ▶ 1.5 (25/10/21) Case Study, 'One Cut of the Dead' (Guest Lecture by Jonathan Wroot)
- ▶ 1.6 (01/11/21): INDEPENDENT STUDY WEEK (No Classes)
- ▶ 1.7 (08/11/21): Anarchist Filmmaking I (What is Anarchism?) CN
- ▶ 1.8 (15/11/21): Anarchist Filmmaking II (What Makes a Film 'Anarchist'?) CN
- ▶ 1.9 (22/11/21): Manifesto Writing Workshop CN

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in-class discussions during this session which led to the decision to include a 'Manifesto Writing Workshop' in Week 9. But the manifesto-led aspects were supported by explorations of other independent film-making methods, including art film, feminism, an international case study and anarchism. So, ahead of thinking about what this meant for them, the students were grounded in what, historically, alternative film-making practices have meant for others.

Some of these teaching weeks contained more political content than others, depending on the context of the topic. Certainly, the sessions on feminist and anarchist film-making prompted some charged in-class discussions, and the film-maker case studies proved quite illuminating. Covering these topics allowed an introduction to a range of films and film-makers that many of the students had not heard of before: the gender politics in Sally Potter's film *Orlando* (1992) or the LGBTQI feminism in Lizzie Borden's anarchist film *Born in Flames* (1983), as well as the anarchist-inflected films of Peter Watkins (*Punishment Park* [1972], *La Commune* [2000]) and John Sayles (*Return of the Secaucus Seven* [1980], *Matewan* [1987]), or the Ken Loach film *Land and Freedom* (1995) – not necessarily an anarchist film by production methods, but certainly so in terms of its narrative about the Spanish Civil War. These film case studies represent either texts which caused controversy at the time of making, radically differing production methods, or sometimes both. None of them are manifesto-led, but all of them constitute part of the mission of the module to explore films that might be considered independent, via King's (2013) taxonomy, outlined above. More than this, this offered an opportunity for these films to be understood and reappraised by a new generation of aspiring film-makers, on their terms. For example, one unexpected but fruitful discussion came about when looking at the Dogme 95 manifesto, which the largely female group of students who presented it to the class found to be arrogant and pretentious.

Perhaps the latter judgement from the students is not misplaced, given the allegations of abuse and creating a 'hostile working environment' which surfaced around Von Trier's production company in 2017 (Desta, 2017; Mumford, 2017). While Von Trier himself was not named in these allegations, singer and actress Björk recounted several awkward propositions from him while on the set of *Dancer in the Dark* (2000), which he directed (Reed, 2017). Indeed, the critique can be widened to anarchist movements also, where the desire to rebuff all forms of domination should make these collectives inherently feminist. Kinna notes, however, that 'Anarchist literatures abound with accounts of manarchism. This describes everything from a self-obsessed reflection on the burdens of anarchist commitment to the adoption of aggressively cis-gendered male predatory behaviors, uninvited protectionism premised on norms of dependency, sexual violence and the casual dismissal of gender politics' (Kinna, 2017: 254–5). Here it seems that, like some of the people who were involved in Dogme, the desire to work with alternative practices is also seen by some as an opportunity for abuse of varying degrees. In short, while this is certainly not always the case, it is clear that pushing back against power structures in one form can lead to them emerging in new, sometimes more predatory, forms. The students are correct to treat the liberating potentials of Dogme with some scepticism.

The sessions on anarchism included some specific exercises designed to connect film-making practice to current concerns and issues faced by the student cohort – an attempt to connect to 'the world around them'. Using the online audience engagement platform Mentimeter (www.mentimeter.com), the class on anarchism asked students to consider what 'forms of domination' affected them in different areas. As an anonymised audience participation tool, Mentimeter offered a opportunity for contribution to those students who might feel too intimidated to participate in more conventional ways (for example, speaking or presenting in front of the class).

What did we mean by 'forms of domination'? Chomsky (2014: 10), quoting Rudolph Rockers, posits anarchism in the following way, and this was the definition used with students in the class: '[not] a fixed, self-enclosed social system but rather a definite trend in the historic development of mankind, which … strives for the free unhindered unfolding of all the individual and social forces in life'. The inverse of this is that various forms of domination exist to hinder that freedom, that 'unhindered unfolding'. With this as context, during one of the sessions on anarchism, the class sought to explore what students thought

was preventing them from reaching their goals, in three distinct areas: day-to-day life, education and film-making.

The results are displayed in Figures 2–4, with the larger words representing a term that was submitted by multiple participants. As with other exercises run using Mentimeter, the results were hidden until the whole class had submitted.

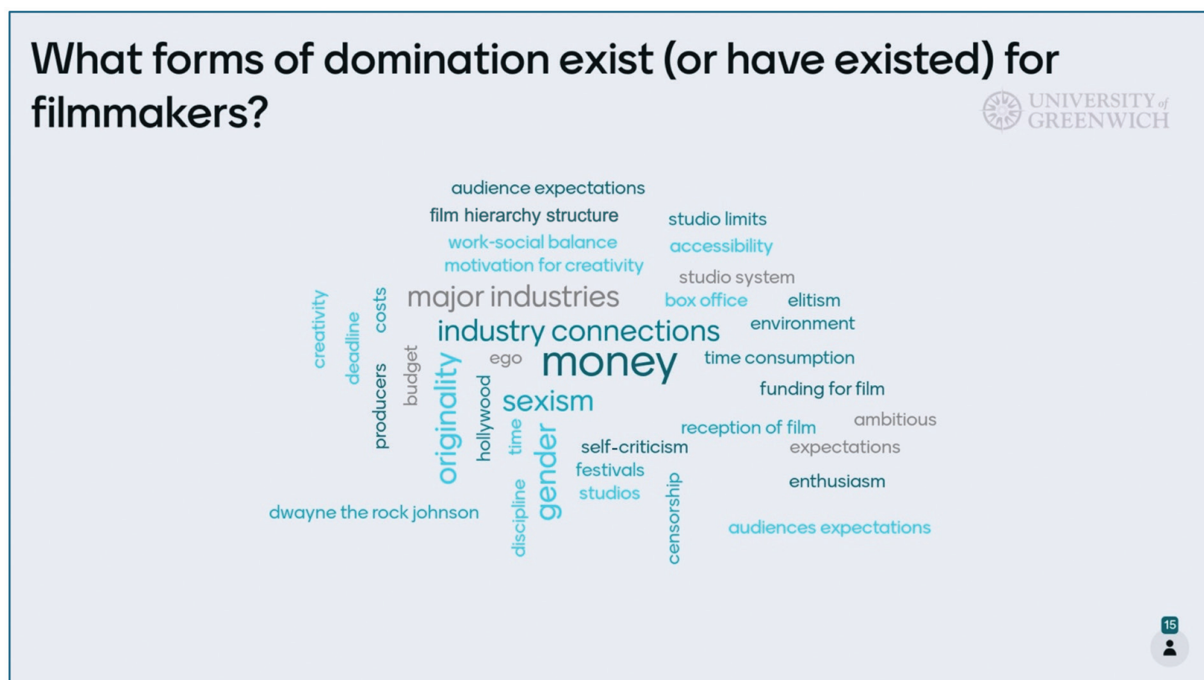
Looking at Figures 2–4, some key themes emerge, and it is interesting to see how these developed into the manifesto that the students wrote, even though these sessions were several weeks apart. The key form of domination across all three spheres is clearly economic capital ('money'), and while this exercise is not necessarily intended to convert students into ardent anti-capitalists, it is striking what happens when you ask certain questions of a group of 20-year-olds. If the aim of the session was directed towards developing a group consciousness, which it certainly was here, then it is important to consider how radical the act of simply *asking* a question can be; that, and giving students the time and space to discuss it. As Fisher (2020: 115) notes in his lecture, 'From class consciousness to group consciousness': 'All you need is the members of the group together, and when they talk together, honestly and openly, they'll start to see they have common problems and common interests, and also the cause of those problems is not them but something else.' Seen in this light, the collective authoring of a manifesto is not about the actual manifesto at all; it is about the process of composition.

The last question is most pertinent to film-making, and thus it likely informed the manifesto more than the other two. Here is a more diverse range of responses, and some longer phrases were needed to expand upon what the students were thinking. Three key themes emerge: 'money', as seen in response to the other questions, which also seems to connect to 'major industries'. 'Industry connections' is perhaps a student reflection on symbolic capital, cultural but perhaps also social. We also see 'sexism' and 'gender' appear as other key themes. Brook et al. (2020: 20) found similar examples in their own research, noting that 'economic inequality is only one part of the story'. They continue: 'We can think of these examples as social inequalities. These social divisions are linked to other sorts of resources beyond financial assets. These can include social networks and social connections. Crucially, they have a cultural dimension'

Figure 2. Mentimeter word cloud – forms of domination 1

Figure 3. Mentimeter word cloud – forms of domination 2

Figure 4. Mentimeter word cloud – forms of domination 3



(Brook et al., 2020: 20). In these responses, then, students are reflecting their existing knowledge that the culture of the film and television industries is not equal.

The next section analyses the first stage of the group manifesto, which was composed by smaller groups of three or four students in the class, on large pieces of A1-sized paper. While the final manifesto

was compiled using another digital platform, called Miro, it was felt necessary to have the initial stage take place in an analogue mode, enabling small group discussion to then inform debates and decisions made by the whole-class group.

Sketching the manifesto – initial ideas

Figures 5–10 show some images of the initial ideas and the (sometimes literal) sketches that students did, ahead of debating what should be included in the final draft. We can consider how these compare to the Mentimeter slides above, noting again the gap of a few weeks between sessions.

Several key themes emerge that can be unpacked productively. As in the Mentimeter exercise, students in this class are clearly identifying 'money', or economic capital, as a problem, with the term appearing in five of the six images above. And Figure 6 instead refers to 'budget' ('[which] should not define film success'), and the term 'monetary' appears in the bottom left: 'Make films for the purpose of telling stories not monetary gain'. This returns to the notion that the point of this exercise, despite having an anarchist lean, is not designed to 'convert' students into anti-capitalists, but is instead designed to connect to their experiences of the world. Even allowing for some pressure felt by having a lecturer in

Figure 5. Manifesto sketch – 'festo

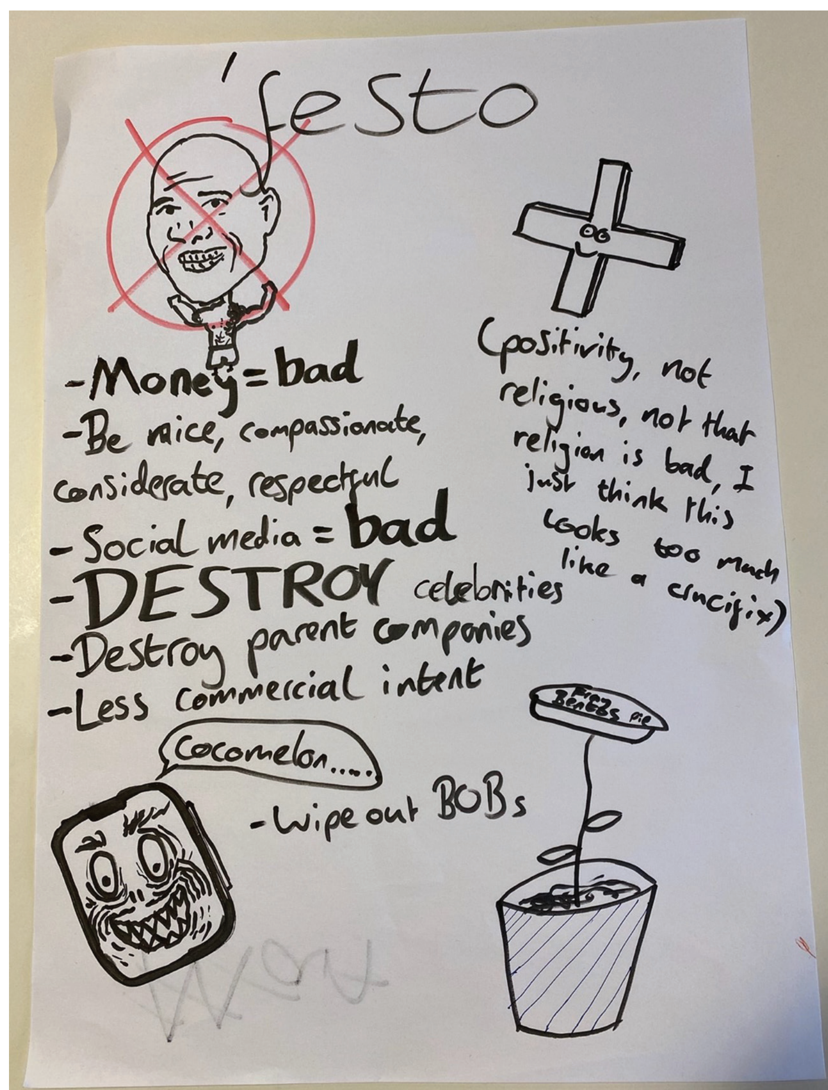
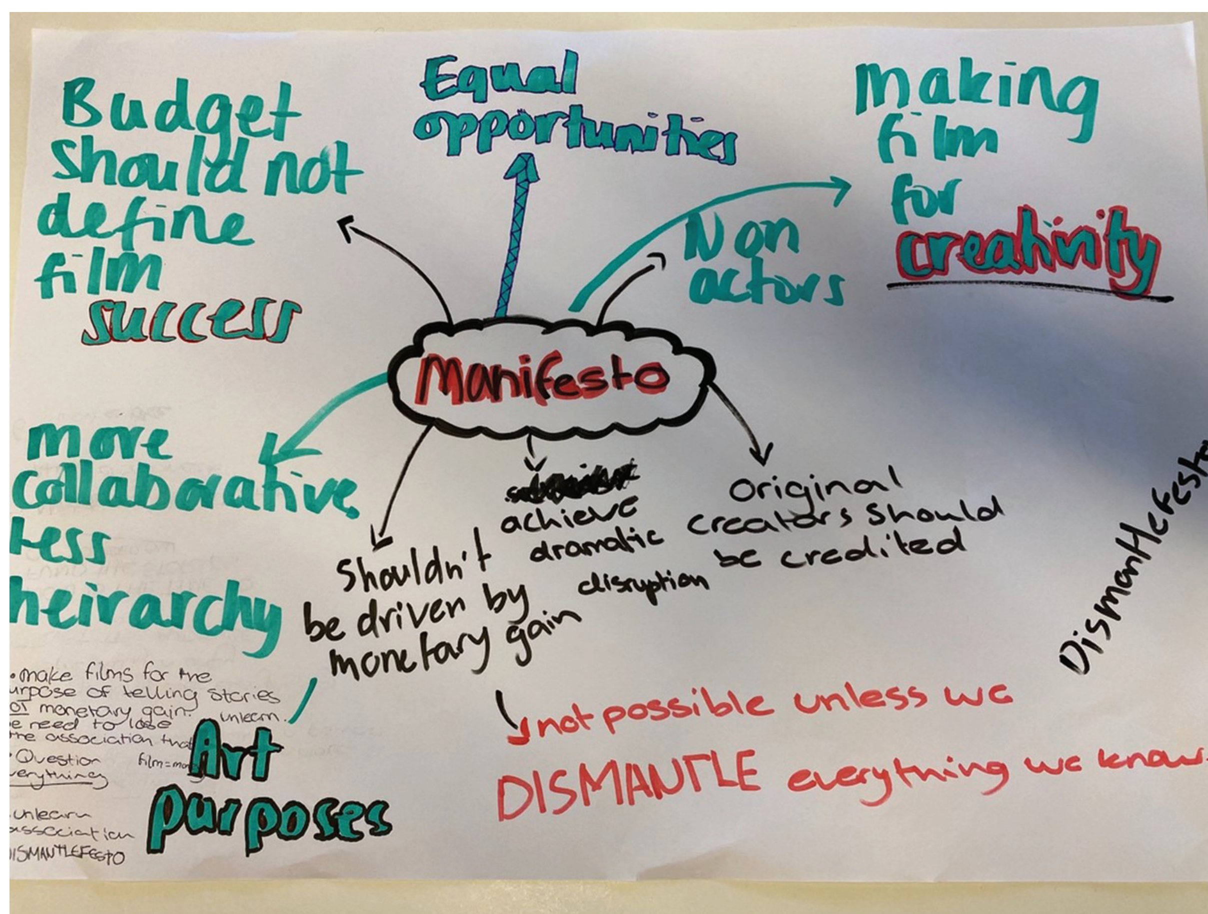


Figure 6. Manifesto sketch – Dismantle

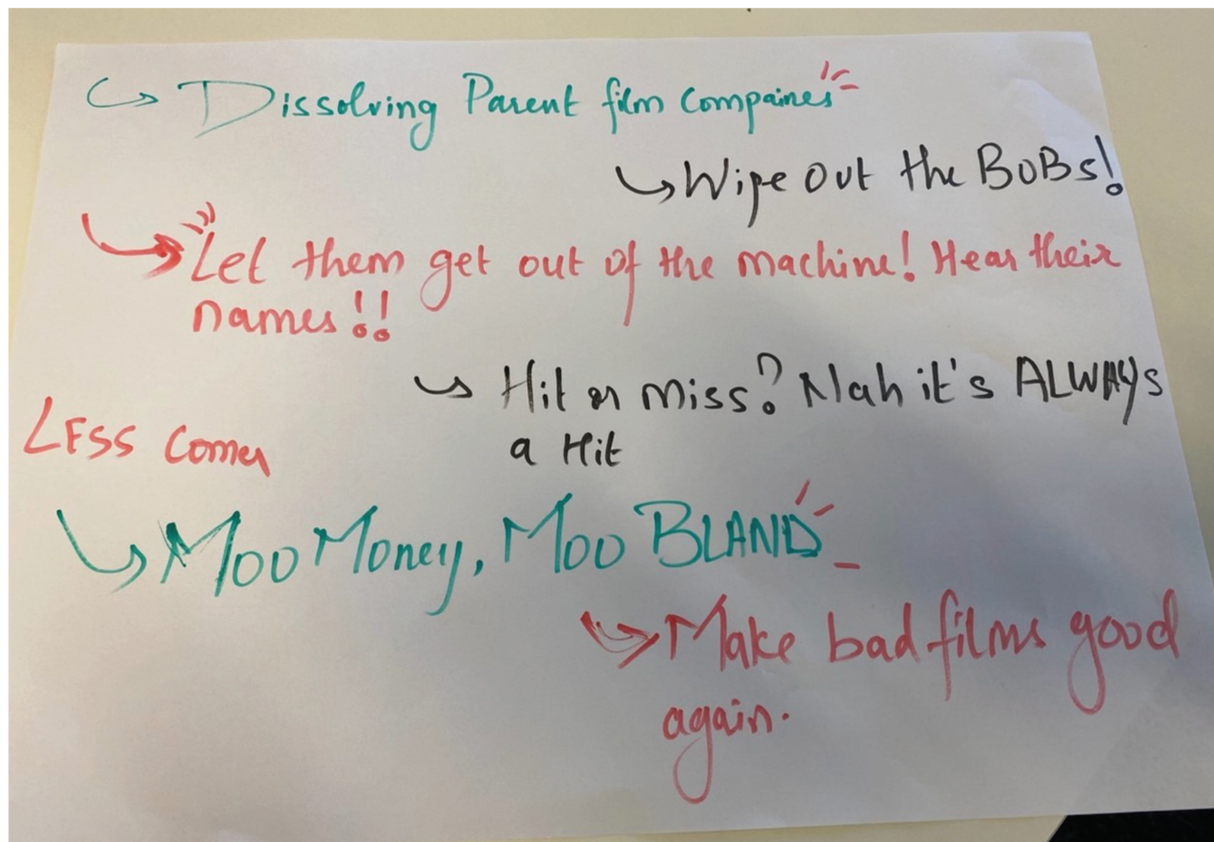


the room with a clear political position, the feeling that economic capital has a very real impact on the aspirations of these student film-makers is clear. As Fisher (2020: 125) points out: 'If you're in a subordinated group, you see the way things are talked about by the dominant group, and you see the reality of your life and you see they don't match up.' This is one of the issues with advocates of the film and television industries – most of whom possess not just greater economic capital, but also higher reserves of social and cultural capital – trying to convince young people that this is a viable career option: the experiences do not match, and the platitudes ring quite hollow, as exemplified in the qualitative case studies in Friedman and Laurison (2019), and in Graeber's (2018) *Bullshit Jobs*.

Economic capital is presented here as a core issue for students, but so too are cultural and social capital, even if less defined. There are bold proclamations, from 'Fuck Disney!' in Figure 10, to 'bring down celebrities' in Figure 8, and even 'wipe out the BOBs' in Figures 5 and 7 ('Bob' here is taken to stand in as the generic White, heterosexual, male Hollywood executive). Students are also railing against heteronormativity in Figures 9 and 10, as well as perceptions of 'censorship' and 'fake corporate-led change'. Figures 5 and 7 also call for the 'dissolving/destruction of parent companies'. These issues are also extensions of the earlier discussions around 'forms of domination'; here, the class is seeing either more forms of film industry domination, or else attempts by those dominating forces to appear less threatening.

While these are strong statements, reflecting the radical potential of the students and the nature of the manifesto exercise, the definition of what a particular group is against presents a core aspect of any manifesto. As Hanna (2019: 34) asserts, 'Lately we have swung back to era of engagement, of taking sides, when to remain silent is increasingly seen not as being neutral or aloof but as complicit.' Here,

Figure 7. Manifesto sketch – Wipe out the Bobs!

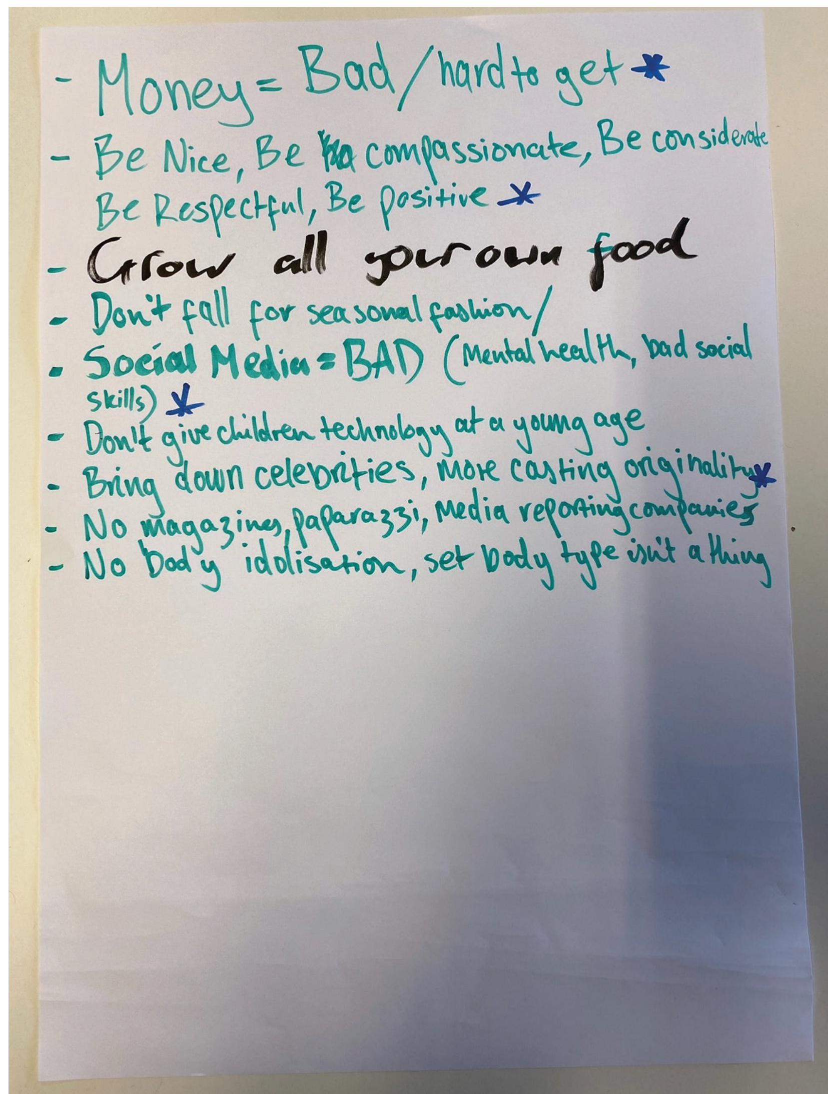


the students in the class have delivered a wealth of ideas for what the theme(s) of their manifesto might be, and, in particular, what side they are taking: that of the underdog, the unrepresented, the 'wasted talent', as it appeared in the final draft (Figure 11). However, the manifesto form is also about making some material impact on the world and, in that sense, it is crucial that any manifesto also posits what it is *for*, what the authors think they, or others who choose to follow them, can do to make a difference. From the students in this class, then, what can we do? From Figures 5 and 8: 'Be nice, compassionate, considerate, respectful, positive'. And from Figure 8 again, readers should 'grow [their] own food'. We can head towards Figure 9's 'ideal utopia' of 'freedom and variety in creativity'. Readers can heed Figure 6, and 'achieve dramatic disruption', or Figure 7 and 'make bad films good again'. Or, perhaps most pertinently, given the form that the final manifesto took, we should heed the prophetic words of Figure 6, and acknowledge that none of what is being put forward by this class is possible 'unless we DISMANTLE everything we know'. In conclusion, then, this article presents the 'Dismantle-festo'.

Conclusion – the 'Dismantle-festo'

Figure 12 presents the first draft in a series of ideas which emerged from the initial sketches in the previous section, composed using the online collaborative platform Miro. In the week ahead of this workshop, students were provided with some sections from Hanna (2019) and the accompanying manifestos to which they refer. I added key themes from these to the board, and relevant comments were filed under them, to help organise the group's ideas. These actually helped to ensure that the final manifesto included a helpful sprinkling of ideas which touched on the key themes drawn out of Hanna's (2019) *Manifesto Handbook*. We featured themes such as 'NOW', 'clarity of intention', 'against the present' and 'making

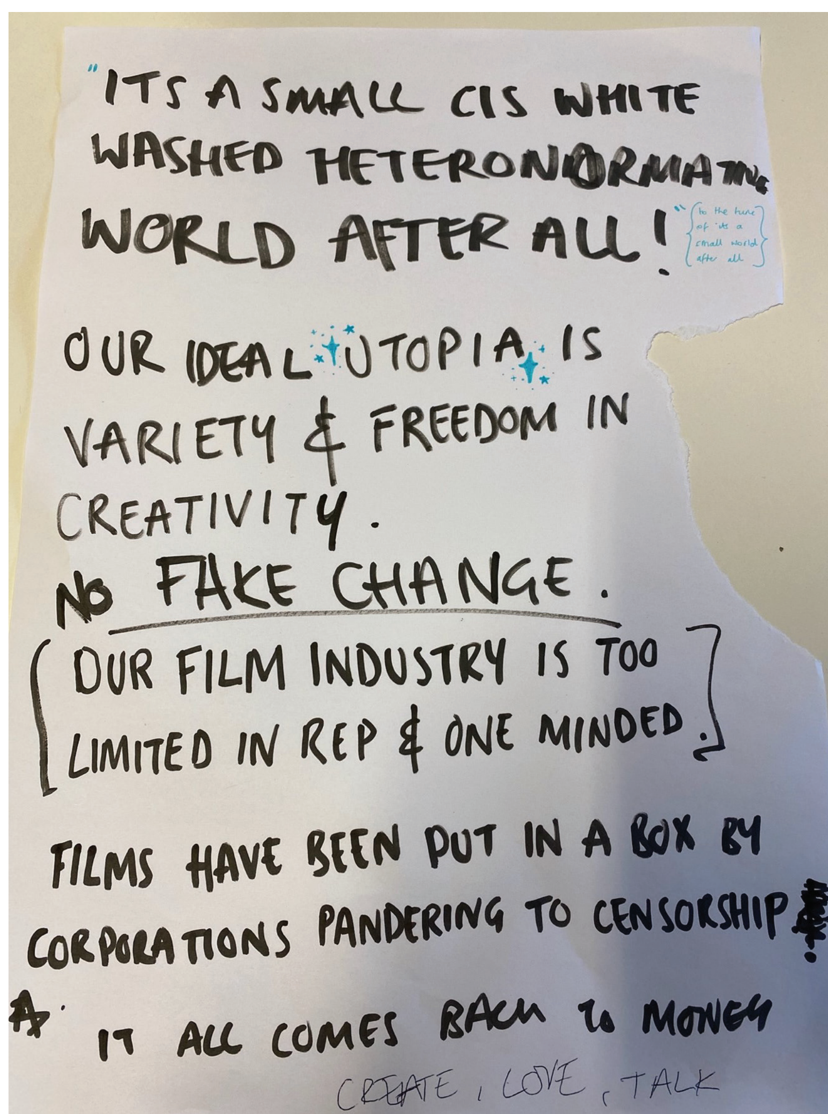
Figure 8. Manifesto sketch – Grow all your own food



threats'. These were paired with a few other themes which came from the students, one of which made specific reference to the 'craft of film-making'.

There is development of issues raised in the previous sketches, including the addition of the provocative 'piracy is KEY', for example. This was one of a few proposals which caused healthy debate among the class: if we all pirated or stopped paying to see big-budget films, this would harm ordinary film workers (seen on a few Post-it notes in the top right of Figure 12). Big ideas such as the aforementioned 'dismantling' are reinforced with notions of 'unlearning – no more content', 'wasted talent – support young talent' and 'disconnect between filmmakers and audiences'. Interestingly, none of these latter points are focused on economic issues, but instead on wider notions of social and cultural capital. Even in this first pass, though, the students in this class are not without their ideas for how to go about enacting this change. Some solutions include: 'big budgets distributed to smaller films', 'LITERALLY WORLD CINEMA' and 'TRUST THE AUDIENCES'. In discussion with the originators of this first idea, this seems logical: instead of giving £10 million to one film, investors or funding bodies would seek to give £1 million to 10 films. This would present a radical change in the funding models, which would allow young talent, first-time feature-film makers, an opportunity to get their films made (and even at £1 million, these would still be 'low budget').

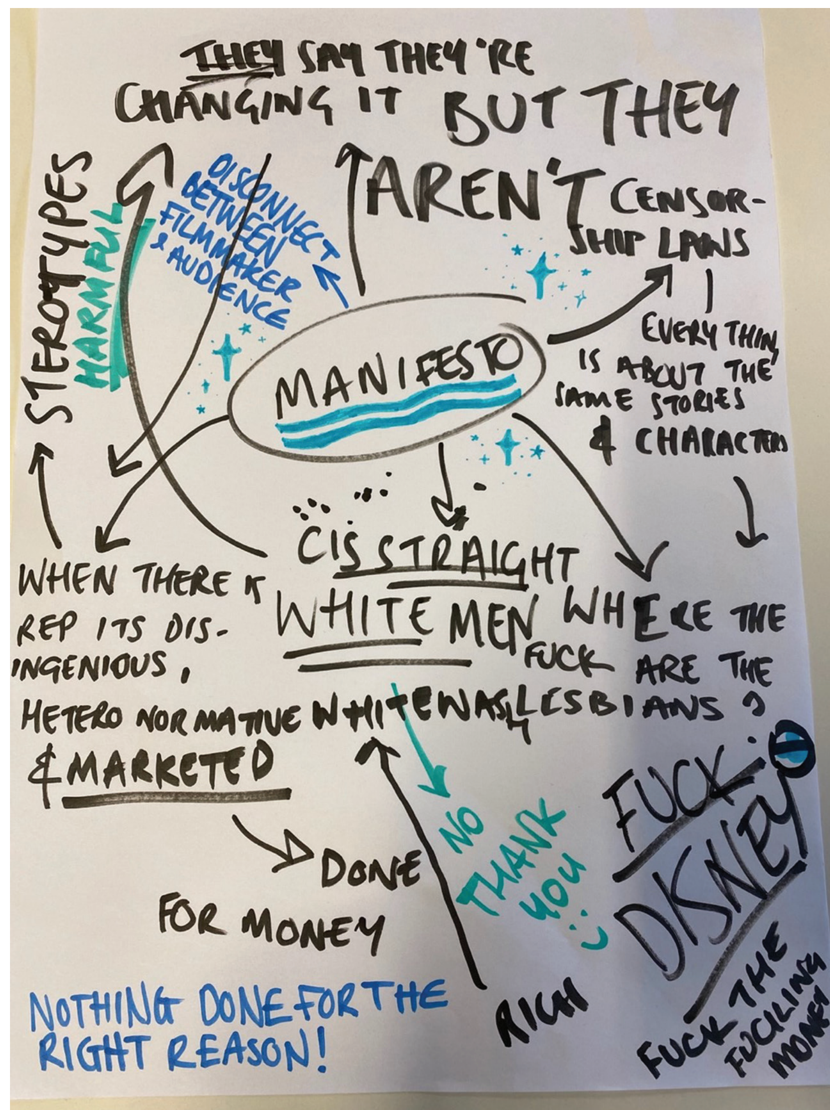
Figure 9. Manifesto sketch – No fake change



In Figure 13, we can see the honing of the ideas presented in the final manifesto, if only by making some of the issues larger than others. More foregrounded in this version, arrived at through in-class discussion and debate, are notions that we are dealing with an 'inherently flawed system', we are reaching for the 'ideal' of 'freedom in creativity', and we are questioning, crucially, 'who the storytellers are'. While not all of these made it into the final manifesto, which can be seen in Figure 11, the way in which these have been brought to the fore here, through graphic emphasis, indicates that they are seen to be important by the class.

Following Hanna's (2019) manifesto provocation around 'lists', Number 30 of his '95 theses on an incendiary form', the class decided that their manifesto, now with the title 'Dismantle-festo', should follow suit, and should present a rundown of the key points. As Hanna (2019: 55) notes, 'the list of principles or demands is the most recognizable feature of the manifesto', and it can be, as it is here, a useful distillation of the discussions and debates which have taken our class far and wide. Prior to presenting a list, as exemplified in Dogme, and in so many other manifestos, a preamble or narrative around the creation or general stance of the manifesto was felt to be necessary, and this was drafted by some of the students after the class, and added to the manifesto (Figure 11).

Figure 10. Manifesto sketch – Cis straight White men



In the preamble, the students properly centralised their ideas and put forth a proposition. Built into what they have written is the fact, attested to multiple times in this article, that the film industry is not equal. Whatever their differences, perceived or actual, in habitus (class, social position or general disposition), the students managed to agree upon this inequality, and decided upon redress. As the PWB (2017: 54) say of their suggested manifesto exercise:

> Remember, the manifesto genre encourages bold, direct and unapologetic expression. It largely strives to be clear and enticing to a wide range of people. While you might sometimes struggle to synthesise a number of different voices, this task asks you to think collectively and find common ground from which to fight.

Credit is due to the students in terms of the above, where they have synthesised different voices and have begun to articulate a group consciousness. They have focused their manifesto on the idea of dismantling everything they know – perhaps an equal reflection on at least part of their educational experience. Ultimately, the students' rallying call to distribute budgets for 'multiple independent creatives to allow audiences to expand their horizons and explore new communities and themes' is not only a wholly

Figure 11. The Dismantle-festo

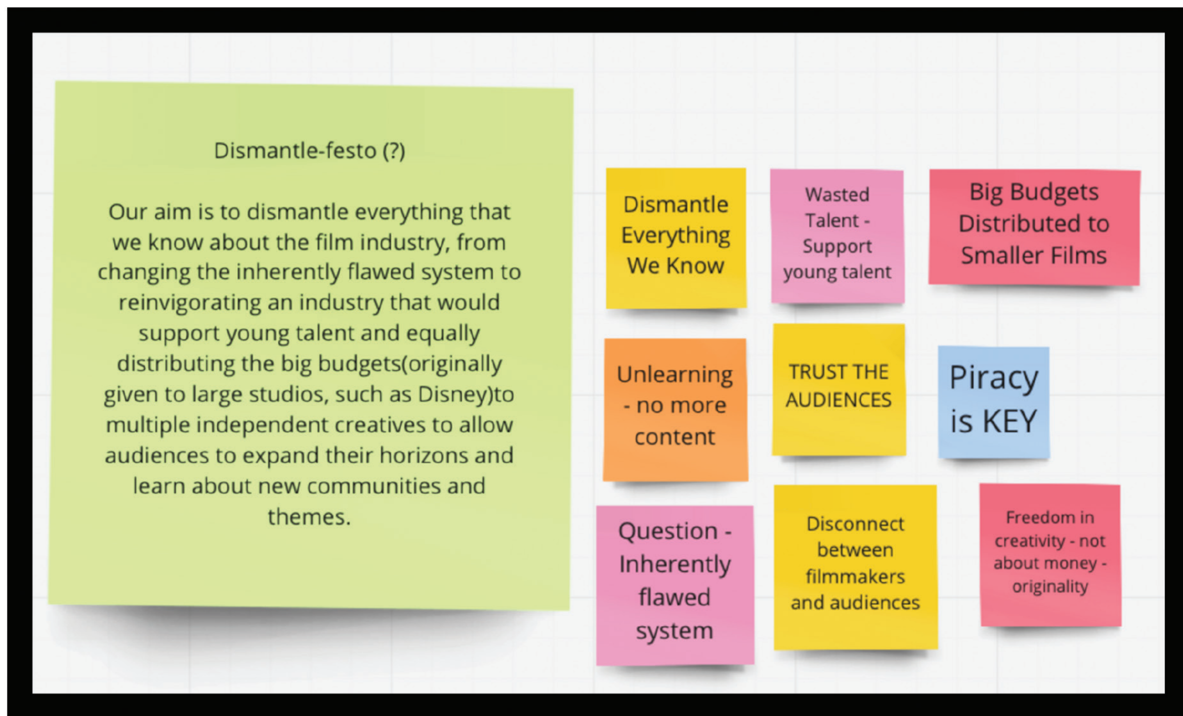
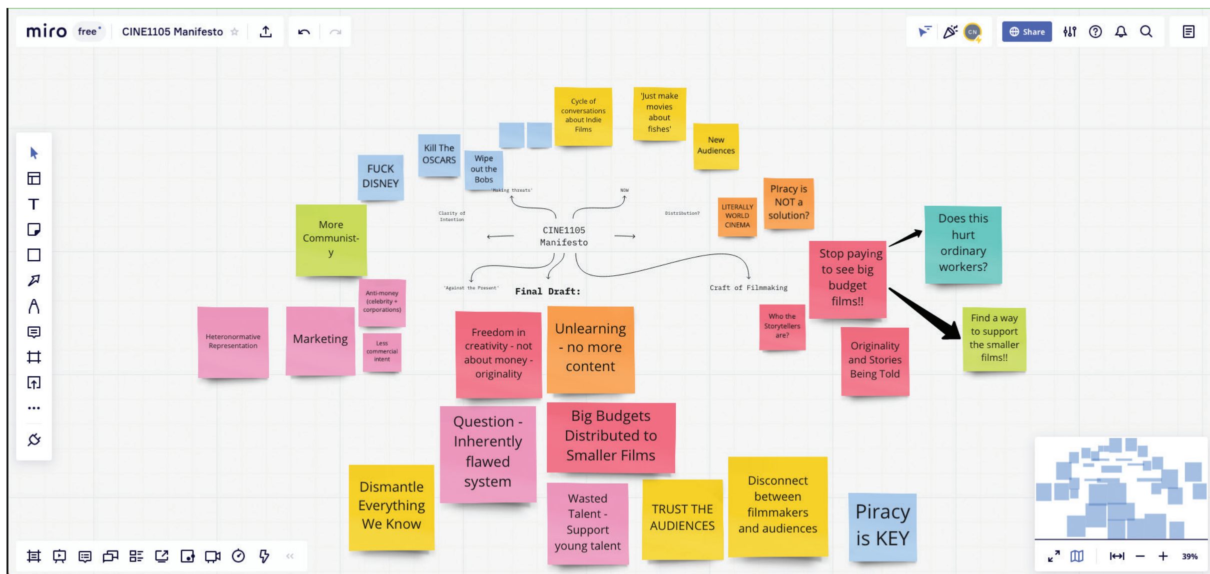


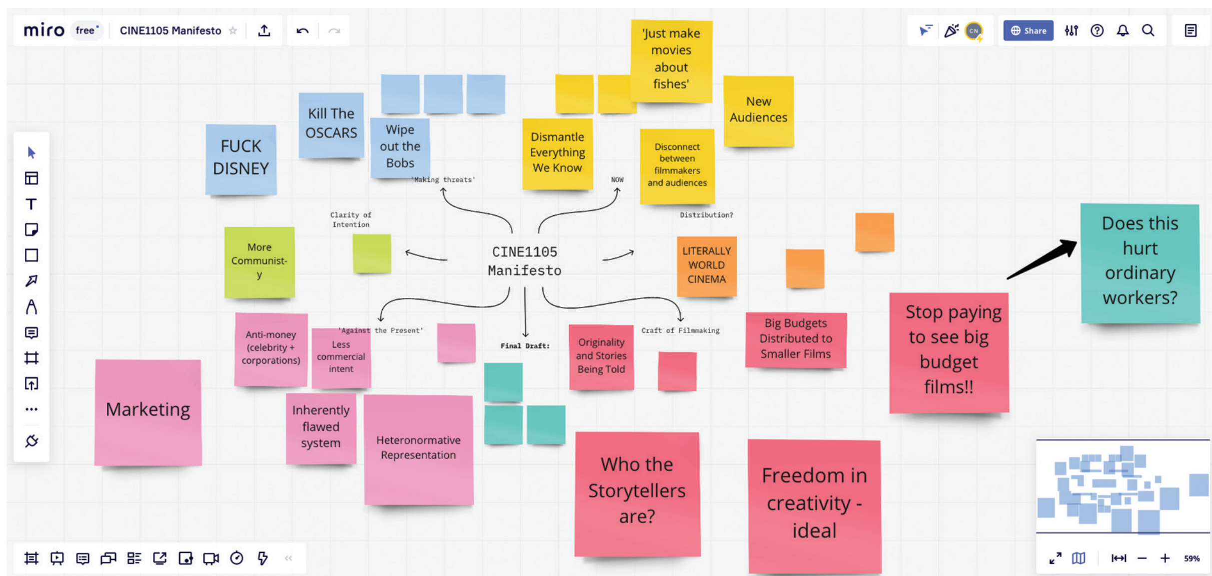
Figure 12. Manifesto – Draft 1



worthwhile endeavour, but also one which resembles what the film and television industries are often found paying lip-service to. But, through their nine-point manifesto, the students are not echoing these hollow calls; instead, they put forth practical suggestions for how this might come about.

In presenting not just radical rebuttals of current practice, but also suggestions for methods to change this for the better, the students in this class are fulfilling the remit of any worthwhile manifesto. But so too are the educators who encouraged them to reflect on these issues in the first place. Returning

Figure 13. Manifesto – Draft 2



to Dogme 95 and Danish cinema, Hjort (2013: 34), also from Denmark, makes a claim that 'the priorities and philosophies of institutions devoted to practice-oriented film education have a decisive impact on filmmakers' creative outlooks, working practices, and networks, shaping not only the stylistic (visual and narrative) regularities that define distinctive bodies of cinematic work but the dynamics of a given film industry'. The dual role of film-making educators, then, is first to give platform and voice to their students, but second, to foster changes in the material world – changes that we hope will be manifested by the future practitioners whom we are teaching. This is what Hjort (2013) notes about the Danish context: the industry dynamics were shifted by the education on offer, first at the Danish National Film School (which produced Von Trier, Vinterberg and Dogme), and then by the serial rejects of that school who founded the now internationally regarded Super 16. This latter school offered 'an alternative student-governed, student-driven and partly student-financed course of structure, practice- and project-based film training' (Hjort and Lindqvist, 2016: 103). The dynamics of a given industry can and will take time to shift, necessitating some difficult transitions in the process. But the Danish context gives a concrete example of how groups of students made sure that the dominant industries could not ignore the work they were making, and this was done, partly, through the composition of a now world-renowned manifesto.

It may be that the manifestos produced in higher education contexts, and through seminar exercises, come to nothing, as indeed have many manifestos historically, but emerging film-makers will be all the stronger for having worked together to debate, argue and ultimately respect each other's points of view – the 'synthesis of different voices', or the 'development of a group consciousness'. In this case study, the responses to the in-class exercises, coupled with the themes that emerged in the manifesto and drafts, give us a sense of what concerns our students. Particularly, it is clear that they are keenly aware of the impacts of economic capital on their prospects, but, in the context of the film industry, also of social and cultural inequalities. It would benefit academics to gather more data to help to fully understand the habitus of the students they are working with, which was not possible in this pilot. However, at my current institution, Independent Filmmaking Practices launches as a new module in the academic year 2024/5, and the manifesto exercise will return. This time around, in addition to gathering more data on the class demographics, students will also be able to partly put their manifestos into practice by making short films afterwards. Given that, for example, the Dogme 95 film-makers broke their own manifesto rules almost

as soon as they started making films (Tobias, 2013), it will be fascinating to see the extent to which the students' short films adhere to the spirit and the letter of their own manifestos, and to consider how the filmic materialisation of the manifesto-writing process might then guide their aspirations going forward.

Declarations and conflicts of interest

Research ethics statement

The author followed the University of Birmingham ethics guidelines.

Consent for publication statement

Not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of interest statement

The author is a current Editor for this journal. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the author during peer review of this article have been made. The author declares no further conflicts with this article.

Filmography

Born in Flames (US 1983, Lizzie Borden)
Dancer in the Dark (DK 2000, Lars von Trier)
La Commune (FR 2000, Peter Watkins)
Land and Freedom (GB/ES/DE/IT/FR 1995, Ken Loach)
Matewan (US 1987, John Sayles)
Orlando (GB/FR/IT/NL/RU 1992, Sally Potter)
Punishment Park (US 1972, Peter Watkins)
Return of the Secaucus Seven (US 1980, John Sayles)

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