From **cultural studies** to **cultural research**
Engaged Scholarship in the Twenty-first Century

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— Introduction: the contemporary crisis of cultural studies

As the first decade of the new century marches on, cultural studies has become an established global presence in the intellectual landscape of the humanities and the social sciences. At the same time, what it stands for, and what its future might be, has remained decidedly contentious. Since its emergence cultural studies has repeatedly been the subject of intense controversy. In the media, it has often been the subject of vitriolic attack, often based on sheer ignorance, wilful misconception or rejection of the seriousness of its intellectual projects. For example, the project of taking popular culture seriously as a site of struggles over identity, value and power—one of the most versatile areas of study within cultural studies— has always been the subject of facile dismissal from critics arguing either on behalf of a notional high culture or from the standpoint of a more purely 'radical' culture of resistance. Within the academy, cultural studies has had countless opponents and adversaries, especially among those who feel threatened by a real or imagined cultural studies takeover of their own disciplinary territories—be it literary studies, anthropology, or history. From these points of view, cultural studies is often seen as a menace to rigorous scholarship and discipline, so much so, as Jan Baetens recently remarked, that cultural studies-bashing is a fashionable pastime nowadays.[1]

That's the view from outside. Inside the field itself—and I count myself in—there have been no less frequent quarrels about the state of cultural studies. Indeed, the cultural studies community has always had an anxious sense of identity, with a large degree of self-doubt and a predilection to introspective navel-gazing. Is, or should cultural studies be a discipline

or not? What exactly is its object? Should cultural studies be focused on influencing policy or be an agent of critique? What is the role of theory? What kind of theory? Should textual analysis or ethnography predominate? The regular reiteration of such questions reveals an ongoing sense of crisis, a general apprehensiveness over the question whether cultural studies is able to live up to its own self-declared aspirations, both intellectually and politically.

In intellectual terms, the parameters of the field are notoriously indefinite. John Frow and Meaghan Morris's observation, made more than a decade ago, that cultural studies 'lacks an established methodology and even a well-defined object',[2] still has veracity today. Many cultural studies practitioners believe that this lack of self-definition is precisely what energises the field. For example, Brett Farmer, Fran Martin and Audrey Yue have recently commended the field's disciplinary uncertainty, presenting it not just as a key attribute of cultural studies as an academic formation, but 'as a productive sign of the field's continued growth and its refusal to succumb to intellectual or political stagnation'.[3] Indeed, much of the energy, versatility and critical edge of cultural studies has been derived precisely from its 'undisciplined' theoretical and methodological eclecticism, providing the space for researchers and students to flexibly 'mak[e] it up as they go along'.[4]

Other authors however have argued that this lack of interest in, even refusal of self-definition has now become debilitating for the field's further development. Tony Bennett, for example, has forcefully argued that cultural studies should 'acquire a better understanding of both its own concerns and practices as well as that of their relations to those of adjacent disciplines'.[5] To be sure, the conceptual malleability, methodological pluralism, and radically contextual nature of cultural studies theory and practice have been important factors in its versatility in very different contexts around the world, but these same, arguably postmodern characteristics are also the very reasons why there is so much enduring confusion, not to mention anxiety, both inside and outside the field, what cultural studies is and should be.

This persistent sense of crisis—which in fact can be a productive force in itself—is compounded by cultural studies' self-declared claim to be a politically informed intellectual practice. But what does 'political' mean here? In which ways can cultural studies, as a predominantly *academic* practice, have a *political* impact or effect? Yes, cultural studies' *interest* has always been focused on deconstructing relations of power in all its cultural contexts and configurations. Moreover, cultural studies' *sentiment* has always been overwhelmingly on the side of the subaltern, the subordinate, the marginalised. But as Steven Connor has rightly remarked, we have to make a clear distinction between political motivations and political effects.[6] Most of those identifying with cultural studies have been motivated, at least implicitly, by the belief that their work makes a significant contribution to progressive politics. In this sense, their political heart is in the right place, as it were. This peculiar affective articulation—the desire to align intellectual work with progressive social change—has been foundational for

cultural studies, as exemplified by the work of Stuart Hall and the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the 1970s and 1980s. Referring to Gramsci, Hall has described the activist aspirations of the Centre as an attempt 'to find an institutional practice in cultural studies that might produce an organic intellectual'.[7] However, Hall goes on to admit that throughout that period 'we were organic intellectuals without any organic point of reference',[8] that is, without any concrete connection with emerging progressive forces in society. In other words, while Hall insists that cultural studies should be thought of as 'a practice which always thinks about its intervention in a world in which it would make some difference, in which it would have some effect',[9] it has been far from clear what that effect might be, what real difference it could indeed make.

It is fair to say that as an intellectual practice confined almost exclusively within the academy, cultural studies is by and large seriously disengaged from the messy realities of social and political struggles of the day. Too often what is presented as radical or transgressive is no more than discursive posturing, performed as a kind of what Slavoj Zizek calls 'cultural studies chic'.[10] Connor argues that cultural studies people should abandon the 'grandiose delusion' that their work is actually a way of doing politics: 'I have come to think that the work of politics is vastly necessary and for the most part tedious; the study of culture is endlessly fascinating and pretty much gratuitous'.[11] Baetens makes a similar observation: 'Assuming you can combine both, i.e. doing politics when doing your job inside the academy, is an insult to all those who are really doing politics in the field'.[12]

Such insights seem to suggest that cultural studies academics should stop having political pretensions and concentrate instead on what they are paid for: the scholarly production of knowledge (about culture). However, such a disentanglement of knowledge and politics flies in the face of the Foucauldian truth—one of the few certainties cultural studies people hold dear—that knowledge is always ultimately 'political'. As Hall puts it, 'there is all the difference in the world between understanding the politics of intellectual work and substituting intellectual work for politics'.[13] In this light, cultural studies cannot simply give up its aspirations to be what Hall calls, after Edward Said, a 'worldly' intellectual practice.[14] He argues that to produce 'organic intellectuals' cultural studies must work on two fronts at the same time. On the one hand, they have to be at the very forefront of intellectual theoretical work—that is, produce cutting-edge new knowledge—to understand fully the cultural complexities of the contemporary world. On the other hand, however, it is equally crucial for cultural studies to be seriously engaged with the 'real' world outside the walls of the academy: 'the organic intellectual cannot absolve himself or herself from the responsibility of transmitting [their] knowledge … to those who do not belong, professionally, in the intellectual class.'[15] This is an argument for the need to develop genuine social connections between cultural studies intellectuals and others who might arguably benefit from their

intellectual capital. Hall refers to the need to embrace the 'dirtiness' of cultural studies: 'to return the project of cultural studies from the clean air of meaning and textuality and theory to the something nasty down below.'[16]

But how exactly can such aspirations be translated into concrete intellectual practice? What more recent cautious notes such as those expressed by Connor and Baetens prompt us to consider is what being 'political' might mean, more concretely and humbly, within the context of contemporary academia. Richard Johnson, one of the key figures of the Birmingham Centre in the 1980s, put it this way: 'Cultural studies is a way of being in the academy, academic or not quite academic. This means prioritising agendas from outside the academy, being critical of academic limits, but using and developing the resources we find there'.[17] To make this happen, however, we have to take seriously the material conditions of our own professional and intellectual practice. It is useful to remind ourselves that the institutional environment within which we carry out our work has changed considerably in the past two decades. Academics are increasingly bound by the requirements imposed on them by the corporate university and the government policies that guide it. In Australia and elsewhere, stringent audit procedures to assess research performance have been introduced and today's research funding criteria, such as those used by the Australian Research Council, do not only emphasise the 'quality' of research but also its anticipated 'impact', its potential for 'national benefit'. Moreover, increasing importance is now placed on 'commercialisation', on collaborative partnerships with 'industry', and so on—all in the context of governmental schemes to put academic research in the service of the emergent 'knowledge economy'.[18]

While producing critical evaluations of such neoliberal developments and their consequences for universities and academic work remains an important task,[19] it is clear that simply 'resisting' them would be counterproductive (if not futile), as it would only serve to marginalise us further than we are (or think we are). Indeed, the fate of the Birmingham Centre itself, which was shut down by the University of Birmingham in 2002 following an unexpectedly bad score in Britain's Research Assessment Exercise, is a salutary reminder of the institutional constraints produced by the ongoing stresses and strains influencing universities in the current era.[20] At the same time, I would like to argue that we should not consider ourselves completely powerless in relation to these relatively new requirements. In fact, I think that we can respond to them creatively, within limits no doubt, and turn them from necessity into opportunity because none of the new mantras—'relevance', 'national benefit', 'entrepreneurialism', to name a few—exhaust what is still possible within the contemporary university. To be sure, 'turning necessity into opportunity' is a strategic and tactical orientation very much in line with the spirit of cultural studies, exemplified by the emphasis on cultural 'negotiation'—the hybrid practical logic of adaptation and opposition articulated in people's responses to dominant forces in society—in much cultural studies theorising and

research.[21] I do think, however, that in order to do this we cannot hold on to some pure, idealistic notion of 'cultural studies'—whatever it may be. We should apply to cultural studies what cultural studies researchers routinely do when they analyse other cultural practices (say, watching television): namely, understand it as a practice situated within its distinct social, economic and institutional contexts and shaped by the outcomes of particular cultural negotiations involving multiple agents and interests. I will explore the example of the Centre for Cultural Research at the University of Western Sydney as one such site below, but first, let me briefly spell out what I see as some of the key challenges that cultural studies as an intellectual project must address in the coming years.

— THE CHALLENGE OF (INTER)DISCIPLINARITY

The first challenge pertains to the very success of cultural studies, since the 1970s, in driving the research agenda for the humanities and social sciences, and in setting in train transformations within a whole range of conventional disciplines, which have now taken up 'cultural' questions within their own areas of activity. Disciplines such as history, sociology, human geography, international relations, English, education, architecture, psychology, philosophy, economics, politics and so on have all undergone a so-called 'cultural turn', while anthropology, traditionally the discipline which claimed to own 'culture' as its distinct object, has been thoroughly influenced by cultural studies theorising. Cultural analysis is now an extremely widespread and distributed intellectual endeavour, so much so, as Johnson et al have recently observed, that cultural studies itself is now 'no longer in a pioneering situation' when it comes to cultural analysis.[22] This is now a very competitive marketplace indeed, and one of the challenges for cultural studies scholars today, in my view, is to give up their self-perception as being at the vanguard of cultural research, and start actively to learn from and engage with the accumulated wisdom of other disciplines, each of which has its own enabling concepts, methodological strategies, theoretical histories, and empirical horizons which can inform and enrich our research in fresh and innovative ways.

Another way of putting this is to say that the issue of disciplinarity is a major challenge for cultural studies. Cultural studies people like to describe themselves as intrinsically interdisciplinary, or as somehow beyond the disciplines (i.e. 'transdisciplinary' or even 'antidisciplinary'), but there is a lot of conceit and self-delusion in this kind of self-description. As a discursive formation, cultural studies, no matter how multidisciplinary its origins, has over time institutionalised itself *as* a discipline of sorts, complete with its own 'founding fathers', canonical texts, peculiar modes of questioning and reasoning, styles of writing and distinct object and value preferences (e.g. 'popular' rather than 'high' culture; hybridity rather than purity; heterogeneity rather than homogeneity; the marginal rather than the mainstream; the new rather than the old), not to mention its own journals, conferences and professional

associations. This is not at all a bad thing: after all, as Michael Warner argues, disciplinarity 'allows people to develop a line of thinking cumulatively, without starting at each moment from the zero point of maximum accessibility'.[23] From this perspective, cultural studies needs to define its own disciplinarity more, rather than less explicitly, so that we can be much more specific and reflective about the *distinctiveness and the limits* of the kind of knowledge and expertise cultural studies represents, in comparison with those of other disciplines that do cultural analysis. There are major overlaps and commonalities to be sure, but there are also subtle differences in approach and conceptualisation—the whole discussion between cultural studies and anthropology about 'ethnography' is a case in point, [24] which impact greatly on how we develop our projects, in methodological and other terms. Understanding our disciplinary limits would also facilitate the dialogue and exchange with people who work within other disciplinary contexts, including being open to what they might consider our blind spots. As Warner has remarked, disciplines 'allow people to speak in code and forget questions that might be posed from the outside'.[25] It is the opening up to such questions from the outside—and taking them seriously—that enables innovation and renewal in cultural studies, preventing it from closing in within its own consolidated boundaries. For example, in a reflection on the interface of political theory and cultural studies, Jodi Dean, a professor of political science, has argued that a conversation between these two distinct disciplinary fields is especially useful for thinking about politics at a time when the political and the cultural are so inextricably intertwined. She spells out how such an exchange might help overcome partial biases within both fields: 'To put it bluntly, political theory risks oversimplifying its accounts when it fails to acknowledge the multiplicity of political domains. Cultural studies risks non-intervention by presuming its political purchase in advance'.[26]

But the need to open cultural studies up to interventions from outside its own discursive field is also an important reason why I prefer to use the term 'cultural research' rather than 'cultural studies' to describe the work I wish to discuss here. I see cultural research as a kind of post-cultural studies, building on the competencies, achievements and aspirations of cultural studies but taking it into a more concretely social and practical direction. Cultural research is broader and less parochial than cultural studies per se, animated by a more genuinely collaborative interdisciplinarity than is usually practiced within the cultural studies community, where crossing disciplinary boundaries rarely implies going beyond selective borrowings from writings in other disciplines. As Marjorie Garber puts it in her book *Academic Instincts*, 'exciting and convincing interdisciplinary work stages a really intensive encounter of two or more disciplines', involving the 'need to learn each other's mental moves, rhetoric, and styles of thought, taking nothing for granted'.[27] Garber compares the challenge of interdisciplinarity with that of team teaching, which, she rightly notes, is more rather than less difficult than conventional solo teaching. As she says: 'Nothing works better than team teaching,

when it works; nothing falls flatter when it fails'.[28] The challenge for cultural research is to embrace and develop this kind of difficult but productive interdisciplinary work by working together with people of different backgrounds and expertise than ourselves. Obviously this means genuine 'collaboration', to which I shall return.

— Beyond the academy

This brings me to the second challenge for cultural studies. Questions from the outside are not limited to those raised by colleagues from other academic disciplines, but extend to what is generally called 'society at large'. This reminds us of Johnson et al's remark that 'prioritising agendas from outside the academy' is a distinctive feature of cultural studies, and it brings up the controversial issue of accountability. It is true that the increasing demand for academics to be accountable these days comes mostly from the government and the university bureaucracy, and it is more often than not an instrument of control, regulation, and resource management. Too often, as Bill Readings remarked in his oft-quoted book *The University in Ruins*, accountability is conflated with accounting—a quantifying, bean counting appraisal of 'good practice' that underlies the audit regime.[29] However, critiquing the latter as a crude, mechanistic and contentless approach to accountability—one that does not take account of the distinctive, open-ended nature of academic research—does not mean that the issue of accountability itself should be put aside. Whether we like it or not, academics— and especially cultural studies and, more broadly, humanities academics—do have a reputation in society at large as producing useless knowledge, and even if we are driven, in our moral outrage, to rally in defense of our cherished 'academic freedom', it still behoves us to think seriously and honestly about why what we do matters. We do have to address what David Marquand calls 'the thorny problem of how to reconcile accountability with autonomy'.[30]

Take, for example, the sensitive issue of 'jargon'—one of the easiest and most common targets of attack by hostile journalists. Humanities scholars, including many cultural studies academics, routinely dismiss the attack on academic jargon by pointing to their right to use a specialised language like any other professionals (scientists, engineers, lawyers), whose discourses are, after all, also often impenetrable to outsiders. Jargon, in other words, is the mark of a profession's autonomy. This is a valid point: academia *is* a profession whose professionalism has to be protected, and like any other professional world the world of academia (and more specifically, of particular academic disciplines) is a semi-private world, partly constituted precisely by its specialised language. As Warner puts it, 'expert knowledge is in an important way nonpublic: its authority is external to [public] discussion. It can be challenged only by other experts, not within the discourse of the public itself'.[31] In other words, the specialised language of, say, engineers and lawyers is socially accepted (sometimes grudgingly) because it is taken as expressive of their specialised expertise and hence,

their capacity to solve particular problems. Unlike engineers and lawyers, however, it is not clear what exactly the expertise of the cultural studies (or humanities) academic is.

To put it differently, cultural studies discourse isn't really enunciated to solve problems, at least not in any straightforward, technical sense. Nor does it aim to. Indeed, if the claim of cultural studies is that its more complex and more context-sensitive understandings of the world might have socially empowering and emancipating effects, then the value and significance of cultural studies knowledge—for which it could be held accountable— should derive at least in part from the ways in which those understandings might be shared with others. This points fundamentally to the *civic* role of an intellectual practice such as cultural studies, and it invokes the necessity—even responsibility—for cultural studies intellectuals to consider how their expertise might impact on those beyond the confines of their own community. In other words, we need to engage in a world where we have to communicate with others who are, to all intents and purposes, intellectual strangers—people who do not already share our approaches and assumptions. It is therefore inappropriate, I think, to defend our 'jargon' simply by referring to our professional autonomy. This doesn't mean that professionalism doesn't matter; on the contrary, it is absolutely necessary, as Warner suggests, to maintain in our academic, discipline-building practice a professional space for theory-formation and the development of new concepts, which are essential whenever we have to grasp new realities or advance new understandings.[32] This kind of work does often involve a language which is difficult for lay people to access, precisely because it wants to say something new. The best of this work usually ends up in peer-reviewed academic journals or specialist monographs, which, as Warner points out, are the outlets of professional academic expertise and, despite their formally public availability, circulate only within the semi-private world of the relevant academic community. But for cultural studies this is not, cannot, be enough, at least not if it still wishes to have a 'political' effectivity in a broader realm than the academic world, that is, if it wishes to be an intellectual practice that is serious about its status as *engaged* scholarship.

Warner mentions another common line of defense of academic jargon, which is more in tune with the professed political aspirations of cultural studies. It argues that difficult writing is necessary as a strategy for defamiliarising common sense.[33] But, as Warner rightly points out, to defend academic writing on such grounds begs the question of: 'defamiliarisation for whom?' If the defamiliarising text is only accessible to academics themselves, isn't this political strategy only effective within the restricted zone of the academic community which is already all too familiar with the strategy of defamiliarisation itself? In this context, efforts by academics—and there are many—to break out of the academic ghetto by writing for a broader audience than their academic peers are to be lauded (and, we might add, should be rewarded more appropriately by the auditors!).[34]

More generally, what we are faced with here is the very serious issue of how the work of cultural studies can be made to circulate outside the restricted zone of academia. As Warner puts it, 'academics belong to a functionally segregated social sphere'.[35] Moreover, cultural studies academics occupy only a small niche within that social sphere. But in a world where academia is increasingly required to make itself relevant in a much broader knowledge economy, there is no way to stay securely tucked away in this ever-shrinking segregated niche. Indeed, as universities are facing diminishing public funding and are forced to become more 'entrepreneurial', many of them are simultaneously redefining themselves as 'porous' public institutions with decidedly outward-looking missions—as is evident in the rise of the language of 'community engagement'.

'Community engagement' is a relatively new concept within the higher education landscape, and signals a renewed emphasis on building bridges between universities and communities outside academia.[36] While this movement is not entirely new, the term 'engagement' tends to be distinguished from older, more patronising terms such as community 'service' or 'outreach', which generally imply a one-way export of knowledge and expertise from academia into the outside world. By contrast, of crucial importance in community engagement discourse is the emphasis on two-way collaborations between academic researchers and groups and individuals external to the institution. In Marcia Finkelstein's words: 'The term engagement has been coined to reflect this emphasis on the reciprocity of university-community partnerships. Together, the participants address issues of mutual interest; together they determine the questions to be asked, the methodologies to be employed, and the means by which findings will be disseminated.'[37] Precisely what community engagement entails remains vague (neither 'community' nor 'engagement' has any straightforward meanings), but its new prominence is part of the gradual repositioning of universities, over the past few decades, as organisations that are 'networked' not only to 'industry' but also to 'communities' at local, state, national and international levels. As such, what has been called the community engagement 'movement' can be seen as the social or human side of neoliberal economic policies that have led the drive towards the corporatisation of the university sector. At the same time, the discourse of community engagement arguably opens up potential spaces for critical and democratic interventions for progressive social change in an increasingly neoliberal world. The Centre for Cultural Research (CCR) is one site where we have made a commitment to inhabiting these spaces.

— Towards an engaged cultural research

At the University of Western Sydney (UWS), where I was appointed as Professor of Cultural Studies in 1996, community engagement is promoted as a key aspect of organisational identity and culture, 'consistent with the University's value of relevance and responsibility to our

communities'.[38] Strategic plans and mission statements are rhetorical texts designed to project a preferred corporate image to the outside world, but they also serve to steer internal priorities and policies, and they circumscribe the institutional conditions of possibility for avowedly progressive intellectual projects such as cultural studies. It is in this context that what we have tried to do at the Centre for Cultural Research (CCR) at UWS should be seen. In light of the University's vision to be an 'engaged university' it was imperative for us, if cultural studies scholarship were to gain institutional recognition and support within the University, to invent ourselves as a research centre that is centrally involved in 'community engagement'. What has emerged, as a result, is our focus on a pragmatic, context-specific approach to cultural research and scholarship, which aims to generate productive compromises—negotiations— between the institutional arrangements we find ourselves in and our intellectual and dis- ciplinary commitments. This institutional 'war of position' is political work, much of it tedious indeed, involving the juggling of the complex and sometimes contradictory requirements emanating from the fact that UWS is a new university with an embryonic research culture and located within a highly charged region of Australia ('Western Sydney'),[39] as well as senior management's expectation that we would be a 'flagship' for the university by doing both cutting edge international scholarship and regionally relevant community engagement, that we would bring in huge amounts of external income, and last but not least, build up an attractive intellectual environment for a diverse group of academics, research staff and post- graduate students.

In response to these challenges we have set up interdisciplinary, collaborative projects where academic cultural research expertise is put to use in particular contexts of social prac- tice. In such projects what generally happens is a collaboration between a diverse set of aca- demics, practitioners and professionals, working together on understanding and finding solutions for challenging problems or issues which are rampant in today's complex world. Our collaborators have included doctors and nurses, road safety officers, teachers, com- munity workers, representatives of ethnic communities, museum professionals, local govern- ment councilors, health care administrators, policy advisors, planners, as well as artists, filmmakers and youth activists. Our industry partners were government departments, cul- tural and media institutions, health organisations, development companies, as well as smaller community groups. The problems these projects addressed ranged from the impact of back- packer tourists on residential areas such as Bondi Beach, formulating new strategies for dealing with the urban water crisis, to how hospitals can respond more adequately to an increasingly diverse range of clients, or how to develop tools for regional cultural planning using digital technologies.[40]

This is not the space to go into the details of these projects, except to emphasise that these are *research* projects, not simply consultancies, involving the creation of new knowledge that

has relevance within the contexts in which it has been conceived. Nor are we talking simply about 'applied' research, as if it merely involves applying already existing knowledge with no new theorising involved. On the contrary, these projects give rise to the development of grounded theory that might feed into the more abstract level of theoretical reflection that has been the focus of so much work in cultural studies. For example, a project assisting an art museum in bringing more ethnically diverse visitors into its exhibition spaces also provides the raw materials for a critical analysis of the changing place of art and cultural institutions in contemporary multicultural democracies.[41] What such projects have provided us, in short, are practical opportunities to explore and reflect on what it might mean, concretely, to engage in genuine interdisciplinarity *and* socially accountable scholarship—in 'community engagement'.

It is too early to tell how this relatively new mode of intellectual practice, which I am proposing here in a modest and experimental spirit, will be a way forward for the theory and practice of cultural studies. As well, we should not romanticise the rhetoric of community engagement that has been an important mobilising force in our resolve to pursue this kind of work: neither its intellectual satisfactions nor its political effects can be taken for granted. From what we have learned so far, however, I would like to contend that cultural research can play an extremely creative and enabling role in these collaborative research settings. Cultural researchers have the capacity, developed by years of training in critical, social and cultural analysis, to grasp and describe the cultural complexity of issues and problems, and highlight the need to understand and acknowledge that complexity rather than ignoring or dismissing it. Heavily theorised cultural studies principles such as 'the cultural' as the site of struggles over meaning and value, the situated constructedness of identity and difference, the articulation of power through symbolic practices and representations, notions of multiplicity and hybridity in our understandings of the social field, the importance of narrative and story-telling in people's constructions of self and the world, the intertwining of global and local processes in the construction of place and community, the complex cultural embeddedness of technology, the intersections of gender, race and class, and so on, are all part of a very rich and adaptable conceptual toolkit which is of eminently *practical* use in the concrete research challenges brought up by these collaborative projects.

More generally, the usefulness of cultural research pertains to the analytical versatility and expansiveness that is associated with the principles of theoretical syncretism, methodological pluralism and radical contextualism that is central to cultural studies—its commitment to 'interpreting and explaining cultural processes as a whole, in time, space and social relations'.[42] Frow and Morris once characterised the methodological practice of cultural studies this way: 'Cultural studies often operates in what looks like an eccentric way, starting with the particular, the detail, the scrap of ordinary or banal existence, and then working to unpack the density of relations and of intersecting social domains that inform it.'[43] In other words,

the particular professional skill that cultural researchers can bring to these collaborations begins with their capacity to *articulate* the ways in which concrete issues and problems are to be understood as complexly layered 'intersections' of various structural and conjunctural (economic, legal, political, historical, social, geographical …) conditions of existence.[44]

Indeed, I would argue that it is precisely in such practical contexts that strategies of defamiliarisation may be particularly effective and empowering. For example, by entering into dialogue with art museum professionals about the challenges they face in changing their institution's practices we might, through our questionings, help destabilise taken-for-granted ways of looking at things and open up imaginative spaces for new practices.[45] As I have put it elsewhere, 'the very notion that culture is always contested, that meaning is always negotiated and constructed in concrete contexts, can be mobilised and applied in myriad strategic contexts in partnership with other specialist knowledge producers and users.'[46] It is with this rather imprecise and untested, but exciting proposition that we have gone outside the walls of academia in search of suitable partnerships, and it is now one of the defining characteristics of the work of the Centre for Cultural Research.

— CONCLUSION

We went down this path for reasons that were economic in the first instance. As a research centre we had to earn external income, and in the Australian context there are grants to be gained for collaborative research with external partners, such as from the Australian Research Council's Linkage Projects scheme.[47] Here, then, was a great moment of turning necessity into opportunity—but the opportunity, in my view, has not been just economic but also, importantly, intellectual and political. In particular, this kind of work prompts new ways of doing worldly intellectual work and exploring different inflections of the politics of knowledge in academic cultural research. In this sense, the turn toward community engagement can be seen not just as a pragmatic compromise or merely a reaction to neoliberal government policies but also as a 'return' to some of the key aspirations of cultural studies in the first place.

Above all, this work redefines academic practice as a decidedly *social* practice, involving actual relations with a broad range of professionals and other social agents with very different interests and expertise. This 'socially cosmopolitan' modality of cultural research, as Meaghan Morris (in this issue) calls it, represents a critical departure from the predominantly individualist, 'ivory tower' practice that has come to dominate cultural studies scholarship despite its routine rhetoric of political commitment. Collaborating with others—intellectual strangers—who have very different professional backgrounds and concerns fundamentally alters the position and practice of the academic scholar. S/he no longer has the luxury of pursuing, linearly, his or her own interests or 'curiosity', but has to step into an interdiscursive

contact zone, where divergent knowledges are put into sometimes uneasy interaction with each other. To make the collaboration work, a common ground has to be found that of necessity involves a give and take of ideas, paradigms and approaches. For example, in many projects we have been faced with the external partner's request that survey research be included in the project, because the aura of objectivity associated with quantitative knowledge still looms large in the complex operations of institutional and governmental politics. The necessary compromises (and the ways in which they are argued for and arrived at) require moving beyond our intellectual comfort zone, having to communicate and engage with interlocutors who, tangibly, have huge amounts of intellectual capital themselves.

What are the 'political' effects of these projects? What is their contribution to social change? These are empirical questions, contingent on the particular 'outcomes' of each project, and the ways in which they are negotiated, contested and taken up (or not) by various constituencies within multiple terrains of intervention. (See the essays by Dreher and Redshaw in this issue, reflecting on two such projects.) This is fundamentally a process *without guarantees*:[48] impacts and influences emanating from projects such as these are not only relational but also long-term and indirect, produced at the junction of interweaving knowledge flows within a network of emerging social and professional interrelationships, and their myriad aftereffects. In bureaucratic terms this raises the importance of asserting new 'measures' of accountability. As Marquand argues, we need to 'capture the subtleties of real-world professional practice' and argue for 'subtler, qualitative, more specific and more local forms of accountability, based on open-ended dialogue between professionals and their stakeholders'.[49]

It is this dialogue, so often professed as centrally important by cultural studies academics in theory but so rarely pursued in practice, that the 'socially cosmopolitan' projects I have referred to have intended to initiate. To be sure, it is not easy: if this dialogue is to involve serious 'engagement' it means a drastic decentering of our own habits of discourse, not least that of our 'jargon'. It also requires us to go beyond the style of enquiry so common in cultural studies (theory-laden deconstructive criticism) and inventing modes of positive, reconstructive *intervention* (providing advice and recommendations, constructing alternative discourses) which is perhaps much harder to commit to because, to speak with Connor, it may necessitate a movement from the 'endlessly fascinating' to the 'tedious'. Or as Hall would put it, it means dwelling on the 'dirtiness' of cultural studies.

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3. Brett Farmer, Fran Martin and Audrey Yue, 'High Anxiety: Cultural Studies and its Uses', *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2003, pp. 358–9.
4. Angela McRobbie, 'Post-Marxism and Cultural Studies: A Postscript', in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler (eds), *Cultural Studies*, Routledge, New York and London, 1992, p. 722.
5. Tony Bennett, *Culture: A Reformer's Science*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1998, p. 59.
6. Steven Connor, 'What Can Cultural Studies Do?', in Paul Bowman (ed), *Interrogating Cultural Studies*, Pluto Press, London, 2003, pp. 207–20.
7. Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies', in Grossberg, Nelson and Treichler (eds), *Cultural Studies*, Routledge, New York and London, 1992, p. 281.
8. Hall.
9. Hall, p. 286.
10. Quoted in Baetens, p. 8.
11. Connor, p. 208.
12. Baetens, p. 8.
13. Hall, p. 286.
14. Hall, p. 280.
15. Hall, p. 281.
16. Hall, p. 278.
17. Richard Johnson, Deborah Chambers, Parvati Raghuram and Estella Tincknell, *The Practice of Cultural Studies*, Sage, London, 2004, p. 25.
18. For the Australian context, see, for example, the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, *Backing Australia's Ability: An Innovation Action Plan for the Future,* Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2001.
19. There is no dearth of such critiques, written especially by Humanities scholars who see themselves as most threatened by these developments. See, for example, Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins*, Harvard University Press, New Haven, 1996; Simon Cooper, John Hinkson and Geoff Sharp (eds), *Scholars and Entrepreneurs: Universities in Crisis*, Arena Publications, Melbourne, 2002.
20. For an insider account, see Frank Webster, 'Cultural Studies and Sociology At, and After, the Closure or the Birmingham School', *Cultural Studies*, vol. 18, no. 6, 2004, pp. 847–62. (Webster was Head of the Department of Cultural Studies and Sociology at the time of its compulsory closure.)
21. For an early conceptualisation of 'negotiation', see Stuart Hall, 'Encoding/Decoding', in Stuart Hall et al (eds), *Culture, Media, Language*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1980, pp. 128–38.
22. Johnson et al, p. 21.
23. Michael Warner, 'Styles of Intellectual Publics', in Jonathan Culler and K. Lamb (eds), *Just Being Difficult? Academic Writing in the Public Arena,* Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 2003, p. 116.
24. In cultural studies, 'ethnography' is generally used in a more hybrid fashion within a more multi-method framework and in the interest of a sustained theoretical argument or narrative, departing from the classic anthropological emphasis on fieldwork as immersion in an 'other' culture and 'ethnography' as a 'thick description' of that culture. However, the boundaries have become increasingly blurred, especially as anthropologists have focused more on the constitutive role of representation in ethnographic accounts. See, for example, George E. Marcus, 'The Unbalanced Reciprocity between Cultural Studies and Anthropology', in Toby Miller (ed), *A Companion for Cultural Studies*, Blackwell, Malden, MA and Oxford, 2001, pp. 169–87.
25. Warner, p. 116.
26. Jodi Dean, 'Introduction: The Interface of Political Theory and Cultural Studies', in Jodi Dean (ed), *Cultural Studies and Political Theory*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2000, p. 5.
27. Marjorie Garber, *Academic Instincts*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and London, 2001, p. 74.
28. Garber.
29. Readings, op. cit.
30. David Marquand, *Decline of the Public*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2004. p. 142.
31. Warner, p. 120.
32. This doesn't mean that academic professionalism should not itself be subjected to critical analysis. Thomas Bender has astutely pointed to the dangers of fossilisation and scholasticism in the over-professionalised culture of academic intellectuals, especially in the United States. See Bender, *Intellect and Public Life*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1993.
33. Warner, p. 117.
34. In Australia the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) only recognises four categories of publications for official annual audit: books, refereed journal articles, book chapters and refereed conference proceedings. Publications in newspapers and other general public outlets—for example, commentaries on topical issues—do not count, severely disadvantaging those

academics who put serious effort into such activity of public engagement.

35. Warner, p. 118.

36. For the US context, see for example Marcia A. Finkelstein, 'The Scholarship of Engagement: Enriching University and Community', in *Metropolitan Universities. An International Forum*, vol. 12, no. 4, 2001, pp. 7–9. For an excellent Australian overview of current debates on community engagement, see The Australian Consortium on Higher Education, Community Engagement and Social Responsibility, *Foundation Paper*, UQ Boilerhouse Community Service and Research Centre University of Queensland, St Lucia, Qld, 2004.

37. Finkelstein, p. 7.

38. The University of Western Sydney, *Regional and Community Engagement Plan 2004–2008*, <http://www.uws.edu.au/about/university/mission/stratplan>.

39. 'Western Sydney', comprising 14 outer-western municipalities of the metropolitan global city of Sydney, is often described as the fastest growing region of Australia, in both demographic and economic terms. The area is officially recognised as 'disadvantaged' in relation to the metropolitan centre and thus in need of much remedial intervention. The New South Wales State government has appointed a separate Minister for Western Sydney and the Ministry of the Arts has a dedicated Western Sydney Arts Strategy, to encourage the arts and cultural development of the region. At the same time, the suburbs of Western Sydney (where housing is relatively cheap compared to the inner city) are also where most new migrants come to settle when they first arrive in Australia, making these suburbs some of the most multicultural areas in the country. In other suburbs in the region live many of the so-called 'aspirational' class, people with young families who have been deemed responsible for the persistent electoral strength of the conservative Howard government in the past decade. For an analysis of the social, political and cultural complexity of the region, see David Burchell, *Western Horizon*: *Sydney's Heartland and the Future of Australian Politics*, Scribe, Melbourne, 2003.

40. For more information about these projects, please go to the CCR website: <http://www.uws.edu.au/ccr>.

41. See Ien Ang, 'The Predicament of Diversity: Multiculturalism in Practice at the Art Museum', in *Ethnicities*, vol. l 5, no. 3, 2005, 305–20.

42. Johnson et al, p. 267.

43. Frow and Morris, p. xviii.

44. 'Articulation' is an important cultural studies concept, referring both to 'putting into language' and the making of contingent connections between two or more elements. It therefore speaks to the context-specificity of all social phenomena and events. See, for example, Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place*, Routledge, New York and London, 1992, chapter 1.

45. See note 41.

46. Ien Ang, 'Who Needs Cultural Research?', in Pepi Leistyna (ed), *Cultural Studies: From Theory to Action*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, MA, 2005, p. 482 (originally published in 1999).

47. A substantial—and growing—focus of the Australian Research Council is its Linkage Projects scheme, which funds collaborative projects where academic researchers team up with 'industry' partners to conduct research on an agreed topic (see <http://www.arc.gov/au/grant_programs/linkage_projects.htm>). The term 'industry' is defined broadly, referring to partner organizations in both the public and private sectors. As the term 'linkage' indicates, this scheme can be seen as part of concerted governmental efforts to stimulate the emerging 'network society' by encouraging long-term alliances between higher education and other sectors. While the scheme has been designed primarily with science and technology in mind, there is growing interest within the humanities to explore avenues for participation in the scheme. The Australian Academy of the Humanities commissioned a special project to evaluate the experiences of humanities researchers in this area (see Ien Ang and Elizabeth Cassity, *Attraction of Strangers: Partnerships in Humanities Research*, Australian Academy of the Humanities, Canberra, 2004).

48. Cf. Paul Gilroy, Lawrence Grossberg and Angela McRobbie (eds), *Without Guarantees: In Honour of Stuart Hall*, Routledge, London, 2000.

49. Marquand, p. 142.