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Transition or Translation?

Thinking through Media and Cultural Studies Students' Experiences after Graduation

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Over the past fifteen years, both in the UK and Australia, I have occasion to observe the mutual misapprehension of discipline-based academic staff on the one hand and educational developers and those developing policy around learning and teaching at universities on the other. Policy makers and staff developers frequently seem to view most academic staff as at best preoccupied with their research, at worse, conservative, poorly educated around pedagogy and uninterested in their students' experiences at university. In return, many lecturers view educational developers as patronising, irrelevant contributors to the intensification of academic work and part of a new and much despised surveillant managerial culture. These encounters take place in a context of funding cuts and constant change, in which people who work within universities are 'experiencing a sense of insecurity and identity crises as they are buffeted by changes both in demands and the resources they have available to meet those demands'.[1] As someone who has been sullied by her association with discipline-based teaching on the one hand and the apparatus of learning and

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teaching support on the other, I have found the frictions between these two roles sometimes difficult to understand and always challenging to negotiate.

An immensely useful conceptual tool for making sense of this simmering tension and thinking through what to do about it is the notion of 'instrumental progressivism', developed by communication and cultural studies scholars Frank Webster and Kevin Robins in their book *The Times of the Technoculture.*[2] Robins and Webster argue that many contemporary educational policies within universities are forged from an unlikely combination of forces: on the one hand, humanist and progressive educational ideas about student empowerment and life-long learning, and on the other, the idea that higher education should serve the economy. Consequently, some of the most commonplace policy emphases and pedagogical practices in contemporary universities have a chimerical nature. They borrow from educational progressives like Paolo Friere a desire to break down the authority of the teacher and put the learner's experience and wishes at the centre of education. However, these same reforms have been advocated by those who see the potential of such changes to make graduates into more effective members of the paid workforce. I will suggest here that the notion of 'instrumental progressivism' helps explicate the relationship between the discipline of cultural studies on the one hand and educational innovations and the people who seek to promote them on the other. Why does this matter? Here I will follow Michael Fullan, who argues that 'the phenomenology of change—that is, how people actually experience change as distinct from how it might have been intended—is at the heart of the spectacular lack of success in most social reforms'.[3]

In Robins and Webster's account, instrumental progressivism is a symptom of a wounded and collapsing educational system. I want to argue here that for those of us in cultural studies, at least, their critique is insufficient. In contrast, I want to explore the way we can more deeply understand the internal contradictions of instrumental progressivism, its dangers and its potential uses. To do this, I draw on some of the qualitative data emerging from two small-scale research projects, undertaken with colleagues in Liverpool, UK, and Sydney, Australia, which focused on the experiences of media and cultural studies students after graduation. In presenting the voices of graduates, I am not attempting to 'trump' critiques by media and cultural studies academics of the managerial logics of instrumentalism. Rather,

the narratives told by graduates and the advice they give to current students and their teachers provides a powerful corrective to what I feel is Robins and Webster's ultimate conclusion: that progressivism and the pedagogical apparatus it offers constitutes a dangerous erosion of the qualities that make universities vital institutions. The words of these cultural studies graduates suggest some directions for those of us who want to embrace, in an awkward and ambivalent way, the label of progressivism.

—INSTRUMENTAL PROGRESSIVISM

The concept of instrumental progressivism captures precisely one reason why the people in universities who are eager to change learning and teaching practices and the people whose practices they are keen to change are often at odds. In particular, it highlights why educational developers and learning and teaching policy makers are often so mystified and disappointed by the resistance they receive from people they may view as potential institutional allies—colleagues in cultural studies, for example. Nod Miller, in an account of her journey from feminist and Marxist adult educator to a senior manager at a new UK university, gives a taste of this response to her passion for lifelong learning. 'It seemed,' she comments, 'that there was widespread perception of lifelong learning as a capitalist, New Labour plot amongst colleagues with whom I hoped to form alliances.'[4] Her self-depiction here is of progressivism, or perhaps even radicalism, misrecognised.

Instrumental progressivism, as Robins and Webster describe it, is the coming together of two apparently quite disparate forces: 'an unanticipated alliance of educational radicals and government figures alert to the expressed needs of industry'.[5] Their genealogy of this coming-together traces its origins in further and vocational education in the UK in the early 1980s. Changes in educational philosophy at this time were driven by the imperatives of retooling young people for a post- or neo-Fordist manufacturing sector in recession which was demanding a flexible and self-controlling work force. However, what might seem to be an educational philosophy focusing on employment had designs on a much larger part of the person to be trained. In fact, like the progressive educational traditions from which it was developed, it stressed learning for both work and life, emphasising personal attributes, values and skills rather than technical knowledges. In particular,

instrumental progressivism sought to cultivate learners' autonomy, self-reliance and ability to independently reflect on their own learning.[6]

As this educational philosophy has been articulated in higher education, its emphases have been on transferable rather than disciplinary skills, particularly the skill of critical thinking; competencies (as demonstrated in learning outcomes) against knowledges; a move away from examination towards diverse ongoing assessment types; modular programmes; student profiling; and the reflective practitioner.[7] All of these emphases will be very familiar to readers working in contemporary higher education, where they have become, as Robins and Webster point out, a new orthodoxy across the Anglophone world. To their credit, Robins and Webster avoid the obvious critique of this odd affiliation. They refuse the move that suggests instrumentalism has corrupted the otherwise admirable ideals of progressives. Rather, they stress the fact that progressive educational philosophies in general involve what they view as worrying trends towards increased surveillance and social control.

In particular, they cite the work of Basil Bernstein and his arguments about the classification of knowledge in education. Bernstein distinguishes between 'collection codes' that have a strong discipline-based classificatory structure, and 'integrated codes' which seek to break down such classificatory distinctions.[8] Bernstein comments, 'social order arises out of the hierarchical nature of the authority relationships, out of the systematic ordering of the differentiated knowledge in time and space, out of explicit, usually predictable, examining procedure'.[9] In contrast, integrated codes emphasise processes of learning and ways of knowing, rather than 'states of knowledge'.[10] As a consequence, Bernstein argues, the assessment associated with integrated codes involve exposure of more and more of the student—their attitudes, skills and values as much as their knowledge—to monitoring and assessment. Consequently, according to this argument, progressivism and its refusal of the authority of conventional disciplinary collection codes involves the development of new surfaces of self-surveillance and self control.

—Locating critical thinking

So what are the implications of this analysis of recent shifts in higher education for cultural studies? It is interesting to note that the trajectory Robins and Webster

trace for instrumental progressivism, from further and vocational education through to higher education, in some ways parallels the emergence of cultural studies (or at least a particularly influential British variant). Key figures of British cultural studies, Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams among them, began their careers teaching working-class people in adult education classes.[11] Not all of the trends that Robins and Webster map as part of progressivist education are visible in the current contours of cultural studies, but they are products of the same kinds of historical moments and share some key techniques. For instance, one of cultural studies' key principles—the idea of opening up everyday life and personal experience to critical and political scrutiny—resonates particularly emphatically with the very feature of progressivism that most concerns Robins and Webster: the exposure of ever larger surfaces of the self to self-examination, self monitoring and remodelling.

I would argue that as scholars within cultural studies we are on particularly shaky ground if we try to fight pedagogical progressives (including the instrumental kind) from the terrain that Robins and Webster seem to claim. While cultural studies has been institutionalised as a discipline over the past forty years, with its own conferences, journals, degrees, and even star systems, its origins as an interdiscipline or even an anti-discipline, are evident in the range of partner disciplines with which it finds itself coupled or clustered. A glance at cultural studies departments finds them linked to media, communications, gender studies and even English. If Robins and Webster see the erosion of a 'collection code' as a key aspect of the declining distinctiveness of knowledge creation in the university, how are we to respond to this as a discipline that is foundationally interdisciplinary?

While Robins and Webster steer clear of overt tabloid-style attacks on cultural studies and its disciplinary affiliates, very familiar comments on the value of new disciplines, and the kinds of knowledge that such disciplines might try to cultivate, sneak into the margins of their argument. I would like to read some of these moments symptomatically. In an interesting passage they discuss the concept of 'critical thinking' as a transferable skill as a shibboleth of progressivism, a ubiquitous and arguably vacuous element of the way higher education programs are now often described. They comment:

> If one aims to create reflective practitioners who constantly scrutinize themselves and their actions, then a necessary adjunct is a quality of

> critique. It is our view that the only way such a potentially destabilizing concept as 'critical thinking' can find inclusion on degrees such as Midwifery and Business Administration, Estate Management and Tourism Studies, is to denude it of real force by limiting it to pre-established (and incontestable goals). In such a way, 'critical thinking' is 'operationalised' as a 'practical competence' which might allow the more effective delivery of babies (while the organization of welfare services is out of bound) or might reflect on how best to maximize corporate interests (but will not open wider questions about business behaviour).[12]

The claim that midwifery is a professional domain which excludes the possibility of critical thought is one which as a post-partum feminist I simply can't go past. However, I think my knee-jerk aggravation tells us something quite significant about the weaknesses of Robins and Webster's argument, just as the mutual hostility between many cultural studies academics and the staff who seek to develop them tells us something about educational change.

Identifying and critiquing the pathologisation of pregnancy was one of the important insights of second wave feminism. These critiques have had a real impact on the practices of medical and health professionals, including midwives. Power struggles and conflicts over professional roles in obstetric care continue, as conflicts over, for example, the regulation of home birth, testify. Claire MacKenzie, writing about midwifery in Australia in the wake of feminist challenges to the profession, comments 'in my own experience as a midwife, this is often a complex and contested arena of individual and institutional power relations, which includes the control of information, and how it is presented to women making choices'.[13] Discussions of contemporary midwifery education emphasise the current value placed on aspiring practitioners being able to analyse the hegemonic medicalised framings of birth and interrogate the assumptions about knowledge that are embedded in a range of types of truth claims.[14] Professional practice is seen by these writers as containing many moments of difficult decision-making about professional affiliations and disaffiliations, paradigms of knowledge production, and forms of communication—surely demanding critical thinking as thoroughgoing as any in more abstract conceptual settings.

Why does this apparently gratuitous, if by-the-by, sledging of midwifery and its educators matter? We can place this critique in the context of the other programs with which Robins and Webster take issue. What is distinctive about them? In keeping with their overall argument about the loss of purpose and direction in contemporary universities, these are degrees that are often offered in 'post 1992' (UK) or 'post-Dawkins' (Australia) universities. They are professional or vocational programs and they are outside more established disciplines. Subject to less direct critique by Robins and Webster, but nonetheless framed as part of the postmodern university, are other disciplines that share, according to them, 'performative' criteria for inclusion as knowledge: race and ethnicity, women's studies, tourism or environmental change and indeed cultural studies.[15] While eyebrows might be raised by some at the notion that cultural studies might be defined performatively, it is this 'performative' definition or use-value that seems to underpin Robins and Webster's concern about the inclusion of these disciplines in the academy.

What is wrong with such arguments? Clearly, the knowledges of midwives, for instance, are situated and invested in particular institutions and power relations, as are, I would argue, all knowledges. This is not to underestimate the sizeable challenges of being critical in situations where one is economically beholden to the institutions which one might be critiquing. Drawing out this theme, Ien Ang has discussed the challenges of undertaking cultural studies research in partnership with or for non-academic organisations. She emphasises that the reframings of research questions that cultural studies so often offers are not always what organisations want. She insists, nonetheless, that this is one of cultural studies' key strategies and one which is genuinely beneficial to all parties.[16]

Foucault offers a useful concept to counterpose Robins and Webster's scepticism about emplaced or located critical thinking: the specific intellectual. He comments:

> The intellectual *par excellence* used to be the writer: as a universal consciousness, a free subject, he was counterpoised to those intellectuals who were merely competent instances in the service of the state or capital—technicians, magistrates, teachers … A new mode of the 'connection between theory and practice' has been established. Intellectuals have become used to working, not in the modality of the

> 'universal', the 'exemplary', the 'just-and-true-for-all', but within specific sectors, at the precise points where their own conditions of life or work situate them (housing, the hospital, the asylum, the laboratory, the university, family, and sexual relations). This has undoubtedly given them a much more immediate and concrete awareness of struggles.[17]

This notion of the specific intellectual has real purchase for describing the intellectual engagements of workers like midwives. It lends support to the notion that critical thinking—where a worker interrogates not only the efficiency or effectiveness of the way practices or organisations operate but also considers questions of ethics, social justice and power relations as they play out in a particular institutional situation—takes place in many locations and professions. Graduates from media and cultural studies programs might well have opportunities to deploy critical thinking in their paid work, though that deployment may well lead to personal discomfort or conflict.

Ironically, while Robins and Webster provide a careful and interesting genealogy of higher education in its social, economic and political context, their distaste for the disparate disciplines they view as inspired by performative criteria and their distancing of such disciplines from the mission of critique appear to suggest that graduates embedded in particular institutional contexts and bound by the professional habitus of that field cannot engage in critical thinking. Yet as they demonstrate, universities are themselves institutional locations of various sorts and while there may be special dispensation for some kinds of critical thinking in these spaces, students and scholars working in these institutions are shaped in their practices and analyses by organisational demands, languages and emphases.[18] As Foucault points out, academics themselves are, in many ways, specific intellectuals.

It is interesting to speculate about what is at stake in denying an embedded, practical or vocational dimension to one's work, given Tomlinson's argument that a key move by middle-class people to protect the cultural capital invested in their education is to avoid an affiliation with the vocational.[19] Certainly, some academics benefit, just as some privileged students do, from the distinctions in the higher education system between (older) research intensive institutions and (newer) institutions that tend to offer interdisciplinary programs and focus on links with industry in their research projects and the framing of their graduate outcomes.[20] I

am not suggesting that Robins and Webster's critique of university reform can be simply dismissed as an attempt to mobilise their own symbolic capital. But we can see in this instance how critique within the university emerges from institutional locations and perspectives just as does critical thinking in other locations.

—Cultural studies graduates' experiences of transition from education

If Robins and Webster draw on a tradition of Foucauldian theory in their exploration of progressivism's intensification of modes of self-scrutiny and social control, perhaps we should reflect on Foucault's well-known comments about dangerous ideas:

> My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism.[21]

Progressivism is certainly linked to new forms (or new intensities) of social control; it is undoubtedly a danger. However, saying this is insufficient to entirely reject it, since I would argue that it also offers a range of resources that may potentially be useful to us. If there are factors that make the retreat to the higher ground of traditional disciplines and the old idea of a university difficult for cultural studies, there are also reasons to at least wade out a little way into the incoming waters of progressive educational reform.

I want to refer briefly to two small-scale funded research projects which I undertook with colleagues in Liverpool in the UK and Sydney, Australia. Each involved following up a number of cohorts of graduates from media and cultural studies programs. The Liverpool study, undertaken via postal questionnaire in 2003, focused on the four cohorts that graduated in the years 1999 to 2002. In the Sydney study, undertaken in 2008, all students who had graduated from the Departments of Media and Critical and Cultural Studies since their inception were contacted via email and online questionnaire (Liverpool responses n=94; Sydney n=186). Each involved an open-ended questionnaire asking about current paid work, activities since graduation, including training, voluntary work, creative work and travel, and the relationship they perceived between their studies and their subsequent activities. A small number of follow up telephone interviews were undertaken,

focusing in particular on the role of unpaid or voluntary work in the lives and careers of particular respondents (Liverpool n=13; Sydney n=22), although this article focuses on graduates' responses to the questionnaire.

There were some differences between the contexts of the two studies. The first study was conducted with graduates from a former polytechnic which recruited many of its students from the northwest of England, an area with higher than average levels of unemployment. Many graduates reported a need to move elsewhere in order to obtain work, particularly work in the media. In contrast, the university in Sydney recruits a large number of its students from overseas (particularly East Asia) and from its local catchment in the largely affluent north shore suburbs of Australia's largest city. This has both a lower level of unemployment and a larger local media industry than the English northwest. Many of the Sydney graduates had some practical experience in media production incorporated into their degree, while this was much less common for Liverpool graduates. The variants of cultural studies taught in the institutions varied somewhat, too, with the British program drawing more heavily on British cultural studies of a Marxist inflection, and the Sydney department focusing more on cultural theory, particularly of a European poststructuralist and postcolonial variety. Given there are very few published studies on the experiences of media and cultural studies students and graduates, the continuities between the experiences of these groups of graduates seem worth drawing out here.[22] Both samples of graduates were self-selecting and hardly likely to be representative. We would expect those with less rosy experiences at university and less narratable subsequent careers to have been less likely to contact us. We would also expect to be more likely to hear from those with stories about their family, creative, travel and volunteering experiences, since we explicitly asked for such information.

Despite it being impossible to generalise from the responses, both these research projects confirmed key themes in the literature on educational transitions from education to work. As Novie Johan summarises:

> youth transition today is regarded as being prolonged, complicated, unpredictable (open-ended and fluid), diverse, individualized, insecure, fragmented, risky and includes many steps.[23]

Indeed, some have argued that the term 'transition' is no longer useful because of its implication of a linear and one-way trajectory.[24]

Graduate respondents, particularly those from the Liverpool study, frequently reported what they described as experience of 'shock', 'abandonment' or 'being lost' during the transition from degree study to paid work. Perhaps naively, the ubiquity and heartfeltness of such comments shook me from a long-held position that the experiences of graduates, or particularly their experiences in paid work, were essentially outside my remit. Many of the Liverpool students in particular found themselves initially unemployed or in jobs requiring no higher education credentials at all, although as the time between graduation and self-reporting lengthened, reported levels of satisfaction with paid work grew. Teichler notes that part-time, contract or short-term employment has increasingly become a feature of the first years after graduation, because of the less propitious employment market and larger numbers of graduates.[25] It has been suggested that such experiences of transition to paid work are one of the key ways that graduates in the first few years after graduation assess professional success.[26] This observation was certainly true of our Liverpool respondents.

Responses to a question in the Sydney on-line questionnaire asking graduates to give advice to current media and cultural studies students provide some interesting insights into the experience of educational transition. Graduates some years out from their degrees, or at least those who chose to respond to our email, frequently express confidence about the value of their degrees in a range of employment situations:

> Choose subjects like social philosophy—they're useful in real life. Choose critical analysis subjects, again, useful in real life. Exploit every opportunity given to you—you can do anything. Look at me—dux of my high school, now a pornographer, food critic and night club promoter. Life is interesting! [2001, Sydney.]

> Not to stress to[o] much about where the degree can be used. I believe that the Media and Cultural Studies degree is much broader than that and what is learnt can be applied across many fields and vocations. These degrees provide a solid foundation from which careers in many fields can be built upon. [2005, Sydney.]

However, respondents frequently report the need to 'think laterally' and 'be open-minded' in order to reconcile the types of knowledges and skills acquired in their studies with the paid work force. The difficulty described by a number of students was not one of the adequacy of skills but of ways of imagining and then articulating how cultural studies might fit into the taxonomies and categories of work.

> I would however tell Cultural Studies students to be prepared to not know where they fit within traditional work descriptions, and to be very confused and unsure about where to head with their degree … I think the department can do better to inform students about some of the prospects available for them. [1999, Sydney.]

> That it is hard to find a job with what you have studied. Particularly if you don't have an exact idea in mind of what you want to do. [2004, Sydney.]

This graduate's account of not having a sense of what she could do as a barrier to a successful transition to paid work is repeated in the accounts of many graduates, both in Liverpool and Sydney. In their advice to current students, many graduates stressed the value of opportunities both before and after graduating to explore and reflect on various possibilities. Interestingly, even work-related learning experiences framed more as a chance to reflect and gather information than as acquisition of skills:

> Take your time to figure out what you want to do. [2006, Sydney.]

> Study more, it can be self-studying, it's like seeing the world, and decide what you like to do, and to see if you need to study more for the job that you want. [2004, Sydney.]

> Definitely undertake an internship—it gives you a better insight into the range of job opportunities and a look into the sector you think you may want to work in. [2003, Sydney.]

Some of the narratives offered by Liverpool respondents in particular emphasise the role of reflection and re-evaluation of the value of their studies later in their careers.

> I found it quite difficult to get a sense of what I could do with my degree. However, I'd like to think now I have got over my initial lack of self-esteem. [2000, Liverpool.]

> The degree was far broader than I realised and while, at the time, I thought much of it was irrelevant, I feel I have been proved wrong. [2002, Liverpool.]

> Many modules on course seemed a bit obscure at the time, but now, in the 'real world' are incredibly helpful. The cultural studies side of the course was perhaps the most challenging but ultimately the most rewarding and applicable to life. [2000, Liverpool.]

Such narratives suggest the importance of the dimension of *time* in thinking through the relationship between university study, paid work and other kinds of activity. Reflecting on learning can take time, and experiences post-graduation may significantly amplify or refract the experiences of studying. In addition, such observations point to the importance of studies of graduate experiences that move beyond the most common measure, first graduate destination surveys.[27] As Brenda Johnston's 2003 review of research around graduate employment notes, longitudinal and qualitative studies of graduate experiences are rare.[28]

This emphasis on the importance of reflection in the process of transition, I would argue, suggests that at least some of the conceptual tools offered by educational progressives may have value for cultural studies, or at least its graduates. In particular, the emphasis on reflection within the progressive educational discourse is one that seems to be helpful for graduates from generalist humanities disciplines moving towards transition. Yorke and Knight's model for thinking through the relationship between the curriculum and 'employability', for instance, emphasises 'metacognition'—reflection on one's own thinking processes—as key.[29] Of course, we should not overplay the ability of academics to promote this kind of reflection within the timeframe of a degree, or expect that students' reflection will be the same as that of graduates in later years. An insightful remark from one Sydney graduate points to the limits of reflection even as she comments on the great value of her own studies in the discipline:

> Many of the things 'learnt' from these degrees are taken in on a level which will reappear and be relevant and useful in many areas of life but often without you consciously accessing them. [2005, Sydney.]

The literature on educational change and educational transition contains cautionary tales but also reminders of what might be gained from progressivism in universities. It has been argued that there is often a 'fallow' year after transfer from a familiar educational environment during which adjustments need to be made.[30] Students experiencing educational transitions usually 'bounce back' after a period of time, finding their new educational setting even more satisfactory than the last.[31] However, a significant minority experience long-term difficulties as a result of transition. Those who suffer greater long-term setbacks are more likely to have experienced wider forms of social disadvantage. Galton and Hargreaves comment that those most at risk from the transfer process were less mature and confident, less academic, and often from a lower socio-economic background'.[32] Marian Morris similarly found that low self-image was a barrier to successfully dealing with transitions.[33]

In the specific context of transitions from university to paid employment, the work of Brown and Scase suggests that a similar pattern of unequally distributed disadvantage from transition can be found. They argue that graduates from the least-advantaged backgrounds, those from the lowest-ranked universities, were least prepared for contemporary world of work. Such graduates, they argue, lack the ineffable cultural and personal capital to allow them to flourish in an economy based around flexibility, entrepreneurial selves and portfolio careers.[34] In contrast, middle-class graduates have 'the value added curriculum vitae', in Brown's terms, 'the right personal and social skills and cultural experiences'.[35]

Robins and Webster read such research to a pessimistic end. Despite the fact that the 'new' university sector in the UK has engaged much more actively with the employability agenda than the prestigious Russell Group universities, it is the privileged graduates of the latter that seem to have the networks, flexibility and 'charismatic character' that employers seek in graduate level employment. Robins and Webster conclude ironically: 'It seems to be the case that employers' predispositions have led them to concur with educational progressives that transferable skills are of great value and then to use these for recruitment in ways which few progressive teachers would approve'.[36] Being privileged, or at least middle-class, is an enduring and reliable means of attaining such qualities which

progressive attempts to remodel university education have been unable to match, it seems.[37]

Such conclusions draw out sociological truths in ways that seem to me fundamentally defeatist, and indeed I would argue that Robins and Webster retreat to a position of conservatism around the shape of the university. Even as they acknowledge the elitism of the era before mass higher education, they argue, progressivism is not helping equalise the inequalities that pervade higher education and are carried through from this sector to employment. What then, they seem to ask, is the point of such educational changes? I am not persuaded that a viable alternative to progressivist reforms is for cultural studies to simply accept the mission of educating (perhaps critically educating) elites, the most privileged of whom, regardless of their teachers' efforts, are likely to transition smoothly to 'good jobs' after leaving university. Rather, I would like to read the evidence of the difficulties of progressivist educational reform against a broader backdrop of the difficulty of making meaningful changes in the complex social structures that constitute education systems.[38]

In a powerful recent denunciation of what he sees as contemporary academics' refusal to act as public intellectuals, Henry Giroux argues that 'academics have not only a moral and pedagogical responsibility to unsettle and oppose all orthodoxies, to make problematic the commonsense assumptions that often shape students' lives and their understanding of the world, but also to energize them to come to terms with their own power as individuals and social agents'.[39] Giroux views these aims as in stark contrast to a stripped down, individualised agenda of preparing students for the workforce. But if one of his guiding principles in teaching is producing 'critical thinkers capable of putting existing institutions in question', then the world of work is a key domain for critical interrogation.[40]

Such reflection and critical interrogation will not create extra 'graduate jobs' or enable students to escape the force of differential cultural capital that marginalise those from working-class or otherwise disadvantaged backgrounds. It is unlikely to do much to undermine neoliberal political discourses and economic practices though it may make graduates more able to identify and analyse them. But this kind of reflection may mean fewer disadvantaged students feel 'lost' and 'abandoned'

when leaving higher education and give them some critical resources for situating and understanding their own experiences.

I would argue that making space in the cultural studies curriculum for these kinds of reflections and interrogations is genuinely useful. In particular, there is some evidence to suggest that creating such opportunities to reflect on one's study and link it to the world outside university—particularly volunteering or service learning built into the curriculum—can smooth transition to work in some people who are otherwise likely to experience discrimination and disadvantage in the workforce.[41] However, we should not overestimate the extent to which such initiatives will enable students to 'transfer' their disciplinary understandings.

'Transferring' practices and habits from one context to another is no easy task. Bolton and Hyland comment flatly: 'All the empirical studies in this area have failed to produce evidence of transferabilility of skills.'[42] They argue that (embodied) skills are context specific and cannot easily be decontextualised. The variety and complexity of the career trajectories of humanities and social science graduates does not make such recontextualisation easy.[43] Perhaps a more appropriate term for the transition between study and work called for by cultural studies graduates then is not so much 'transfer' as 'translation'. The comments of graduates suggest that one of the things that cultural studies graduates need is practice in translating the categories, research questions and disciplinary concentrations of their field into the languages and taxonomies of the work place. The findings of Morris and Bennett et al. support the notion that being able to identify and describe what one can do is critical to any attempts to use habits and understandings developed in one educational context in another. Our research emphasises the need for cultural studies undergraduate programs to provide opportunities for students to reflect on how their discipline-based understandings might make sense in the context of paid work and other post-graduation activities.

The need for just this kind of translation of experiences of work into the languages and theoretical categories offered by cultural studies is identified in the advice of some graduates:

> Best thing to do then is to look at the skills you have picked up via the degree, and package it using traditional (career) terms. Create a niche for yourself by doing that… [1999, Sydney.]

This kind of translation or analytical excavation, exposing underlying preconceptions, interrogating vocabularies and noting incommensurabilities in meaning, is something cultural studies is particularly good at. Rather than turning away from the discipline's key intellectual and ethical concerns, this kind of analysis should be central to such concerns. One Liverpool graduate's reflection on the relationship between her studies and her experiences of work points this out.

> I now work in the homeless department of the county council and although I enjoy the work, the people that the department help is restricted to those that we are legally obliged to help, which I sometimes hard to accept—my ability to question things in this way was definitely helped by the course—where I might have felt something was wrong before, I was not always able to give intelligent reasons why! [2001, Liverpool.]

Cultural studies had not only helped teach this graduate the critical thinking skills to allow her to question the paradigms underpinning the way things are done in her workplace (contra Robins and Webster's suspicions), but it has given her a vocabulary in which to describe her sense of social injustice. Cultural studies already provides many ex-students with this set of intellectual tools, but I would suggest we can make the connections a little clearer.

The recent revival of interest within the discipline in questions of cultural economy and working lives in creative and cultural industries offer a wealth of resources for an analysis of the relationship between cultural studies and work.[44] This analysis can also interrogate the narrow ways that 'employability' and 'work' have been framed in public policy and discourse, and underscore the connection between cultural studies' understandings and the diverse endeavours that graduates engage in—activism, creative work, volunteering, parenting and all those other things people do alongside and after their studies. Such opportunities for analysis might happen in the context of volunteering in the curriculum or service learning, in internships or other work-related learning. They might appear in the curriculum as part of a capstone unit that gets students to look backwards to their studies or forwards to what they want to do next, or in a unit which uses cultural studies tools to analyse discourses and practices around work.

It would scarcely be worth a programmatic reshaping of the university to these ends, given the tenuous evidence that instrumental progressivism promotes social mobility in graduates. However, such reshapings have already been taking place, along with other kinds of not-always consistent and often less welcome changes, towards corporatisation, privatisation and marketisation.[45] As Ian Hunter has pointed out, the university is in many ways a shell enclosing a diversity of institutions, agents and governmental logics.[46] This heterogeneity creates some spaces, tactics and rationales that for all their dangerousness, may also be turned to some ends that those seeking a more just education system may be happy to pursue.

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—NOTES

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