

From “Criticism” to “Research”: the Textual in the Academy

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It is a source of great satisfaction to me to introduce the first joint workshop between the University of Western Sydney’s Centre for Cultural Research (CCR), and my own Department of Cultural Studies at Lingnan University, Hong Kong. I have been looking forward to this for a long time; there is no better context than the CCR for visitors to explore the new research practices coming out of our field in Australia. Yet now that we’re all here together I must admit to a little uncertainty. It is a novel experience for me to speak in Sydney as a member of a foreign delegation, and I’ve spent some anxious moments wondering how I should pitch these remarks: am I here to tell old friends from UWS about what we are doing at Lingnan, or do I introduce my new friends from Hong Kong to the Parramatta-based environment where they—we—will be spending the next few days? Since I probably know even less about “Parramatta” than I do now about “Hong Kong”, I’ll stick to what I understand best at the moment—the Lingnan Cultural Studies program, our reasons for organising this workshop in conjunction with the CCR, and my expectations of what we might hope to achieve.

This workshop is the first activity to be held under a recently signed Academic Cooperation Agreement between our two Universities, and it could fairly be described as initiating (on a modest scale) a new kind of transnational research enterprise—not least because it brings together parties who have little in common in certain important respects. Take the two Universities committed to the Agreement. Both are so-called new universities, facing all those problems of financing, organisation and (as we say

in Hong Kong) brand definition that the term “new” suggests, and both universities happen to be the youngest in their respective cities. However, while the University of Western Sydney is a huge, sprawling, comprehensive university created in part by the amalgamation of diverse older elements, Lingnan is a small, compact, residential liberal arts university that can claim a tradition running back to 1888 in Guangzhou (where Lingnan University was a progressive Protestant establishment), but has a much more recent profile in Hong Kong as a Business-dominated College created in 1967. Under our current President, Professor Edward Chen, Lingnan College began to develop new programs in the Humanities and Social Sciences from 1995, achieving University title in 1999.

In practice, this Workshop involves just one area of each university and here, too, there is an asymmetry: the UWS participants are based in a research centre while those from Lingnan work in a teaching department. The CCR develops research contracts, trains postgraduates and orchestrates the work of post-doctoral and research fellows. At Lingnan, life is organised around close, intensive contact with undergraduates. Our Department of ten full-time staff delivers a full Bachelor of Arts in Cultural Studies, enrolling around 33 new First Year students annually. There is a small, select, postgraduate group (three of whom are here for the Workshop) but our MPhil and PhD students work by thesis alone, in the old British way, and most are involved in undergraduate tutoring. Most staff must produce research as a condition of contract renewal, but we do so on our own time. Funding is secured through competitive external or internal grants and, in a significant difference from Australian practice, those grants generally exclude the possibility of “buying time off teaching”.

Now, in Hong Kong as well as in Australia there is an insistently circulating argument for formally dividing the academic field into “research” and “teaching only”

universities. This division is not yet an official reality, having been resisted in both places by reformers with at least some understanding of the importance of research to pedagogy and, more rarely, of the importance of pedagogy to research. In both places “research universities” still run undergraduate programs while receiving the biggest chunks of research funding and the largest postgraduate enrolments, while the rest must struggle to support their often first-class research activities as best they can. In other words, in both places the publicly-funded universities remain mixed, if unevenly so, and the universities that matter are public. Nevertheless, we all know that across the field of higher education the research/teaching distinction has acquired internationally an active discriminatory force, and that within as well as between universities a real separation is informally well underway. So in combining staff *and* postgraduates from a research centre on the one hand and a teaching department on the other, our Workshop moves against the prevailing tendency towards divergence to create a new working relationship across what is increasingly a tense or fraught demarcation line in the academy today.

In the permanent condition of instability installed in the Australian academy and now overtaking Hong Kong, we tend to overwork the word “new”; I’ve already invoked a new transnational research enterprise and new research practices, as well a new relationship. What will this really mean? I don’t have ready answers, but a few things are more or less clear. Like many opportunities worth seizing in institutional life, the beginnings of this relationship were arbitrary to an extent—personal friendships, a little homesickness on my part, Professor Ien Ang’s role as External Examiner for the Department of Cultural Studies—but the challenge here and now is to extend those friendships to people from two different societies who have never met before, and to develop a rationale and a practical basis for the relationship’s future

development. Our “enterprise” is small, informal and experimental at this stage; the transnational does not have to be grandiloquent, and with this Workshop we aspire only to get to know each other well enough to form an idea of what we might do in future. So in these respects what I mean by “new” is simply something recent and as yet ill-defined, but open to development by participants who are uncertain of what they may hope to achieve.

I have a more concrete sense of what is “new” from a Humanities perspective about the research practices of the CCR with its emphasis on seeking commissioned projects as well as competitive grants, and on a mode of involvement with government agencies, community groups and organisations in Western Sydney that includes but is not limited by the cultural studies preoccupation with minorities and marginalisation. Such practices are not, of course, exclusive to the CCR; for example, at Lingnan, an excellent Asia-Pacific Institute of Ageing Studies has a similar orientation. However, APIAS is a social research unit and I think it is fair to say that doing *cultural* research on this model—in particular, commissioned and contracted research—would have been hard to imagine for most Humanities-based scholars in the West some thirty or even twenty years ago. True, many of us in those days worked hard for social movements, published busily beyond the confines of academic journals, and tried to link scholarship with activism; there are important continuities in the West between the “radical” ethos of the 1970s and the externally-oriented “professionalism” of the CCR today, which may be concealed by an unreflective hostility to professionalism as such. But among the significant differences, the idea that the themes and priorities, indeed, the very substance and the *genres* of one’s academic research might be initiated and shaped by requirements determined “outside” one’s personal field of interest would count for me as a major departure

from the tradition in which I was trained. There is a real difference between, on the one hand, spending a life-time deepening one's knowledge of, say, Milton, to generate scholarly books and articles (current options might be "sexual politics in Milton", "queering Milton", "Milton and governmentality"), and, on the other hand, spending one year writing a report for the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) and the next running workshops for a Health Centre—all with, who knows, a little queering Milton on the side.

Mind you, my own old-fashioned training came from an "outside" that exerted its own determining force (not least on "my personal interests") no less than does a research brief today when it arrives from an art gallery, a town council or a media organisation. We just didn't think about it in quite those terms. However, the training of a Humanist thirty years ago did predicate a consistency and durability of vocation that is becoming unimaginable now. On the literary side, we were shaped by and for a community ("of scholars") sharing an ethos ("criticism") and a discipline ("English", "French"...) within an institution ("the University") that was assumed not only to exert somewhat ineffably a life-long influence on us but to command life-long allegiance from those who continued on to postgraduate work—a very small number of students by today's standards, I might add. The professionalism of a Stanley Fish, eloquently expounded in his book *Professional Correctness*, still conforms to this model, which, far from being in global decline (as academics struggling with Australian conditions sometimes wishfully suppose), is deeply entrenched in elite US universities—now undergoing a strong disciplinary backlash against "studies" areas in general, and cultural studies in particular¹.

Elsewhere, such a specialised *mode* of professionalism is too costly, too exclusive to sustain on the public purse. With casualisation and the rapid spread of

fixed or renewable short-term contracts (the norm rather than the exception in Hong Kong), our time-frames of commitment have shrunk; there is no guarantee of ongoing academic work, and this alters in manifold subtle ways both the quality and the nature of a plausible subjective investment in scholarly or, in Fish's terms, "interpretative" community, in disciplines, and in the University. What will become of the critical ethos in these conditions is an interesting question, and one that does not have to give rise only to sad or depressing answers. For while the *time* we may have for academic work is reduced, the "spaces" in which our interests and trainings can be put to work are beginning to multiply; extra-mural activities that once signified special dedication in individuals are becoming ordinary—a mundane condition of employment. The CCR has a brilliant record of generating such activity; read from Lingnan, your list of projects involving road safety issues, women's health, Asian-Australian art and the National Parks and Wildlife Service has (including for me) an exotic utopian force.

I do not mean to romanticise this multiplication of spaces. "Mobility" and "flexibility" also mean insecurity and alienation, while "diversification" can just be a way of spreading yourself too thinly. We all understand this, I think: these clichés of the new academy regulate our everyday working lives, and they designate problems we urgently need to deal with rather than offering (as blow-in pundits commonly suppose) magic solutions to need. Nevertheless, these are also the conditions in which that traditional critical ethos has to be reworked, and in which some aspects of older models of radical practice as "social engagement" can be made to acquire new relevance. I tend to think that the most interesting contrast to draw within cultural studies in the West right now is not between a radical/critical past and a professional/co-opted present, but rather between two starkly divergent modes of professionalism, one of which is tenure-based and institutionally insular in its self-

presentation (“Stanley Fish”), while the other is contract-based, other-oriented and socially cosmopolitan (“CCR”).

In this context, our shared enterprise as I see it has an intellectual foundation in Ien Ang’s working paper, “Who Needs Cultural Research?”². First delivered at an annual conference of the US-based Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes held at the Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, in July 1999 (*The Humanities, Arts & Public Culture in Two Hemispheres*), this paper detached from the usual polemics and legitimization exercises buzzing about the Humanities by posing a genuine research question: who *needs* what we can do? With investigation it is possible not only to come up with answers to a question like that, but with a variety of context-specific responses that can give rise, on the one hand, to a series of local, practical initiatives, and, on the other to a cosmopolitan or boundary-crossing reflection: our answers from Lingnan in Hong Kong will differ from those that arise for the CCR in Sydney, and together we can examine and then work with this difference, “transnationally”.

Legitimation exercises are necessary; I’ve written some myself³. They keep the Humanities involved in the renegotiation of academic life, and sometimes they make space for concrete projects to form. Arguably, one of the most influential books of the 1990s in Australia was one that few people read closely and many disliked when they did: *Accounting for the Humanities: The Language of Culture and the Logic of Government* (1991)⁴. Hotly disputed at every level from that of fact to morality, this text none the less succeeded in disseminating widely the idea that it was futile for the Humanities to maintain the “incalculable worth of reason and culture”⁵ in the face of the determinedly economic restructuring of higher education that began in Australia with the “Dawkins” reports of 1987-88 and has now reached Hong Kong with the “Sutherland” report (*Higher Education in Hong Kong*) of 2002⁶. In this

respect a work of meta-legitimation, discrediting some defences while endorsing others, *Accounting for the Humanities* pointed a way towards further exploration of those “regular and reciprocal exchanges between the academy and social administration”⁷ presupposed by an experiment such as the CCR, and it put forward some fascinating history to support a case for the “always-already instrumental” value of Humanities research and teaching. However, its mode and above all its *tone* (if I may do a little lit-crit here) were “critical” in the generic sense of that term. Heavy sarcasm about what soon began to figure as the doctrinal errors of others—“whole”, “well-rounded” persons and “grand, oppositional gestures” were major targets for scorn—signalled, at least to this reader, an investment of the text in the postural extremism that it rightly wanted to distance, but more importantly its rhetoric also encouraged inattention to some practical issues. Is a “whole person” ideal always illusory in a *pragmatically* significant way? Are grand gestures never necessary? Is “opposition” in academics never quotidian, forever gestural, and, by implication, always hollow and absurd?

These are interesting questions to pose in a Hong Kong university framed by the wider context of the People’s Republic of China. Under what is often called the “minimal state” of the HKSAR and yet within (let me say as an outsider) a culture of maximal governmentality—where my local gym boasts a “Headphone Sponge Use Policy” and on the beach a rock barely bigger than I am is smothered in signs warning “DANGER DO NOT CLIMB!”— what would it mean to develop “reciprocal exchanges between the academy and social administration”? I really have no idea, but I am conscious that in this context I work for a university that wants to *niche-market* “whole person education”. This liberal arts ideal was never explicitly affirmed by my own education in Australia (the assumptions of which were meritocratic), and it is

certainly a novel, exotic and precarious proposition in the Hong Kong university system. Now, niche-marketing personality is a vocation that *Accounting for the Humanities* broadly attributes to cultural critics, but the interesting term here is “whole”; what can wholeness come to mean as, first, the goal of a university-wide curriculum and a set of pedagogical practices, and, second, as the *product* of a degree in Cultural Studies “with Hong Kong characteristics”?

Even to sketch an answer here would take me beyond my introductory brief, but let me say that the university curriculum includes compulsory General Education components, distributed evenly across degree programs in Business, Social Sciences and Arts, and a language policy that privileges English but fosters “three speech” (English, Cantonese, Mandarin), bilingual training (in English and Chinese) for a student body that on entry reads little in any language and speaks only Cantonese well. Among the pedagogical practices are: easy access to close contact with teachers, contrasting with a norm elsewhere of classroom overload and impersonality; hostel life away from home, rare for young adults in a space-cramped, familial society; an international student exchange program, providing those who stay as well as those who go with an experience of diversity and a chance to compare achievements with those of students from other places, neither of which is easily available in an intensely homogenous (97% Chinese) and somewhat inward-looking environment; and a stress on creativity, problem-solving and, yes, critical thinking that contrasts with most students’ experience of a high school system where rote-learning and drilling still rule. This may sound like a recipe for “multi-skilling” an elite in “flexibility” and “difference management”, and in a sense I wish it could be: many of our students are the first generation in their families to have secondary, let alone tertiary, education; quite a few are the children of new immigrants (from the Chinese mainland in most

instances); and most come to us with, in varying degrees, an entrenched sense of failure and low self-esteem (Lingnan is the least prestigious of Hong Kong's seven universities and few students "choose" to come). My point, however, is that *wholeness* in this context minimally names a supplement offered in response to an actually existing deficit in educational opportunity that is damaging for a real social cohort of students.

What kind of "whole personhood" may be produced by a Cultural Studies degree? This is where the *form* of Ien's question—*who needs* cultural research?—has a practical force for us that a deconstruction of the "person" and the "whole" of Western liberalism does not, or does not unsupplemented by context-specific research. If we ask, for example, "*who needs* whole persons in Hong Kong?", the University has an answer supported by findings in the USA: business does. Corporate managers seek that famous "well-rounded personality" in potential employees, and by this they mean a mix of cognitive, presentational and social skills⁸. "Cognitive" here covers critical *and* creative powers as well as a lasting aptitude for learning. "Presentation" involves not only an ability to "communicate" in speech and writing, along with a grasp of logic and composition ("coherence"), but also other semiotic knowledges—of dress codes, say, or manners—that sustain *persuasiveness* (rhetoric). Finally, social skills entail a pragmatic acceptance of difference ("to work with others ... regardless of race, gender and age") and an internalised cosmopolitanism ("international experience and foreign language facilities are essential")⁹.

This is clearly a condensed revision of an old Arts curriculum that adapts and generalises for the purposes of corporate globalisation some of the once specialised self-shaping procedures learned by "reading literature"¹⁰. Of course, it does not follow that business in Hong Kong uniformly accepts that these *are* its "needs", or that

scholars are thereby constrained to disseminate or internalise corporate values any more than we already do. However, any public university today is obliged, if not duty-bound, to promote a viable, indeed persuasive account of its mission; UWS does no less when it posits and works to create its own special importance to the economy and society of the Western Sydney region. In the militantly entrepreneurial, low-“welfare” environment of Hong Kong, it makes sense to emphasise a business-culture nexus. The hard question for a Cultural Studies program is not, “who needs critically trained, creative and difference-literate Cultural Studies graduates?”; we can plausibly say, “cultural industries, institutions and organisations do”, and foster awareness of these in our program. The hard question is how to integrate with or sustain alongside this mission those more contestatory, unsettling commitments to a politics of “culture and society” that are distinctive to our discipline and constitute its heritage in Hong Kong as elsewhere¹¹.

It would be presumptuous of any newcomer, let alone one without Cantonese, to express strong views about this; I have access neither to the everyday life of 95% of the population nor to the large network of Chinese “Societies” and “Associations” which formed under British colonialism a majority-based yet “alternative” mode of social governance, and still operates today¹². Nor does an English-only speaker really have access to the vibrant life of those non-governmental associations [NGOs] and social movements that seem *formally* more familiar to a recently-arrived Australian. However, it is also a fact of Hong Kong life that well-remunerated members of elite cultural minorities like myself are lodged, as it were, in the social body, with a job to do that has consequences for that body. So rather than dodging the question of politics with irresponsibly PC display of my humble marginality I will address it, but from a very narrow point of view—that is, through my own responsibilities as a “textual”

critic in the institutional and social context I've just outlined.

As you might expect I dislike saying "textual" in this reifying way and I'm doing it to be friendly. Widely used on the sociological side of our field, this term is inaccurate and misleading as an invocation of either a method or an object; it is, in fact, obstinately *literary* in its assumption that ethnography, historical research and cultural policy work are insignificantly textual activities. It also slyly predicates a realm of pure Practice which is greater (or lesser) in its immediacy than a fallen (or ideal) world of Text. But to rehearse even the preliminaries of a tired critique of this old and enduring fantasy buys into what we have unfortunately come to call the "text-ethnography debate", a debate that strikes me as increasingly bogus for two reasons of relevance here. One is that as we replay through this debate the modern division of Humanities and Social Sciences (as if this particular "great divide" were reparable by *fiat* in a utopia called Cultural Studies), we do so in interesting times that merit more of our attention; as cutbacks and restructuring in universities force the amalgamation of once distinct intellectual traditions, we find the textual and the ethnographic flung together in administratively unified but far from utopian Schools, Faculties and even Departments of "Humanities and Social Sciences". We may not be able to resist the overall contraction in resources that this "interdisciplinarity" achieves, but we do have choices about how we handle the outcome. Ritualised hostility, particularly of the kind that rhetorically aims to exterminate a neighbour's mode of expertise, is not necessarily clarifying of the potentials of this time or phase of choice.

My other reason for calling the text-ethnography debate *increasingly* bogus (for of course there have been and continue to be productive issues of contention at stake) is that far more polemics calling *for* ethnography or audience research are now appearing as "Cultural Studies" than substantial achieved examples *of* such work.

There is at least one simple reason for this: principled defences of ethnography and attacks on textualism—or vice versa—are much faster and cheaper to produce in our new conditions of labour than research of any kind. Research on the traditional model of “field work” is becoming rare, even in those fields where the work is mainly in the library with texts; we have no time or resources to do it in a sustained and intensive way, and we are approaching a threshold where most of us may manage it once or twice in a lifetime after completing a PhD. Tetchy or speculative essays fit more easily into the rhythm of our working lives and as “international refereed journal” items they meet the productivity requirements set by our employers and help us keep our jobs.

I don’t mean this cynically, although I do think that most such essays are defensive operations in wishful thinking rather than the bold campaigns for renewal they represent themselves to be¹³. To the extent that I am calling *for* something (and meeting productivity requirements) myself right now, it is for the focused and collaborative exploration of actual working contexts for cultural research that I expect this workshop to foster. So this seems the right moment to sketch the disciplinary mix and political involvements constituting at least one realised Cultural Studies program by introducing those of my colleagues who have come to participate in this workshop and who will no doubt tell their own stories in other terms over the next few days.

Teaching doesn’t leave us time for internal text-ethnography debates, and I’m not sure we would have them if it did. Several staff do have literary backgrounds, in both English and Chinese, but it would be a mistake for those of us educated only in English to assume that we can annex as *similarly* “textual” the practices, traditions and ethos of Chinese literary scholarship. In fact this is the first among many borders or differing lines of development constituting our Department. It is more complex

than the social science/humanities division which we also incorporate (we have left a political economist, a historian, a critical theorist and a translation specialist behind on this occasion), since only the “Chinese” side of this one is fully obliged to grapple with the difference—one that Western cultural studies arguments in English fail to admit or even to imagine. Yet it is crucial to recognise these little civilisational *différends* if we are ever to talk sensibly about transnational Cultural Studies. I have a whole new level of insight about what it means to be an agent of imperialism now that it is part of my job to help colleagues trained in Chinese literature to submit their work to the conventions of refereed journals in English, or write funding applications on ARC-style forms to the Research Grants Council, Hong Kong’s ARC equivalent. Believe me, “English” as a *language* is the least of anyone’s problems.

But there are always third terms (and American connections) to mediate an English/Chinese disciplinary split and, typically for a Cultural Studies program, few of us narrowly practise the discipline in which we were trained. Our Head of Department, Dr. Stephen Chan Ching-kiu, worked in Comparative Literature at the University of Hong Kong and UC-San Diego, but his major research is in Hong Kong cinema and popular culture--especially as these respond to the pressing, worldly questions of identity posed so acutely to Hong Kong people in recent decades. The other major practice of this textualist is as an institution-builder: as Director of the Programme for Hong Kong Cultural Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong from 1994 to 1998, he established a substantial *Hong Kong Cultural Studies* series with Oxford UP (China), before playing a primary role in creating both our program and our Department at Lingnan; recently, he has been working on Hong Kong-wide, Hong-Kong-mainland, and East Asian-based regional networks for cultural research.

Dr Chan Shun-hing is Beijing-trained and has a background both in Chinese

literary history (most recently, literary migrations between the mainland and Hong Kong after 1945) and in feminism; she is Chairperson of the Association for the Advancement of Feminism (AAF), an important NGO, and her work on feminism and cultural studies draws on long involvement in social movements ranging across such issues as housing, sexuality, self-employment projects for women in local informal economies, and the lives of older women in Hong Kong. Dr Lisa Leung Yuk-ming did postgraduate work at the University of Sussex (UK) and has experience as a journalist as well as in media studies; she studies the circulation and local uptakes of East Asian popular culture (Japanese TV “dramas”, for example), and as Chair of the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission she is involved in research on human rights sensitivity among journalists and on poverty in Hong Kong, as well as in networking with overseas human rights and labour groups.

Our postgraduates bring further involvements to the program. As a full-time PhD student, Margaret Sit Tsui uses her background in Comparative Literature and Translation to study the burden of representation negotiated by women caught up in the vast rural-to-urban migration unfolding across China; however, her interest in how rural women migrating to the factories and cities of the East and South respond to their textual use in the state’s latest Modernisation campaign is formed by her work as a researcher with the China Social Services and Development Research Centre (CSD), especially with a women’s Credit Union that aims to reconstruct particular village economies in rural China. Of the two part-time students who have come to UWS, Luk Kit Ling is a professional social researcher; she works full-time for APIAS at Lingnan while writing a PhD on representation of older women in government policy, media and social movement discourse. Cultural studies with a textual inflection is new for Kit Ling, and she has chosen it to supplement her knowledge as a long-term activist

for the housing and residents' movements that arise at the core of Hong Kong "culture and society". Kimburley Choi is moving in the opposite direction. A composer and musician, with experience in women's theatre and as a member of AAF, Kim is an Instructor for the School of Creative Media at City University of Hong Kong; she trained in Comparative Literature at HKU, but her "as-it-happens" study of the cultural insertion process being attempted for the Disneyland now under construction on Hong Kong's Lantau Island is resolutely ethnographic.

As for me, my training was in English and French as drastically demarcated disciplines with a shared classical base; Cultural Studies pays little heed now to the latter, but studying Latin, Hebrew and Biblical Studies in the late colonial atmosphere of Australia in the 1960s after a childhood spent watching Hollywood Biblical epics in the "old bush town" of Tenterfield no doubt shaped my research in action cinema, popular historiography and the work of Ernestine Hill. I have some experience in journalism and I, too, act as Chair of a small NGO, the Human Rights Council of Australia (HRCA). However, like my colleague Stephen (I imagine), I have been institution-building for so long now that the rest is recreation. Much of this work has been with journals (*UTS Review: Cultural Studies and New Writing*, now *Cultural Studies Review*) and regional research networks such as those now focused by *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* and *Traces: a Multilingual Journal of Cultural Theory and Translation*. In different ways, all three projects aim materially to sustain locally involved, regionally-oriented intellectual practices within and beyond the UK/US-based economy of publishing. As I see things (others will disagree), these journals are primarily professional in their politics, but no less political for that; they foster "socially cosmopolitan" activities across our shared yet painfully differing situations as scholars and researchers in culture. This experience (far more than "my research", I

suspect) has allowed me to work in Hong Kong and thence to come to this workshop.

So what can a “textual” orientation contribute to all this? I can remember when people who worked with texts did not claim to do research; we read, and read “closely”; we thought, talked, argued and wrote criticism. (Most of the people who taught me best did not do even the latter; they just gave wonderful lectures). One direct consequence of the drastic changes in university funding in recent decades is the partial reshaping of Humanities research by a science-based model of knowledge production which forces us to claim to do *more* than read, think and write. One way of dealing with this is to fake it: the funding application becomes a genre one learns, like CV-writing, from which nothing follows for critical practice. That can work, although a problem is arising for new literary graduates who genuinely do not understand why their brilliant exercise in queering Derrida is not deemed “research” by higher committees. A more interesting outcome, I think, is the recovery of older traditions of positive literary scholarship—historical and philological, for example—that were widely displaced from the mid-twentieth century by those practices and philosophies of close reading that did so much to professionalise the modern discipline of English. As Cultural Studies is reshaped by the powerfully geopolitical force of “culture wars” today, the expansive, research-based scholarship modelled by Erich Auerbach’s *Mimesis*, Curtius’ *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* or Peter Brooks’ *The Melodramatic Imagination* acquires new relevance and power, and all the more so for the creative effort it takes to think *past* its Eurocentrism; so, too, does the model for a formally precise, culturally “thick” investigation of transnationally popular genres to be found in Peter Dronke’s *The Medieval Lyric*.

So I would say (wouldn’t I?) that text-based study provides not only an enriched but also a sobering historical perspective on the politics of “culture” today¹⁴.

More immediately, though, such study is a field of practice in which people learn to *do* things; text work hones skills that “transfer” usefully to all sorts of endeavours, and the critique of the grandiose claims used to legitimise aesthetic education in the past has relatively little to say in this ongoing practical dimension. Of course, the value of any such transfer depends on its purposes in the context in which it occurs: if mastering the genre of the “funding application” may sustain but need not alter a given critical practice in Australia, the significance of securing such sustenance has a social and collective edge, indeed, a political resonance for, say, Chinese feminist literary scholars negotiating the hostility of colleagues as well as the demands of the globalising academy. Understood as an apprenticeship for doing something else, close reading has and always has had powerful uses—not least in fostering the literacy on which equal opportunity depends. Teaching Cultural Studies in what is for most of my students a poor second or even third language leaves me in no doubt at all about that.

Beyond these life-supporting practices, textualism can make two modest but vital contributions to both the cultural research projects and the wider social ambitions of a locally-implicated program such as ours. I have already mentioned one of these, an active understanding of genre; to be able to *work with* given differences between a memo, a media report, a commissioned research report, a position paper, a personal essay, an essay for refereeing and an Internet chat-room message (the base-line genre in English that most of our students begin with) is a pre-condition not only for participating in the world of cultural work but for having any chance of making a difference within it, let alone beyond it. The other contribution we offer is a similarly active awareness of rhetoric; I mean arts of persuasion, yes, but primarily the capacity to “speak *to*”, rather than “at” or “past”, those whom we hope to persuade. I have been harping about this for more than twenty years¹⁵. So let me just add that with

rhetoric, too, the crucial thing is to help people deal with differences—to know how to *address* varying social bodies and contexts, which means being able to recognise new ones as they arise.

If we can establish an understanding that people *practise* rather than merely “identify” genres or “analyse” rhetoric, and if we can ground this understanding in a skills-based confidence to go out and *engage* in the many complex processes of “ordering and limitation” that cultural practice entails in a “three-speech, two languages” society undergoing a “one country, two systems” transition towards a future as yet unknown¹⁶, then we will have gone a good way towards training students to work effectively across the varying institutions, industries and community groups, including NGOS, who need cultural research in Hong Kong. We may also be in a better position ourselves to imagine (in the midst of that same complexity) new ways of orienting our work towards shaping that unknown future—and finding practical ways to realise whatever plans we make.

Let me conclude by mentioning some concrete features of the near future that is taking shape around us at Lingnan now. Reading the Sutherland Report on *Higher Education in Hong Kong* gave me a strange sensation of having migrated to the past; Australian academics know all too well what happens when a government decides to cut the higher education budget while expanding participation, to channel more resources to fewer institutions by promoting “excellence” schemes, and to encourage “collaboration” and “partnerships” to make up the inevitable deficit—all in the name of that perverse dream of crumbling public sectors world-wide, the cut-price “World Class University”. There is a logic to these changes that is powerfully supra-cultural and unvarying in its unfolding. Nevertheless, we cannot know in advance how those changes will be taken up and dealt with in societies very different from our own.

Here's one significant difference between Australia and Hong Kong. In the Humanities and Social Sciences, Australian academics feted for being able to raise substantial "external funds" for their research programs and projects are very often (if not always) accessing money made available by other branches and offshoots of government; it's still public money, taxpayers' money, that is shunted around, but now we must compete for that money by spending less time on research and much more time pursuing it over an ever more complex obstacle course. This is not an option in a low-tax, minimal state environment; nor, for that matter, are Hong Kong universities likely to raise funds by charging large fees to "international students from Asia". I don't know what will happen in the long run to the Hong Kong university system. Perhaps it will be absorbed sooner rather than later by the mainland or sold off to a multi-national educational conglomerate forming out there right now; for the moment, a bout of amalgamation fever seems to be in the offing.

Intrinsic to the state of minimalism, however, is another difference with positive implications for a Cultural Studies program. Post-colonialism with Hong Kong characteristics includes that strong community sector, all those Societies, Associations, social movements and proliferating NGOs, with deep experience of how to thrive or at least survive in an entrepreneurial, self-help spirit rather than the "state-funded" mode that became entrenched in Australia at the time of the Whitlam government (and which allowed John Howard to dismantle so much of "the social" so quickly). Many Hong Kong NGOs have an established regional or transnational base. One example is the Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives (ARENA), with which some members of our Department are involved; ARENA's activities stretch from the Philippines and Japan to India, and its research publications program has attracted support from Hong Kong University Press. Of course such

entrepreneurialism is small-scale, grant- and good-will dependent, fragile in bad times; such organisations are hardly “sources of external funds” that can save a University. But this is not the point, because it not *their* purpose to bring (in Ien’s words) “a kind of dowry” to the relationships they form with academic programs¹⁷. Rather, their social purposes can inflect and invigorate ours, and not the least of the benefits of this is the enhanced capacity it brings to conceive an intellectual life beyond the University (as we know it) in a temporal as well as a spatial sense.

Similarly, an Australian-style quest for matched funding is not the purpose of the Internship program that we have established for our BA Cultural Studies Major students, who spend a period of 6 to 8 weeks over summer doing on-the-job training with a range of local institutions. Some of the NGOs I have mentioned are among the more than twenty media, artistic and community organizations that have taken part in this program; others are Oxfam Hong Kong, Greenpeace, Hong Kong Repertory Theatre, Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups, Heep Hong Society for the Handicapped, Step Forward Multimedia Company, Ming Pao Daily News, Cattle Depot College (Ngau Pang Sue Yuen)—a community college which organises classes for the public and publishes a cultural criticism magazine called *E + E*—and the renowned performance group Zuni Icosahedron¹⁸. Do not mistake me; nobody sneers at funding. However, in the absence (at present) of a state-driven match-making scheme, collaboration is not forced by financial incentives. Instead it emerges in the business-like form of mutual consultation over what can be done, whether as training or as research, for the benefit of all parties; finding money, if it’s needed, follows as part of the process.

This is a different but not necessarily better way of working than the Australian approach allows, and it pursues an interstitial rather than a “heavy

construction” logic of building support for the Humanities and Social Sciences. Certain restrictions follow from that logic—burn-out, ephemerality, over-dependence on key individuals and a sometimes disabling amateurism. But I love its inventiveness, and relative freedom from the dispiriting, credibility-sapping game of catch-up that Australians are obliged to play with the changing buzzwords of government, whereby head-kicking polemics for social engineering under one Prime Minister give way to private sector euphoria and Third Way-burble under the next.

However, once again we have choices about how we deal with whatever conditions we face and, as I suggested at the beginning, the CCR at UWS strikes me as a model of inventiveness (or should I say “innovation”?) in the Australian context now, as well as a model of the enabling force of a socially critical professionalism. The task of redefining in practice what it means to do cultural research, how, and for whom, is one that all participants in this workshop share. We have a lot to learn from you, and I look forward not only to this week but to our future collaboration.

¹ Stanley Fish, *Professional Correctness: Literary Studies and Political Change* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). Fish does not participate in this backlash against “studies”, but he brilliantly describes the conditions in which it arises.

² Ien Ang, “Who Needs Cultural Research?”, CHCI Working Paper, Walter Chapin Center for the Humanities, University of Washington, Seattle WA 98195.

³ For example, Meaghan Morris, “Truth and Beauty in Our Times”, in *Our Cultural Heritage* ed. John Bigelow (Canberra: Australian Academy of the Humanities, 1998), 75-87; and (with Iain McCalman), “Public Culture” in *Knowing Ourselves and Others: The Humanities in Australia -- Into the 21st Century* Vol. 3 (Canberra: National Board of Employment, Education and Training, Australian Research

Council, 1998), 1-20.

⁴ Ian Hunter, Denise Meredyth, Bruce Smith and Geoff Stokes, *Accounting for the Humanities: The Language of Culture and the Logic of Government* (Brisbane: Institute for Cultural Policy Studies, Griffith University, 1991).

⁵ Ian Hunter and Geoff Stokes, "Introduction", p.2.

⁶ See J.S. Dawkins, *The Challenge for Higher Education in Australia* (Canberra: AGPS, 1987), *Higher Education: a policy discussion paper* (Canberra: AGPS, 1987), and *Higher Education: A Policy Statement* (Canberra: AGPS, 1987); and Stewart R. Sutherland, *Higher Education in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: University Grants Committee, March 2002).

⁷ Denise Meredyth, "Personality and Personnel", *Accounting for the Humanities*, p.188.

⁸ See *Liberal Arts Education: Institutional Visit Document for Submission to UGC*, Lingnan University, Hong Kong, September 2002, pp. 18-22. U.S. evidence is cited from Steven Koblak and Stephen R. Graubard (eds), *Distinctively American: The Residential Liberal Arts College* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2000).

⁹ *Liberal Arts Education: Institutional Visit Document for Submission to UGC*, p. 18.

¹⁰ See Ian Hunter, *Culture and Government: The Emergence of Literary Education* (London: MacMillan, 1988).

¹¹ These concerns can be traced in local and/or regionally-based journals and publications such *Alternative Discourses* (Hong Kong), *Hong Kong Cultural Studies Bulletin*, *A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies* (Taiwan), *Dushu* (Beijing, China), and *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*.

¹² On the complex politics of colonialism and anti-colonialism waged through

Chinese associations in British Hong Kong and the legacies of this today, see Fred Chiu, "Combating the Double Processes of Decolonisation/Recolonisation in Hong Kong, or, 'Postcoloniality' as a Double-pronged Politics", *Cultural Studies Review* 1:2 (2002, forthcoming).

¹³ An example is the lugubrious, finger-wagging Introduction to Marjorie Ferguson and Peter Golding (eds), *Cultural Studies in Question* (London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1997), pp. x-xxvii.

¹⁴ I discuss this in more detail in "Globalisation and Its Discontents", *Meridian* 17. 2 (2000), pp. 17-29; a slightly expanded version appears in *Sekai* 686, (2001) [Japan]. A loopy but interesting argument for the importance of grasping the geo-political dimension of "culture wars" is Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

¹⁵ A recent example is "'Please explain?': Ignorance, Poverty and the Past", *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 1.2 (2000), 219-232.

¹⁶ I borrow this emphasis on "ordering" from the interesting and deeply un-literary work of Gavin Kendall and Gary Wickham in their *Understanding Culture: cultural studies, order, ordering* (London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2001).

¹⁷ Ien Ang, "Who Needs Cultural Research?", p.7.

¹⁸ On Zuni, see Rozanna Lilley, *Staging Hong Kong: Gender and Performance in Transition* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1998).