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## ***Culture Unbound, Extraction from Volume 1, 2009***

### **Thematic Section: *What's the Use of Cultural Research?***

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## What's the Use of Cultural Research? Editorial theme introduction

By Johan Fornäs, Martin Fredriksson & Jenny Johannisson

What's the use of cultural research? In late modern society, culture is increasingly positioned as a key force or core element, whether in management or sustainable development discourses, debates on European integration or media trends. At the same time, the value and importance of cultural research is often somewhat paradoxically questioned, and there is a mood of imminent threat and lack of confidence among scholars in this field.

The first thematic section in the first volume of *Culture Unbound* is devoted to the usefulness of cultural research against the backdrop of culturalisation. It aims to explore the impact of culturalisation on cultural research in a broad sense. This concept is a contested one. Does it mainly denote a trendy ideological discourse or a 'real' historical process? Could it be an instrument in furthering cultural research, or does it, on the contrary, risk devaluing the concept of culture, when it is inflated and spread far beyond the domains of 'proper' cultural research (whatever that may be)? What risks may be identified in using culture as a tool to further research interests? What are the politics guiding different definitions of usefulness (and, indeed, culture) in cultural research and elsewhere?

### **Culture, Research Policy and the Politics of Usefulness**

One topic in such a discussion of culture, cultural research and usefulness deals more specifically with issues of usefulness, quality and measurement in the human sciences in general, and in interdisciplinary cultural research in particular. Even if culture today is often identified as a key innovative force, cultural researchers rarely experience that their research is positioned at the fore. Is this due to the fact that many cultural researchers work in disciplines or fields that are not easily assessed according to existing criteria in research councils and other funding bodies? Or is it due to the cultural researchers' inability to convey that their research is useful? Are the quality criteria guiding cultural research different from the quality criteria of other research fields and outside academia, that is, can the 'usefulness' of research be universally defined, or is it completely dependent on the context? Could usefulness be measured in ways that give more credit to cultural research than is the case today?

There is a tension between the criteria of usefulness and the criteria of excellence in the academic world. On the one hand, quality assessment often stresses

the importance of international publication and other factors of individual merit. Major national and international research-funding bodies, established publishing companies and top-ranking academic journals always tend to rate much higher than being useful to the local environment. Works written and published in the domestic language and distributed to a wider audience locally or nationally can, on the other hand, sometimes be deemed more immediately useful to society than those with high excellence points in the big international journal. There is also a tension in that excellence tends to be measured by internal scientific criteria whereas usefulness involves other, extra-academic actors and partners. This is related to the boundary between academic cultural research and political, social and cultural practices found in other parts of society. There is a need to strike a balance between critical intellectual autonomy and self-reflexive linkages to other, non-academic interests and forms of knowledge and understanding.

There is probably no simple solution to these issues. Usefulness can, at best, be fused with excellence and critique, and all cultural researchers should probably strive for such moments. But there is no neutral middle point between them, no perfectly balanced (“lagom”, as we say in Swedish) critical usefulness that solves the problems once and for all. Instead, the research system must be able to uphold a contradictory ambivalence, with a plurality of support and funding structures where quite contrasting projects and perspectives can thrive as parallel alternatives, rather than seeking to widen a golden middle road for all.

On the one hand, efforts should be undertaken to make even critical cultural research useful, demonstrating how such knowledge-seeking helps to solve, or at least deal with, urgent societal problems on several levels. Even the negativity of critical perspectives serves as an empowering function by simply attacking blocks of dominance and boundaries that prevent people from developing their creative potential. Moreover, there is always at least an implicit positive, or even utopian, moment in even the most critical research, by indirectly hinting at possible alternative directions for history.

On the other hand, the whole discourse of usefulness needs to be seriously challenged, since a more autonomous quest for knowledge, based on scientific curiosity rather than on other, more pragmatic, interests can lead to insights that only much later turn out to be of use to others. The inherent instrumentalism implied by the concept of “usefulness” could thus be questioned in favour of the intrinsic value of cultural research, aligning the interests of cultural research with those of high culture (Fornäs et al. 2007: 28). The discourse of usefulness is thus inherently intertwined with issues of power. According to whose interests is usefulness assessed? All citizens do not have equal access to formulating problems, and critical basic research should not let itself be bound to the often short-sighted needs of dominant institutional interests in society – those who have the money to spend on research. For the same reason, it could be argued that the power of defining relevant research problems should not be left solely to the researchers, since they

partly represent the institutionalised interests of academia. Arguments in favour of the intrinsic value of cultural research should therefore be balanced against the possibilities for other members of society to gain access to the influence on knowledge-production.

This creates a complex dialectics. A critique of usefulness can be ultimately useful, although it is often the critical element that makes research truly meaningful and helpful for long-term societal development. However, it is difficult for individual scholars to simultaneously fulfil both functions: to make research useful while criticising the demands for usefulness as such. Both these positions need to be played out against each other and delimit each other's claims, so that neither deteriorates into either servile apologetics or stubborn isolation.

Cultural sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1992/1996: 340, 347f) has argued that intellectuals (in his case both in academia and culture) must be able to combine autonomy and commitment.

... [It] is by increasing their autonomy [...] that intellectuals can increase the effectiveness of a political action whose ends and means have their origin in the specific logic of the fields of cultural production. [...] On the one hand, the aim is to reinforce autonomy [...]. On the other hand, it must tear cultural producers away from the temptation to remain in their ivory tower, and encourage them to fight, if only to guarantee themselves the power over the instruments of production and consecration and, by involving themselves in their own times, to assert the values associated with their autonomy.

In arguing for a social responsibility based on autonomous forms of practice in the cultural and academic fields, including research, seminars, scholarly publications etc., Bourdieu gathered support from both Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas, who also, albeit in different terms, have been engaged in supporting the critical and socially responsible knowledge production that is possible only through a self-critical and reflexive application of field-specific procedures, nourished not least in cultural research. Their various critiques against the commercial and political governing of culture and research did not aim to isolate them in any ivory tower, but rather to enable unique interventions in politics and social life.

A complicated question is how this rather strong ideal of autonomy can be reconciled with the interdisciplinary efforts of cultural studies, which also partly strive to undermine the boundary between academic and non-academic knowledge-production. This was essential already to Raymond Williams, who was in other respects rather close to (not least) Habermas' position (Nieminen 1997). This issue will have to be left for another occasion, however. Cultural researchers in the current situation do need to defend a minimal degree of relative autonomy, in order to retain at least some scope for curiosity and critique, even if they also accept certain demands on usefulness (while fiercely rejecting others). It is not despite, but because of, our critical problematisations that we can work meaningfully for dialogues and alliances with non-academic actors in educational, political and cultural movements of various kinds.

More specifically, there are in many parts of the world several problems to solve in order to defend the specific values of cultural research in the current context of accelerating demands for profitability, usefulness and/or excellence. The precise conditions and balance between them shift between countries and regions, but from our Swedish horizon, we can, for example, identify the following, briefly summarised, issues.

As for the outflow of research in the form of academic publishing, much remains to be done before the prevailing measures, culled from medicine and the natural sciences, can be said to fairly represent the quality and quantity of publishing according to the established practices in the humanities and social sciences. In these areas, books, anthologies and national publication in the domestic language are in many cases more influential – and indeed more important – than articles in leading international journals, even if the latter serve as a useful complement.

Concerning the inflow in terms of external funding, a greater flexibility is also needed so that evaluations do not focus on a too limited set of funding options, but can accommodate a more diverse span of sources. It is also questionable whether external funding is always a mark of excellence, since the most critical research may actually both want and be forced to cope on a rather autonomous basis. In addition, research in areas with few and financially weak external partners also deserves societal support. A key aim for cultural research is to improve understanding and communication between people, and this can hardly be measured in terms of how able they are to attract external funding.

The “through-flow” of people and knowledge effected by academic education already tends to possess relatively standardised quality and quantity measures, but their links to research evaluation are sometimes neglected. There is a tendency to prioritise research and publishing merits before educational ones, even in contexts where the latter are arguably essential.

Not all publishing is academic. Various forms of communication with the general public, in the media or by other means, should also be regarded as relevant to quality assessments.

Most of the preceding aspects are usually measured individually, but there is also a specific value in the ability to build creative collectives. One may well discuss the possibility of acknowledging how research environments are constructed and reproduced socially and intellectually.

Quality measures should not be permanent and one-dimensional, but should aim high. There is no absolute quality; instead, quality is a relative concept. Quality for whom, in what respect? There must therefore be different scales for different purposes, depending on whether one is asking for the best research producer, the best educator, etc.

The evaluation procedures of research funding bodies are mostly deficient in adequately dealing with genuinely interdisciplinary proposals and projects. New and solid procedures need to be developed, to counteract the bias of the strong and

conservative mono-disciplinary system against innovative transdisciplinary projects. Otherwise, transdisciplinary research runs the risk of repeatedly falling between chairs.

The last point deserves a few clarifying words. Interdisciplinarity is a common buzzword in programmes on the local, national and transnational level, but in practice, research-funding systems are less successful in living up to the elegant phrases of innovative transgression.

Michael Gibbons (1994) and Helga Nowotny et al. (2001) opened up perspectives for the future of research where a late-modern “Mode 2” society makes traditional disciplinary (and national) boundaries increasingly defunct. While they tend to regard this as mainly a result of external pressures, Andrew Barry and Georgina Born (2008) have argued that there is also a strong internal, scholarly factor involved. Not only the societal interests demand new forms of knowledge that cross academic borders. Not least the increase in cultural studies exemplifies how such a transgressive push is also nourished from within the universities, where scholars doing cultural research have long found it necessary to forge new links and develop the creative borderlands between conventional disciplines. Such cross-disciplinary research makes the in-betweenness itself intellectually productive, producing knowledge that is not merely a combination of separate elements from single disciplines, but builds on – and produces – a growing movement of scholars who may perhaps be called “researchers without frontiers”.

Similar ideas are currently being tried out in European research policy, where interdisciplinary and transnational cooperation is often prioritised. However, both on a national and an international level, evaluating instruments tend to lag behind. According to Barry and Born, the tendency to use combinations of monodisciplinary experts in such cases misses the opportunity and necessity of acknowledging the specificity of transdisciplinary research, which is more than an additive combination of traditional areas, aiming instead at producing new insights across the boundaries. Research funders at all levels need to develop new standard procedures incorporating mechanisms to find, select and prioritise evaluators who themselves have genuine interdisciplinary experience when dealing with interdisciplinary proposals. At present, surprisingly, this is rarely the case, which is unfortunate for the creative innovativity of research at large, and for exploiting the potential contributions of cultural research in particular.

When talking about transdisciplinary research, it is important to also touch on the relationship between cultural studies as a critical intellectual movement and cultural research as a broader set of interdisciplinary research in the humanities and social sciences. Cultural studies have historically provided an arena for critical research on the boundaries between traditional academic disciplines. The transnational circuits have served as a useful interface between different traditions and perspectives. Still, there are also other strands of cultural research that are not entirely at home under the cultural studies umbrella. So what is the relationship

between cultural studies and cultural research today? Are both concepts needed, and how do they differ? Why have groups of scholars, centres and other initiatives around the world chosen one or the other term to identify their activities?

## Mapping out Different Uses for Culture in Research

As the editors, we are pleased to present a wide range of articles on this set of topics, each relevant to the discussion of the role of our own vocation, cultural research, today and in the future. Some of these articles address the initial question – *What's the use of cultural research* – more or less directly. In the first article, entitled “What's the Use of Culture”, Tom O'Dell discusses how cultural research in general and anthropology in particular can be applied in different areas of research, such as tourism and cultural economics, and how the demands for usefulness, as well as the scholarly responses towards such demands, have been articulated in different ways in different historical and national contexts.

Billy Ehn's and Orvar Löfgren's article “Ethnography in the Market Place” takes an even more empirical stance on the matter of usability. Ehn and Löfgren open their text by posing the question “What happens when cultural analysis enters the world of applied research and academics become consultants working with corporations and public institutions?” The article focuses on commercial ethnographers in Sweden and Denmark who sell their services on an open market. They serve as practical examples of how cultural analysis can be applied outside the universities, how this affects the research process and what kinds of reaction it may trigger inside and outside academia.

The next article, “‘Cultural Policy’: Towards a Global Survey”, relates the question of applied research to the specific field of cultural policy studies. Here, Yudhishtir Raj Isar approaches two major shortcomings in the tradition of cultural policy studies: “the divide between ‘theoretical’ and ‘applied’ research and the quasi-exclusive focus on governmental agency in the analysis of cultural systems”. He claims that it is essential to transcend these limitations if cultural policy research is to be truly useful in the future.

The two final articles open the perspective towards a more general discussion on the conditions and future for scholarly research. Mikko Lehtonen's article “Spaces and Places of Cultural Studies” is not concerned so much with the relationship between research and culture, as with the cultures of research and the role of cultural research within the cultural landscape that academia constitutes. In this context cultural studies represent the challenge of *purposeful diversity*: of building an environment hospitable to scholarly heterogeneity.

The last article in this first thematic section of *Culture Unbound* has the somewhat fatalistic title “The Future of the European University: Liberal Democracy or Authoritarian Capitalism?” This should not be seen as a sign of defeatism but

rather as a way of emphasising the urgency of the overarching question: What's the use of cultural research? Here, Sharon Rider points out the pitfall hidden in an exaggerated devotion to the ideals of applicability and a blind faith in the existing methods for evaluating research. She warns that the "transformation of the university into a supplier of specific solutions for pre-determined, non-scientific needs" runs the risk of sacrificing the potential for universities to contribute to the development of a liberal democracy, for the short-term payoff of providing solutions for an authoritarian capitalism. In short, it is a defence for the freedom and self-sufficiency of academic research and a reminder that cultural research can be of no use to anyone else if it is of no use in itself.

**Johan Fornäs** is Editor-in-Chief of *Culture Unbound*, Professor at the Department of Culture Studies (Tema Q) and Director of the Advanced Cultural Studies Institute of Sweden (AC SIS), Linköping University. With a background in musicology and media studies, he was 2004-08 Vice Chair of the international Association for Cultural Studies (ACS).

**Martin Fredriksson** is Executive Editor of *Culture Unbound*. He is also administrator at ACSIS and graduate student at the Department of Culture Studies, Linköping University. In December 2009 he will publish his dissertation on the relation between the cultural construction of The Author as a Genius and the history of Swedish Copyright Law 1877-1960.

**Jenny Johannisson**, Ph.D., is Associate Editor and Review Editor of *Culture Unbound*. She works as a researcher and lecturer at the Centre for Cultural Policy Research, the Swedish School of Library and Information Science, Borås, Sweden. She is Vice Chair of the Swedish Cultural Policy Research Observatory (SweCult) and member of the scientific committee for the International Cultural Policy Research Conference (ICCPR). Her main research interests concern local and regional cultural policy against the backdrop of globalization processes

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## What's the Use of Culture?

By Tom O'Dell

### Abstract

Like it or not, cultural theorists are increasingly finding themselves challenged to answer a very short but profound question: What's the use of cultural research? Within the academy the question of the usefulness of cultural research has provoked a wide array of responses, ranging from feelings of resentment or the fear of losing one's intellectual freedom to those of approval (often reinforced by a sense that one can in some way help society, or those less empowered) – and an endless number of positions in between. This article places the question of the usefulness of cultural research in relation to issues of the historical and cultural context in which it has appeared over the better part of the past century. Its point of departure rises from the author's own academic background in American cultural anthropology and Swedish ethnology, as well as the work the author has conducted on tourism and the experience economy in Sweden.

The article begins by briefly discussing the different roles applied anthropology has previously played in both Britain and the United States. This section emphasizes a need to understand the question of "usefulness" as being contextually bound. The text then moves on to consider the role culture is playing in contemporary economic life (exemplified here by the field of tourism) and to reflect upon some of the consequences the cultural economy is having in everyday life. Following this the text concludes with a section focusing upon the research challenges and needs coming from the tourism industry. This final section of the paper works to both illuminate and problematize the need which exists at present for the development of different forms of cultural research.

**Keywords:** Applied cultural research, cultural economy, tourism, sector research, higher education

## What's the Use of Culture?

Like it or not, cultural theorists are increasingly finding themselves challenged to answer a very short but profound question: What's the use of cultural research? The question itself can take different forms, and be heard emanating from a diverse array of actors. Research councils, for example, not only expect an explanation of how proposed projects relate to, and will advance, our theoretical knowledge of whatever particular subject it is that we are interested in studying, but on a growing scale they even expect a clear and concise explanation of how that work will be of relevance to society. And in the classroom students are more eager than ever to know how the subject matter they are being taught will be of relevance to them outside of academia. Indeed, before even enrolling in courses an increasing number of them want to know what they will *become* if they study a particular subject or enrol in a specific program (O'Dell 2008). Politicians for their part, rarely decry the value of knowledge, but are prepared more than ever to support research that leads to patents, new services, economic development, regional growth, and a directly measurable expansion of employment opportunities while paying much less attention to (or at least investing comparatively smaller resources in) research directed towards more abstract non-profit oriented cultural and social phenomenon.

Within the academy the question of the usefulness of cultural research has also provoked a wide array of responses, ranging from feelings of resentment or the fear of losing one's intellectual freedom to those of approval (often reinforced by a sense that one can in some way help society, or those less empowered) – and an endless number of positions in between (cf. Kedia 2008; Rider 2008, Wright 2008: 28). This, however, is not the first time that these types of questions have been posed to cultural theorists and spurred debate. American and British anthropologists, as I shall discuss below engaged questions of applicability and usefulness throughout larger portions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Bennett 1996), and continue to do so. But even if the question of usefulness has a longer history, it's important to bear in mind the fact that its cultural framing has changed with the historical context.

In what follows, I want to place the question of the usefulness of cultural research in relation to the issue of the historical and cultural context in which this question has appeared. I will primarily focus my discussion to issues of applied research although in doing this, as I shall point out in the latter portion of the text, my intention is not to reify the practice/theory divide which has fuelled so much debate in anthropology in the past. To the contrary I shall argue for a need to better understand the manner in which issues of practice and theory have to be better understood as implicated in one another. My point of departure rises from both

my academic background in American cultural anthropology and Swedish ethnology, as well as from my work on tourism and the experience economy in Sweden. In this regard it is heavily inspired by observations I have made from the border between academia and the practical realities of those working in the experience economy. And while the perspective from which I address this border is influenced by the anthropological and ethnological angle from which I am viewing it – and the fact that I am viewing this juncture from an anthropologically oriented perspective should be borne in mind – I am quite certain that the analysis and discussion presented below will be readily recognizable, even if differently tinted, to cultural analysts working in a wide array of fields beyond anthropology and ethnology.

I shall begin briefly by placing applied cultural research in a historical context. The text then moves on to consider the role culture is playing in economic life (exemplified here by the field of tourism) and to reflect upon some of the consequences the cultural economy is having in everyday life. Following this, the text concludes with a section focusing upon the research challenges and needs coming from the tourism industry. This final section of the paper works to both illuminate and problematize the need which exists at present for the development of different forms of cultural research.

### **The Shifting Context**

In a time in which cultural researchers are increasingly being asked to explicate the social, economic, or political relevance of their research, it is interesting to take a step back and gaze upon the very same question as it has come to expression in other cultural and historic contexts. Within the context of British social anthropology, for example, one finds a rather long history of disciplinary debate and tension. Exemplifying this, Edmund Leach endeavoured in 1946 to block the entry of anyone but “pure” anthropologists into the Association of Social Anthropologists – clearly seeing the academy as the home of the “pure” (Wright 2006: 30), and Malinowski is reported to have very clearly reported his position on the practice/theory divide by stating, “Applied anthropology is for the half-baked” (quoted in Wright 2006: 30).

Nonetheless, British Anthropology simultaneously found itself implicated in a rather vague borderland (that of the colonial/empire border) in which practice and theory lived in association with one another, and not so seldom, in dependence of one another. Scholars such as Evans-Pritchard, for example were conducting work of relevance for colonial authorities (and funded by them), but still had very clear academic intentions. There existed here a complex matrix of scholarly ambitions, political desires, and calculated perceptions of opportunity calling. Colonial governments needed knowledge, and funding organizations such as the Colonial So-

cial Science Research Council (1944-1962) were established to support applied research that could be of governmental service (Pink 2006: 4). By the 1980s and 1990s, as the number of people possessing Ph.D.s in anthropology swelled far beyond the number of positions available within the academy, the movement of scholars into the realms of policy, practice and business became unavoidable. However, the legitimacy of this work as “real” anthropology often remained a touchy issue, and attempts to gain legitimacy through the establishment of professional organizations proved to be less than effective as these organizations tended to suffer from rather short life lengths (Sillitoe 2007: 149; Wright 2006).

The situation in the United States was equally complicated, although while the British context of applied anthropology has been characterised as one of “serial ambivalence” (Mills 2006: 56), the situation in the US has been more continuous, if nonetheless, equally contested. While Britain had its colonies, American anthropologists had indigenous groups closer to home that they could focus their attention upon. As early as the 1930s policies such as the Indian Reorganization Act drew anthropologists into the world of policy and practice as they worked under the auspices of such organizations as the Indian Bureau of Affairs to restore tribal governance, participate in land reclamation procedures, and study the shifting context of economic development, social organization and reservation life encountered by Native Americans in the pursuing decades (Partridge & Eddy 1987: 25pp.).

Over the course of World War II anthropologists found themselves increasingly working together with the American government. Among other things, anthropological research addressed issues of how national morale could be affected in times of war, and how cultural differences might be understood to affect the processes at work here. Anthropologists such as Ralph Linton and George P. Murdock worked to train American Military personnel for duties abroad, and others participated in the development of separate and uniquely different conditions for the surrender and occupation of Nazi Germany and Japan based upon understandings of the cultural differences between the nations. And in the immediate post-war era anthropologists were similarly involved as advisors in the development and implementation of foreign policies. In this context, participation in applied contexts was far less controversial than it would become in subsequent years, as most anthropologists saw their work as a way of countering racism and participating in the attempt to defeat Nazi Germany (Ibid.: 31pp.; Wax 1987: 4-5).

Understanding culture, and working in terms of it was clearly deemed to be useful by many – the manner in which applied work was viewed in terms of ethics would, however, soon change. Much of this change would take root in the mid 1960s and early 1970s in the wake of the controversies surrounding Project Camelot and some of the work being conducted by anthropologists in South East Asia in conjunction with the Vietnam War (cf. Hill 1987: 11pp.). In the case of Camelot the American Military planned on expending millions of dollars funding social

scientific research devoted, in essence, to the study of processes of social change in Chile (Horowitz 1967). The political implications of this work, coupled with the fact that it was to be conducted under the auspices of the Department of Defence, sparked a firestorm of ethical debate within the American Anthropological Association, which only intensified when it was learned that in South East Asia anthropologists had been working with both the American Military and Royal Thai government conducting research which would benefit those countries' counterinsurgency programs. (Hill 1987; Jorgensen 1971). Among other things, anthropologists debated where the limits of "free research" should and could be set, whether political implications should be taken into consideration when conducting research, or whether "the advancement of science" was a cause worthy of pursuing in and of itself regardless of potential political consequences, and the degree to which scholars had (or did not have) an ethical responsibility to protect their informants' well-being or their discipline's reputation. The details of the debates sparked by these incidents have been covered by others (Jorgensen 1971; Partridge & Eddy 1987: 46), so I will not dwell further upon them here, but it should be noted that even if this was not the first time ethical issues had been discussed within anthropology, these incidents did push the question of ethics to the fore of anthropological attention. And even if the discussions provoked by the incidents of the 1960s have changed over time, the issue of ethics has remained a topic of debate and reflection within anthropology in a very different manner than had been the case previously. But in light of the question of ethics, it can be interesting to reflect briefly upon the context out which a research project such as Camelot could arise.

As Mark Solovey (2001) has argued, the immediate post World War II period was a time of some difficulty for scholars in the humanities and social sciences who were generally regarded as scholars of junior calibre in comparison to those operating in the natural sciences. This was the period in which the National Science Foundation (NSF) was established and its scientific boards predominantly filled by scholars from the natural sciences. It was also a time in which political conservatives viewed much of the work being done in the social sciences with deep scepticism, seeing it as an extension of New Deal liberalism. These types of political forces worked to further marginalize social scientists in NSF contexts. Under McCarthyism attitudes hardened even further and a great number of scholars opted to redefine themselves as "behavioural scientists" rather than social scientists (the former title sounded more positivist in nature, and simultaneously took the word "social" – and possible associations to "socialist" – out of the picture). Linkages to the military could work advantageously in this context to take the edge off, or avoid entirely, McCarthyist inspired attacks upon one's work, reputation, and political sympathies (Solovey 2001: 174pp.). At the time, Project Camelot would have been one of the largest social science projects ever funded in the US. It was never initiated and died while still in the planning stages, but if some

scholars found the prospects of this research project appealing, part of the explanation may lie in the circumstances of the times. Economic and political realities worked together here, as well as in the previous contexts I have discussed, to define the realm of possibilities and impossibilities, but the border between applied and non-applied perspectives, as it turns out, has not always been crystal clear.

As I am arguing, the realm of the cultural has long had the uneasy characteristics of a “force field” (cf. Amin & Thrift 2007: 152) – a source of energy and tension – deriving a special kind of power from its ability to attract and link the attention of academic, political and economic interests. But force fields tend to be somewhat unstable, pulsing entities whose characteristics and orientation can change to meet the needs, demands, and risks of new situations. This becomes particularly evident as we move our discussion forward in time to the years around the new millennium. Where the military had once stood as a viable funding alternative for some, the “free market” now seems to have partially taken its place, offering a wide array of opportunities as businesses and governments increasingly come to identify the realm of the cultural (defined in terms of identity, creativity and the general desire to mobilize the ephemeral) as a significant source of potential economic growth. But now we are moving once again into yet another new context – a context which scholars are increasingly referring to as the cultural economy.

### **Transformation in the Blur**

As other scholars have pointed out, the cultural economy is a context in which entrepreneurs are ever borrowing concepts once anchored in disciplines such as anthropology and sociology and freely invoking them to their own advantage as they sell products, and services through appeals to culture, lifestyle, identity, aura, and authenticity (Aronsson 2007: 16pp.; Löfgren & Willim 2005: 12). But as they appropriate these concepts and fashion them to their own needs, they change (or perhaps one could say, “translate”) them in the process.

Take culture, in the context of tourism today, for example. As a commodity of tourism, “culture” is constantly being packaged and sold to us in terms of such things as difference, otherness, heritage, song, dance, food, music, and art (cf. Craik 1997; Clifford 1997; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Macdonald 1997). More often than not, the processes of commoditization at work here involve parallel processes of delimitation, segmentation, and enclosure as culture is reified as a thing – a “local culture”, an alteric experience of food, art, another way of life, a particular interpretation of the past, etc. Rather than being understood as a process, it is handled as an object. To some extent, this is an inevitable outcome of the market process. In order to sell products marketers have to be able to convince consumers of the manner in which the commodities they are selling are different

from those being sold by others (cf. Callon, Méadel & Raberharisoa 2002). The processes of reification that are at work here make it possible for place marketers to create an aura around specific places, and to brand cities. They work to form and affect tourist expectations (Ooi 2005), and provide locals with a ready made story or image in relation to which they can (in the best of cases) position themselves and their products.

Culture, in this context is often understood as something highly positive, benignly pleasant, entertaining, and interesting. However, the cultural economy of tourism also involves less pleasant processes. As John Hannigan has argued (1998) urban renewal projects designed to attract tourists and turn cities into more exciting places of entertainment and cultural consumption, have an overwhelming tendency to marginalize politically and economically weaker groups in those cities. This point was brought home by comments made to me by a leading strategist from one of Copenhagen's largest and most influential tourist organizations. From the perspective of his organization, the attractiveness of Copenhagen as a destination would be increased if youths and immigrants could be moved out of the center of town where tourists tended to congregate. These segments of the local population simply did not fit in with the image of Copenhagen that his organization was trying to create. As a consequence, it was with great approval that he watched as plans were drawn up to convert one of the larger arcades and entertainment centers in downtown Copenhagen (a place in which youths and immigrants tended to congregate) into an expensive luxury hotel.

Similar processes could be found at work in Österlen (a rural geographic portion of southeastern Sweden) in the early years of the new millennium as members of a local village council discussed plans to create new job opportunities and the possibility for economic growth in their local community through investments in the tourists industry. In this case, it was the people of Kåseberga who, together with local politicians and other "experts" (myself included) discussed plans to develop *Ales stenar* (an archaeological site comprised of a 67 meter long Stone Henge-like ship barrow constructed around 600 AD) into a larger year-round attraction. An architectural competition was started to find an appropriate design for a potential museum dedicated to *Ales stenar*. Amongst the three finalists was a spectacular three story glass building to be built into the hillside on the backside of the village. It was to include a permanent exhibition over *Ales stenar*, an auditorium that could be used to accommodate school classes and other lecture functions, a space for temporary art exhibitions, a new modern restaurant intended to serve gourmet foods on the top floor, and from the restaurant an exit leading directly out to the *Ales stenar*. While some saw the possibility of using such a monumental building as a possible flagship that could help position Kåseberga as a site of central importance for tourism in the region, others, including a local retired fisherman whose house would neighbor this new glass flagship were more critical and wondered if such an extravagant building would help Kåseberga, or

only function as an out of place eyesore detracting from what they saw as the charm of an otherwise simple Scanian harbor and village.

The examples of Copenhagen and Kåseberga illuminate some of the classical problems generated out of attempts to delineate culture and package it as a commodity for touristic purposes. They concern the manner in which borders of inclusion and exclusion are drawn up, and the effects they have for all parties involved. But they also wake questions of how the power to define those borders is distributed through society. As the situation in Copenhagen illustrates, when culture is reified it can readily be mobilized and positioned to the advantage of those who are already empowered. Events need not always turn out this way, but as pressure mounts upon place marketers, regional and urban planners, as well as smaller interests groups in local communities (to name just a few among the plethora of other actors in the cultural economy) to convert culture into profit bearing capital, then there is reason to critically reflect upon the question of what happens to the silenced voices of those who are not empowered. As culture is invoked to turn a profit, what are the consequences of this movement, and for whom? And what, if any role might cultural analysts be able to play (or be expected to play) in these processes at present and in the future?

In the case of Kåseberga debates concerned, among other things, competing ideals over the physical and social arrangement of the local community, but they even concerned issues of economic sustainability and the central question of how large an investment that community could risk bearing. The case may be that “the market” is dependent upon processes of reification in its endeavor to package and sell culture, but when culture (understood as the ephemeral process that it is) is both everywhere and nowhere at the same time, then how can one truly be sure that any investments in this economy will have bearing? The answer may be “careful market analysis” in the case of large scale projects, but as the scale of those projects diminish along with their research and analysis budgets, then what types of safety nets still exist? As Hannigan points out (1998) investments in the cultural economy of tourism and experience production have a tendency to bear a great deal of risk with them. Consequently, as the people of Kåseberga weigh their options, one is struck by the fact that there is a need for knowledge here. And this brings me to the border (which I think is all too often fetishized in an unproductive manner as a border of radical alterity) between academics and practitioners in the cultural economy.

### **Borders of Rigidity in Academia and Business**

The years around the new millennium saw the publication of two important documents outlining strategies for the development and growth of the tourist industry in Sweden: *Turismforskning 2005: Nationellt forsknings- och utvecklings-*

*sprogram* (1999)<sup>1</sup> (Tourism Research 2005: A National Research and Developmental Program), and *Framtidsprogrammet: Strategier för tillväxt I den svenska rese- och turistindustrin* (2001)<sup>2</sup> (Program for the Future: Strategies for Growth in the Swedish Travel and Tourism Industry). Both documents pointed to the important role tourism played for the Swedish economy, but they also argued for the need to intensify the level of sector oriented research being conducted. However, as the authors of these documents pointed out, a number of hindrances lay in the way for such a development. Among the problems cited was the fact that the level of education in the field needed to be raised and adapted to better meet the needs of the industry. The study of tourism was a relatively new area of research interest suffering from a low academic status. These two problems were themselves compounded by the fact that the field lacked professors holding research positions who could focus their work upon issues of importance for the industry. And all of this ultimately inhibited the flow of research finances to the field of tourism.

Nearly a decade later the situation has changed slightly. Tourism has become increasingly institutionalized through the establishment and development of a growing number of university programs and degrees. In conjunction with this growth it has been intellectually fortified by an expanding cadre of scholars devoting their efforts to the study of tourism and related phenomena. And in recent years it has seen the establishment of a Scandinavian based international journal through which scholars have been able to share and spread their findings. The subject is maturing, but the ability of scholars to conduct research in this area of study remains hampered by several factors. A number of the problems cited in the 1999 report remain intact, including a lack of representation by senior researchers on the evaluation boards of Sweden's largest and most important research funds. The situation is further complicated by the fact that, with a few exceptions, the branch is dominated by a relatively large number of small businesses with limited resources. This structural dimension of the tourism industry has impaired the development of sector financed scholarship.

Despite this structural problem, however, attempts have been made to begin to establish a broader sector based platform for tourism research. One of the more recent and notable movements in this directions was undertaken by VINNOVA (The Swedish Governmental Agency for Innovation Systems) and a few other key branch actors in the spring of 2007. A limited number of businesses and organizations working with tourism were invited to join VINNOVA and design four to five new and innovatively oriented research projects which they deemed to be of utmost importance.<sup>3</sup> The tone for the work that would follow was set at the first meeting of branch representatives in which it was emphatically pointed out that the one thing the branch did not need was academic research producing abstract results and theories. As one representative pointed out, he had to produce quarterly reports defining how his company's resources were being used, and he therefore needed to see concrete measurable results within a half year or so. Others

concurrent and the projects that were launched tended to be more oriented towards the development and implementation of concrete services and products than the undertaking of actual research.

I describe this case at length here because it tends to point to a number of problems that are currently facing scholars and practitioners in the field of tourism, and while the example focuses upon tourism specifically, I suspect that the situation is not dramatically different in many other areas of the cultural economy.

The problem here is that, on the one hand, efforts that would lead to increasing the academic status of the field of tourism (and that would facilitate the flow of research funding into that field of study from existing established financiers such as the Swedish Research Council and The Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation) require a high degree of free scholarly research. The argument often put forward by tourism scholars is that such research ultimately leads to the promotion of more scholars to the level of professor who in turn can give the branch both the knowledge it needs specific to the Swedish context, and a weight of legitimacy when arguing for the branch in political contexts. On the other hand, actors in the industry are eager to receive practical hands on information that addresses their particular problems now or in the very near future. They frequently do not find the connection between abstract theories and practical utility as immediately apparent.

It would be simple to say that the distinction between these two research objectives need not be exclusionary, and indeed, they are not. However, as we approach the ten year mark since the publication of *Turismforskning 2005: Nationellt forsknings- och utvecklingsprogram*, there is reason to pause and reflect upon the fact that tourism is one segment of the cultural economy in need of different types of research. Quick and short term projects may work well to satisfy the immediate needs of particular actors, but longer term projects are better suited for providing the broader theoretical knowledge needed as a base for these smaller projects. The branch at present, for structural and cultural reasons, seems unprepared to take long term initiatives. The question then is, to what extent are scholars within the academy prepared and willing to engage themselves in small consultant-like projects in which they are intellectually steered and economically dependent upon the businesses or organization funding the research. Phrased somewhat differently, one can wonder to what extent the cultural economy may be considered as not only an arena of current scholarly interest and study, but even a potential site of work for cultural analysts.

## **Cultural Analysis Beyond the University**

A review of the literature shows that a great deal of effort has been expended over the course of the past decade studying aspects of the cultural economy.<sup>4</sup> Scholars in the humanities and social sciences have a great deal to say here, but as student

enrolments decline, and those young people who do decide to go on to higher education increasingly consider issues of employability when choosing an education, it may be appropriate to reflect upon the manner in which the skills and knowledge that cultural analysts have won through the study of culture and economy might be better adapted to the classroom. Some work in this direction is already underway within anthropology. Terry Redding (2008: 30) has for example pointed to a handful of programs working in this direction in the United States, the situation in Britain is less developed (Pink 2006: 20) and in Scandinavia Umeå University offers degrees in Cultural Analysis and Cultural Entrepreneurship, while the Departments of Ethnology in Lund and Copenhagen offer a joint International Masters in Applied Cultural Analysis.

Movement in this direction is interesting and challenging as it once again blurs the culture/economy border, repositioning the academic, moving her/him from the role of the independent observer to that of the employed practitioner or entrepreneur. And once again, as in the case with the concept of culture as it moves from one field of knowledge – and the practice of knowledge – to another (as discussed above) the dynamic processes laden in borders and border crossings bear with them the powers of transformation. In this case, they involve the transformation of how we view and understand the knowledge that we produce from our diverse disciplinary points of departure. It is a movement which forces us to ponder the ethics of our work and the ethical boundaries in which we are willing (or are not willing) to conduct that work. Here it is interesting to note that while applied anthropologists have long lived in the shadow of similar issues, rather than simply selling their souls to the market, applied anthropologists have led some of the most critical and nuanced discussions of what it ethically means to work in the market (see Cassell & Jacobs 1987; Kedia 2008: 25; Marvin 2006; Partridge & Eddy 1987).

But beyond ethics, this is a movement which pushes us methodologically. What does it mean to conduct cultural analysis in a modern society such as the United States, Britain, or Sweden? When time is of the essence, what types of strategies for the conducting of “quick ethnography” (Handwerker 2001) might we be able to develop? And here it should be noted that it is not just a cross section of anthropologists who are working with quick forms of ethnography. Ethnologists working within their own national cultural settings have long worked with serially organized forms of short-term fieldwork – moving repeatedly between the field and the desk in an attempt to distance themselves from, and gain perspective on, the materials they have collected. And in a similar manner other scholars from fields such as cultural sociology and media studies regularly find themselves conducting smaller studies of contemporary phenomenon – analyzing on-going events in modern society, bracketed in rather specific and narrow time frames.

Nonetheless, with a few exceptions (Czarniawska 2007; Sunderland & Denny 2007) there is strikingly very little written about the methods and techniques re-

quired to do quick ethnography, and conduct cultural analyses under tight time constraints in modern societies (Sillitoe 2007: 155f.). Applied anthropology has a head start here, but much of the work conducted in this field concerns work in relation to governmental policy questions, development issues, and work in non-western contexts (cf. Pink 2006). Moving towards the border of applied cultural analysis bears risks and problems with it, but it can also force us to hone our debates, methods, and theoretical perspectives.

My intention here is not to argue for the development of an applied cultural analysis over and above existing forms of cultural analysis or cultural studies. There can be no form of applied cultural analysis if there does not exist a strong theoretical base upon which it can rest. Without our theories and the development of those theories we would rapidly lose our significance, relevance, and “usefulness” to society (as well as our “value” as applied analysts). My ambition here has rather been to point to some of the ways in which we might increasingly find that we are implicated in the cultural economy, and to point to the fact that we do face a series of opportunities and challenges in the future which we can either confront or embrace (or both). But these will be opportunities and challenges which will be increasingly difficult to ignore or sweep under the carpet.

Cultural theorists have long been highly sceptical of market forces and the effects those forces might have upon research conducted under their auspices. In other times and other contexts working in conjunction with the military or colonial governments seemed, to at least some anthropologists, like as a golden opportunity. Today, most scholars would be highly dubious of such associations. But as we increasingly turn towards the market it is important to remember the lessons of the past. The concerns of those who are wary of the market are not unfounded and we must continue to discuss and address the problems of conducting applied research in market contexts. However, the question is if we can turn our backs to these contemporary contexts entirely. As we increasingly come to understand the ways in which the borders between culture and economy are entangled in one another, we, as cultural analysts, may find that we not only possess unique and important perspectives from which to understand the culture/economy nexus, but even skills, critical insights, and theoretical approaches that are needed in the labor force and diverse segments of the cultural sector, which are of deep social relevance and can help our students find employment opportunities.

To be sure, engagement with the market bears the risk of complicity – or what some will see as the means to capitalizing on the market. But it can also be seen as a way of affecting the market, confronting it, and changing aspects of it – the fact that our knowledge may be “useful” does not necessarily mean that it has to be complicit. And in an age in which fewer and fewer of our students will ever have the opportunity to find careers within the university system, I would argue that we have the responsibility to help them understand how the knowledge we imbue upon them can be used in the labor market. As I have argued above, actors in the

cultural economy are in need of knowledge, and it is here that we have the potential of better equipping our students (and ourselves) for a life after/beyond the university. And while such a movement may raise uneasy ethical questions, the challenge before us is that of confronting those issues and integrating them into our lessons. The border between the university and the market will long prove to be a treacherous and difficult territory to navigate, but the question is, how much longer can we avoid confronting that border more fully than we have to date? And for how much longer can disciplines interested in the study of culture attract students and thereby survive as intact departments without more fully addressing student concerns of employability, or considering the needs of the labor market when planning university courses, or without more thoroughly reflecting upon and communicating the social relevance of the knowledge they disseminate? These may be difficult and unsettling questions, but the answer to them does not lie in avoiding them.

**Tom O'Dell** is a professor of ethnology in the Department of Service Management, Lund University, Campus Helsingborg. Previously he has published *Culture Unbound: Americanization and Everyday Life in Sweden* (Nordic Academic Press, 1997), and is in the process of publishing *Spas: The Cultural Economy of Hospitality, Magic and the Senses*. In addition to these works he has also published extensively, and edited several volumes on tourism and the experience economy including, *Experiencescapes: Tourism, Culture, and Economy* (Copenhagen Business School Press, 2005, together with Peter Billing).

## Notes

- 1 Turistdelegationen Svenska Rese- och Turistindustrins Samarbetsorganisation – RTS. (1999)
- 2 Näringsdepartementet & den svenska rese- och turistindustrin (2001)
- 3 The research project was designed – in line with VINNOVA's general policy – such that those participating in the project invested their own resources in the work to be done, and VINNOVA countered in turn by matching those investments.
- 4 A growing body of work is (and has been) in the process of developing which helps explain the many ways in which culture and economy are entwined in one another (du Gay & Pryke 2002; Lash & Urry 1994; Ray & Sayer 1999). Anthropologists, sociologists and other social scientists have, for example, turned their attention to the realms of business, work and economy, examining arenas of activity ranging from advertising (McFall 2002), IT companies (Willim 2002), the performative strategies of middle level corporate managers (Thrift 2000), and the introduction of New Age philosophies to management theory (Heelas 2002; Goldschmidt Salamon 2005) to the packaging of events (Ristilammi 2002), experiences (Christersdotter 2005; O'Dell 2005), feelings (Thrift 2004), and aesthetics in business contexts (Pine & Gilmore 1999). Nonetheless, as I am arguing here, there is room here to more thoroughly consider the manner in which the knowledge that has been won here might be used and further developed in applied contexts.

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## Ethnography in the Marketplace

By Billy Ehn & Orvar Löfgren

### Abstract

What happens when cultural analysis enters the world of applied research and academics become consultants working with corporations and public institutions? The divide between academic research and commercial ethnography has often hampered communication and critical exchanges between these two worlds.

In this paper we look at the experiences of consultants, drawing on Danish and Swedish examples. What can we learn from them when it comes to organizing research under time pressure, communicating results and making people understand the potentials of cultural analysis? And how could consultants “out there” benefit from a continuing dialogue with their colleagues in Academia?

**Keywords:** Applied research, cultural analysis, ethnography, academic identity, consumer studies.

## Ethnography in the Marketplace

Although only a fraction of the university students will end up in the academic system, disciplines like anthropology, European ethnology and cultural studies still have a tendency in their teaching to focus very much on research careers. Most students will, however, have to find other career paths and arenas. Cultural analysis thus gets applied in museums and journalism, in government institutions as well as in private corporations, in cultural policy and social work.

It was only a few years ago that a concept like “applied cultural research” seemed very alien to the Swedish humanities. Back in those days scholars voiced their surprise, and even suspicion, when they encountered colleagues or students from disciplines like economics or psychology where applied research was a normal part of everyday academic life. “Applied” still had a special ring to it and not too positive; it smelled of shallow and “impure” research, of ethical compromises and a kind of last resort if no funding could be found for “real research” (see Roberts 2005). There was a definite *Berührungsangst* here, especially in dealing with the private sector.

In other disciplines like American anthropology there was a well-established tradition of applied research that emerged out of an interest in development projects in Third World countries, but then spread to other sectors (see Tom O’Dell’s paper in this issue). Anthropologists worked, for example, as advisors and evaluators, often providing a voice for those with less access to decision making (Fiske 2008: 127). Later on many corporations hired anthropologists as consultants to perform a wide variety of tasks, such as facilitating labour and community relations, building resource and economic development, designing products, and training employees (Kedia 2008: 19).<sup>1</sup> Over the years there has been a lot of discussion about this development, its ethical, academic and social consequences.

In Scandinavia of today, several forces have pulled the discussion of applied research into the field of the cultural sciences. First of all, there has been a growing demand from students asking for an academic education with closer ties to the labour market (see Schoug 2008). Another influence was more structural and came from the streamlining of European university education as part of EU reforms. “The Bologna process” meant that new words like “employability” came into the foreground.

The academic responses to such pressures varied from complaints about an accelerating commercialization and market adaptation of university programmes to curiosity about what possibilities these new directions could have.<sup>2</sup> For us two, coming from the discipline of European ethnology, it meant rethinking teaching, research and academic identities,<sup>3</sup> as we got involved in developing new programmes of applied cultural analysis, and it is this experience that forms the plat-

form for our discussion. How could we prepare the students for the challenges, problems and opportunities that work in this new field brought along?<sup>4</sup>

### **Ambassadors of cultural research**

What happens when cultural analysis is applied in careers outside of Academia?<sup>5</sup> In this paper we want to look at the ways it is put to use by people who establish themselves as consultants, or “commercial ethnographers” as some of them call themselves, looking for clients in the private and the public sector. What are their activities doing to the self-understanding of the cultural sciences, and also to the shaping of theoretical and methodological tools?

Whether we welcome it or not, this growing sector is also changing Alma Mater. We are therefore interested in what the consultants bring back to the mother sciences in terms of questions of ethics, research design, methods and goals. We would like to see a better dialogue between their world and the academic one to avoid getting trapped in unproductive polarizations like pure and impure research, deep and shallow studies, slow and fast ethnographies – and, not least, Academia versus “the real world”.

There are relatively many ethnologists and anthropologists employed in the public sector, but we have chosen to focus on the still relatively few in Scandinavia who have developed their own consultancy firms. We find them especially interesting because their activities bring out both the problems and the possibilities in establishing yourself in a market where the clients often have vague or no knowledge of the uses of cultural research. We have talked to some of these entrepreneurs in Sweden and Denmark that are busy developing new fields, but also challenging some of Academia’s norms and ideals.<sup>6</sup>

They work in different settings, from one-person firms to units that have expanded into larger organizations. Others are employed for established and more traditional business consulting firms or hired as “the resident ethnographer” in big corporations. They are analysing, among a lot of other things, consumer behaviours and trends, community changes and workplace organizations. The rapidly growing interest in user-driven innovation is an example of one such field, where cultural analysts are sought after.

When explaining why they are needed, these consultants use expressions like “opening the eyes of their clients”. The goal is to make their employers look at their own organization, activities or customers in a new perspective. The consultants talk about “cracking the cultural code and discover hidden patterns and structures”. They want to explore the gap between what people say they are doing and what they really do, which of course is not an unfamiliar argument also in academic research. Apart from making a living, they see themselves as devoted ambassadors or missionaries of cultural analysis, trying to build bridges between the

research world and industry, and they also provide a fast-growing labour market for ethnology and anthropology students today.

## **Marketing your competence**

The people we talked to have moved out of Academia in order to create their own jobs, finding a market niche, and recruiting clients. This hard task has taught them quite a lot about self-presentations and communication. How do you convince potential employers that they could make use of cultural analysis, people who usually know very little about, for example, ethnology? In Academia we are in similar ways trying to “sell” cultural analysis to other disciplines, multi-disciplinary projects or funding agencies, but our communicative skills often seem less developed than among those “out there”.

The lessons to be learnt concerning communication are important, since a common complaint we meet among students is that they lack confidence in their skills as cultural analysts or don’t know how to present those skills in simple words. Coming from the humanities where there isn’t much of a tradition of assured self-presentation, students are often insecure: what do I know, what kinds of competences do I have compared to an economist, a political scientist or a hands-on engineer? Why should I be hired? There is so much that you have learned that you don’t even see as skills or assets.<sup>7</sup>

In this regard you have a lot to learn from experienced professionals, both about which capacities your education has given and which new competencies you have to acquire. Two American anthropologists and private consultants for many years, Carla N. Littlefield and Emilia Gonzalez-Clements (2008), have provided very concrete advice on starting and operating a consulting business.<sup>8</sup> For example, they say that the consultant must be a master of multitasking and keeping track of details, including keeping a schedule and being on time. “Cold calls” should not be seen as a failure, but as a lesson in rejection. You also have to learn how to price your service, promoting your company and start networking to find clients.

High self-esteem is obviously necessary in this market. But it is not enough to propagate your competence and convince the clients you are worth every penny. You also have to “learn their language and moving around in different settings as a chameleon – without giving up your individual character”, as one of the consultants said. Meeting the world of business or administrators in the public sector also means running into their stereotypes of ethnologists and anthropologists, or as another consultant put it:

I usually dress up a bit and then tell my audience, “Did you expect me to turn up in a pony-tail and a baggy sweater?” Their laughter tells me that this is precisely what they had expected...

The Swedish consultant Ida Hult (2008: 47) writes that she is trying to satisfy the client's requirements as well as her own curiosity. In order to sell ethnography you have to learn their ways of thinking and behaving:

Adopt corporate clothing, make small talk over coffee, learn a few business words, and then go "ethno" and show them that you are different. If you make your clients both comfortable and curious, they will listen to you.

One of the implications of this adaptation to the corporate world is that you will be finding yourself doing a kind of double research. First you have to learn the culture of your client, and then you go out and do the fieldwork for which you are getting paid. How does this interchange between adaptation and production of knowledge work? In other words, in what ways are the consultants changed by their experiences, and how do they influence their clients?

## **Doing ethnography**

The big task is to make your potential customers interested in what you have to sell. What can you offer? First of all it is striking how central the concept of "ethnography" has become over the last years. When we worked with planning the courses in applied cultural analysis we asked prospective employers what they wanted from students. The most common answer was "the skills of doing good ethnography". What's the attraction?

First of all, many clients expect something new and different. They are tired of old and well-established research tools, from traditional consumer surveys to focus groups. Ethnography carries a promise of something more colourful and experimental. There is also a magic in the methods of "fieldwork", actually getting out into the urban jungles, talking to people, observing consumers in mundane settings.

The "surprise effect" has become a common mantra for ethnographers both inside and outside of Academia. Cultural analysis is said to render the familiar strange and the strange familiar. This is accomplished by spending time with people in the context of their daily lives, watching, listening and learning about their world in their home, at their work, at the local gym, wherever. Such fieldwork demands that you enter the field with an open mind and without too many preconceived notions, letting people show you what's important in their lives through their own words and actions.

This is a methodological approach based upon what today is often called "the serendipity approach", not actually knowing what you are looking for. Such a label, however, may hide the cumulative and systematic dimensions of even seemingly anarchistic analytical work. Although it may appear like a very improvised and informal activity, it calls for a constant and critical reflexivity about your own preconceived notions or prejudices. It is also an approach that in its

seeming vagueness and openness may provoke both some academics and clients in the private or public market. Is this really research?

Another problem is actually the reverse. One of the results of this new interest in fieldwork is that ethnography has become a buzz word, travelling into a number of new contexts and also changing its meaning during that travel. Ironically ethnography has become an attractive brand name for doing fast research at home – as opposed to the long and hard years of anthropological fieldwork abroad it used to stand for. As such it often works as a convenient way of describing a mix of methods. It has become a label for a range of qualitative techniques, which are based on the idea of “being there”.

In a somewhat absurd inventory Simon Roberts (2005: 86) enumerates some hundred-and-forty different ethnographic field methods, among them accompanied shopping, at-home ethnography, daily routine shadowing, deep hanging out, immersion, naked behaviour research, store walks, and guerrilla ethnography. A special term is “quick and dirty ethnography” (Handwerker 2002) where short and focused studies are carried out, to quickly gain a general picture, for example of a work setting or a consumer habit. In its most watered-down version “ethnography” is trivialized into a simple technique of “hanging out with real people”. In this sense the technique may be used by people without ethnographic training, for example by computer designers, who feel they need to take a look at the world of the users (see Bergqvist 2004). In contrast to the idea of “easy fieldwork”, it could be argued that “quick and dirty” approaches call for more sophisticated tools and better planning than traditional long-time ethnography, in order to make the most of a limited time span.

When marketing their special ethnographic skills, cultural analysts will have to demonstrate that they are doing something other than just simply “hanging out”. They must also prove that their methods produce new and different kinds of knowledge. As fieldworkers, one of the consultants told us, we focus on the everyday life of ordinary people. We are exploring what they are interested in and what they are valuing, but also things that are unconscious or forgotten. We are seeing whole situations where others are seeing fragments, she continued. We put trends, patterns of behaviour, and changes in lifestyles in a new light. Again, this is a kind of argumentation that is found in Academia as well. Cultural analysis thrives on promising something different, a new angle, another perspective, making the invisible visible or the inconspicuous important.

Consultants thus constantly have to demonstrate that ethnography is good for reaching those aha-insights that other methodologies cannot. This often calls for challenging the preferences for quantitative data collection that are found among corporations. “One of the things we learned early was to argue for the potentials of a qualitative approach”, a consultant ethnologist remembered, “our clients at first found it hard to understand why ten in-depth interviews could produce more interesting knowledge than a ‘scientific sample’ of forty quick ones.” (Again,

there are pedagogical skills developed here that cultural analysts in Academia could learn from when they enter similar debates with colleagues from “the hard sciences”.)

Consultants learn to argue against the wisdom of market surveys or preconceived ideas about what customers want or need. Often you end up finding things that neither you, nor your clients, had anticipated. One of the practical purposes of this method is that designers, communicators and product developers will understand the relationship between what they produce and the meanings the products and messages have for the audience and users.

The expanding demand for qualitative methods and ethnographies of everyday life is thus often a result of a new interest in everyday life. An ethnologist who started to work for a large manufacturer of household appliances found a traditional industrial setting, where engineers and product developers usually devised new products drawing on their own experiences or with the help of some market surveys. She had been hired as an ethnographer, because of the new interest in user-driven innovation, where the innovation processes was turned around. She started by exploring the needs, interests and priorities found in the everyday lives of potential customers. This called for a much more open kind of fieldwork that challenged many of the routines of product developers.

### **Conflicts of loyalty?**

When discussing the world of consultants in the marketplace with our more sceptical academic colleagues, the question of ethics quickly emerges – sometimes too quickly, we think, because it can often become a somewhat predictable exchange between two camps. Such issues should of course not be avoided, but you have to keep in mind that researchers and consultants look at them in somewhat different ways, depending on their working conditions.

In the USA the debate has been intense on the ethical and political implications of working as an anthropologist for governments and corporations (see Willigen 2002: 48ff.). One of the practical consequences is the codes of ethics, one for researchers and one for consultants and the like, that have been established by anthropological associations. The rules of behaviour in these codes are much elaborated, for example concerning responsibility and respect.<sup>9</sup>

In Scandinavia this debate is yet not very elaborated. When we began our talks with the consultants we were interested in how they experienced conflicts of loyalty between commercial and academic cultural analysis. We thought it would be difficult to combine the task of helping business companies solve problems and the scientific commission of being detached and critical. Perhaps the results of their fast and applied research also would be rather cursory?

The Danish ethnologist Mine Sylow (2008: 21), who has done cultural analysis for the food industry, suggests a tension of that kind. In making short, precise and useful recommendations for the industry, she noticed that the cultural insights sometimes become too simplified and that important things can get “lost in translation”. This may be a weakness of cultural analysis, she writes; it works best when it is possible to explain the complexity of results rather than by offering “quick and dirty” commentary. But among the other consultants almost nobody thought conflicting loyalties were a great problem. One of them told us she had never experienced this problem – maybe because she had always had the opportunity to choose her customers and had never been forced to work for companies honouring goals and values that she disliked. Moreover, she felt free to criticize her clients’ activities and perspectives – well, that’s the point of her job! Her own aim as a cultural analyst has not primarily been to make them sell more products and earn more money.

However, in some cases you have to make clear that you do not share all the views of your clients. Will it then be possible to work for them and under what terms? “Would you work for any company?” we asked a consultant employed by a household appliance firm. “I feel comfortable working with consumer-driven innovation in this context”, she answered, “but I would never work for companies like Coca-Cola or Philip Morris”.

Academic sceptics may argue that consultants shy away from ethical questions, creating symbolic boundaries between “good and bad clients”, but it could also be argued that consultants in fact often live much closer to ethical issues than researchers in Academia. Questions of ethics may become very concrete and frequent in the everyday life of consultants. Here is a research territory where borders are discussed, transgressed or contested in ways that could be useful for those of us in Academia who seldom find our work challenged on ethical or political grounds (see for example the discussion in Pripp 2007: 29).

Some of the consultants seem to be anxious to stress that they are *not* selling themselves, while, simultaneously, their survival on the market totally depends on recruiting new clients and getting well paid. The projects you offer therefore must be highly useful for the customers. In practice this means a constant switching between wearing “the ethnographic glasses” and “the costume of the consultant”, as one consultant expressed it, while another said that she never felt that she had to sell out her “inner cultural analyst”,

because I simply decline an offer if it doesn’t work for me with my background, personality and ethical principles. Most often I produce two documents of every project, one that is “ethno” and one for the client – this is my way of not letting down my inner cultural analyst.

Even if these enthusiasts show a great deal of idealism and wish to reform the world, the fact is that they are hired by clients that own the result of their work. While some clients will be quite open about making results or reports public, oth-

ers want to keep them to themselves as trade secrets. In such cases you are not allowed to discuss your findings with colleagues outside the project. Compared to academic research this consequently becomes a more closed world.

### **Speedy research, clear results**

In contrast to academic research that most often is rather slow and painstaking, commercial ethnography is said to be very fast. You do not have months and years to sit down and think about the complexity of your material. The customers are in a hurry and expect speedy research and lucid results. In a short time you have to make yourself acquainted with a new and often strange context and at the same time you must be cautious and avoid making premature conclusions.

But compared to the world of business you are still working at a slower pace. The consultants often take two to three months to reflect on problems that the customers usually want to solve at once. The time constraints make it necessary to develop skills of tight budgeting of time and resources. Working with an eight-week assignment means that you constantly have to think about priorities and the keeping of deadlines – it becomes a highly disciplined way of doing investigations.

To get the most out of these conditions, you have to be creative in combining bits of preliminary observations with team-based brainstorming – sessions when walls are cluttered with yellow post-it slips or mind maps are drawn on the whiteboard. There is a movement back and forth between reflection, collection of new materials, swapping crazy ideas and disciplining chaos into a finished project. What kinds of fieldwork should you do?

For example, how about following a man on parental leave for a full fortnight, observing and discussing his new life, rather than doing traditional interviews with a sample of young fathers? Or what about choosing a couple of very different bars, and spending three days in each to learn about bar managers' relations to customers and staff? Should we use video cameras or not? Formal or informal interviews? There is a constant need to prioritize and think about which fieldwork strategies would work best. Similar processes can be found in academic projects, but here they are often not brought out in the open in the same manner.

An important resource is the fact that many consultants work closely in teams. This may in some ways compensate for the limited time. As a part of a team you have to learn to forget “the lone wolf life” of much academic research. Data, thoughts and results must constantly be pooled and tested by others, and this means that new recruits from Academia have to learn the techniques and skills of constantly sharing research experiences.

Another feature is the frequent use of contrastive or comparative international settings. Exploring the same problem in the French and the American hospital

systems or documenting how people organize family parties in five different cosmopolitan cities around the world gives you a chance to avoid some of the bias of doing anthropology at home. Our point here is that the need for tough time budgeting, teamwork and contrastive field sites may bring out some new research skills that Academia certainly could learn from.

The ability to communicate your results in a way that catches the attention of the client is also a necessary skill. “When we hire new students for a project we have to show them the importance of starting by thinking about the results”, a consultant told us. “You have to envisage the final product, think about what a report could look like and what it would mean to the client. Then you can start working backwards in planning the project, discussing approaches, methods and materials. For the students this is often a very different way of working.”

The presentation of the results is always on your mind. You have to be lucid and know how to summarize, another consultant said. It’s forbidden to present your research in an overly abstract and complicated way. The reports have to be short, clear and easy to read, containing direct answers to the client’s questions, without scientific references and methodological expositions. Concentrate on the most important things.

It works well to tell arresting stories, a third consultant put it, to talk in metaphors, showing images and using PowerPoint. The language should not be “academic”, yet professional and qualitative. Visual images are important. “Sometimes, we spend a lot of time finding the perfect video clip that will bring out the core of our argument”, as one consultant put it. It might also be important to produce a dramatic feeling of urgency: “The world is changing rapidly or the world is very different from what you think. How will your corporation or government agency react to this?”

Just as in academic research, the production and presentation of knowledge among consultants may develop into set genres. What does, for example, the need for a string of bullet points do not only to communication styles but also to the organization of research? There are processes of routinization at work here as in any other research setting, as Richard Wilk (2009) has pointed out in a recent review of a handbook on applied consumer research. He thinks that one of the risks is that consultants make “a skewed selection of anthropological theories and tools, slighting the traditions which aim towards more methodological rigor”.

## **Following through**

A special condition in commercial ethnography is that your job doesn’t end with a report. One of the most essential parts of the project is putting your results to work. You might find that it is not the eye-opening analysis that is the real problem, but communicating the results in ways which gain real effects, rather than

another report ending up on the shelf. This partly depends on your relationship to your client and the role you play during your project. You are in a way balancing between, on the one hand, being an important expert that people listen to when you present your results, but the next minute you are a subordinate with rather marginal influence on the business in the company or the organization.

Learning to let go of the project and give up your ownership of the knowledge means making sure the implementation becomes the concern of the other actors involved. Are they ready to take over, do they want to, do they have the position to make an impact on future decisions? Without this effort to make your results work, you might feel like one consultant, who remembered a project where this last stage didn't work:

We had finished our project and when we were about to hand over our results to a group of engineers and designers it felt just like throwing our findings up and over a big wall, hoping that the guys on the other side could make sense of them.

In most cases, however, you learn to work closely with those engineers and designers, and find that the old boundaries between researchers and “doers” become blurred. Still, you have to be good at simultaneous translation, one consultant said.

I must always, on the spot, master the art of reformulating a customer problem to a cultural analytic problem. Later I have to transform a cultural analytic solution to a customer solution.

This practice of “cultural translation” is described by Ida Hult (2008: 41ff) and using her presentation of a project together with two other cases we would like to exemplify ethnographic practices in a little more detail.

### **Three ways of surprising a client**

Ida Hult's company Trendethnography was hired by a large international bank to investigate property mortgages among first-time buyers. When the project finally got started, after a year of talks with the potential client, Trendethnography and the bank turned out to have very different views of the customers. For the ethnologists they were not only buying a house or an apartment, but also a dream. Therefore it was necessary to consider the emotional and seemingly irrational aspects of their economic behaviour. How do people really accomplish and experience a purchase of a property, was the consultants' basic question, and then they suggested a lot of other issues that the bank people often found strange. These questions to the customers turned out to give the bank representatives quite new insights. Their traditional mode of thinking was very different.

How do you approach a property deal? How do you talk about it? How do you perceive it? What is your relationship to all the actors in the deal, especially to your bank contact? What is a home? What is your relationship to the “important documents” involved in a bank loan? What is the state of your economy? What is your attitude to money? (Hult 2008: 41)

The ethnologists did fieldwork in seven households for three months. During that time they kept a close contact with the bank staff. Ida Hult explains their strategic principle as standing firmly rooted with one leg in the world of ethnology, and one leg in the world of business. The task was to translate between the two.

At the conclusion of the project the consultants made a final presentation – partly by “telling stories” about their fieldwork experiences and about the hopes and fears, beliefs and dreams, of the bank customers. They also presented a written report about the facts and feelings of the customers’ investments, richly illustrated with pictures and quotations. It also contained advice, on implementations and possible solutions.<sup>10</sup>

Doing such cultural translations may be a daunting task. Another example comes from ReD Associates in Copenhagen, a company specializing in user-driven innovations. One of their projects started out with a problem of a medical manufacturer of bandages and tools for handling ostomies or incontinence conditions. The firm wanted to know if the ways they packaged and branded their products were really cost-effective. The consultants decided to use a classic ethnographic approach of “following the object” (Marcus 1998: 91) and observed the ways in which the products were dealt with by all kinds of groups, from the storage staff at the large hospitals, to doctors and nurses and very different kinds of patients. One of the methods was using the technique of “shadowing” (see Czarniawska 2007). The team decided to closely follow specialist nurses who were dealing with newly diagnosed patients. This was a group of specialists that turned out to have the richest experience of the many relevant problems.

In order to get a contrastive material the consultants decided to do fieldwork in the French and American health care systems. They made a video interview with an American male living without medical insurance in a trailer park and who constantly struggled with the problems of affording bandages and the need to get back to work. This interview served as a very effective contrast to French patients in a welfare state where people never had to worry about the costs or lengths of medical treatments.

Another contrastive approach dealt with the life cycle of treatments and products. How did a newly operated user deal with the products compared to one who had employed them for years? By using Arnold van Gennep’s (1909) old theoretical concepts “rites of passage” and “liminality” the consultants found a way to describe the patients’ experiences that was unexpected to the medical staff and helped them to transform existing practices. The ethnologists described the life of a patient with a chronic illness as a process consisting of different phases. Immediately after the diagnosis the patient was in a period of liminality, alienated from his/her healthy self, as well as socially marginalized. To deal with this new reality the patient had to learn to cope with a lot of physical, technical and psychological aspects of the chronic illness. One of these aspects concerned how life very much

came to revolve around the wound and its proper treatment, which was complicated.

The insight the consultants brought back to the manufacturers was that the standard products they shipped over the world had very different meanings and uses in different situations. The demands of people handling these products were not really understood by the company. By regarding people's highly varying situations and needs, for example of emotional support as well as directions for product use, the ethnologists succeeded in communicating a new, cultural perspective on this medical problem (Voldum & Work Havelund 2008: 36).

The third example comes from the consultancy firm Hausenberg, also based in Copenhagen. They were approached by the local council of a Copenhagen working-class suburb, dominated by grey high-rise buildings from the 1960s and endless rows of detached houses. It was a suburb regarded as devoid of any architectural beauty or interesting historical traditions. The council was brave enough to want to enter a competition to develop local heritage projects, sponsored by the National Heritage Board and a large credit union. Hausenberg was hired to make this unlikely project happen.

How do you identify, document and communicate valuable traits of local heritage in a setting, which is famous for having none? How do you find history in a community described as without history? In a limited period of time a heritage plan was to be produced, a plan that resonated with different groups and subcultures in a community that included a wide variety of ethnic minorities as well as a social spectrum spanning from old working-class inhabitants to new middle-class commuters.

The consultants had to be really creative in trying to view this setting with fresh eyes and explore what locals valued and were attached to. In their fieldwork they combined ethnographic methods like "walk and talk" interviews and workshops with locals, bringing in reference groups for meetings in surprising settings, turning the inconspicuous or ignored into new assets. Instead of "freezing" interesting parts of the environment, defining them as valuable heritage sites in the conventional ways, Hausenberg worked together with local actors to define themes that mirrored local practices. Many of the detached houses were typical built by working-class families, without any architectural guidance, and had then been the objects of endless DIY projects of additions and rebuilding, and it was precisely this individualism and constant improvisation that was singled out as a striking local tradition.

The final plan did work. To the astonishment of the 53 other competing communities and local councils, this Copenhagen suburb was one of the four winners and was able to spend the next two years turning the new heritage ideas into practice. Again, it was the surprise effect that made the job, seeing local settings as

potential and future landmarks that emphasized some of the important material and mental infrastructures of local life.

The three cases shared a successful strategy of teaching the clients something they did not know and had not expected. To attain this effect a range of ethnographic strategies and tactics had to be developed. The consultants had to convince their clients that it was better to invest in qualitative and experimental methods rather than in “business as usual”. Interestingly enough, all the three projects could, albeit with different goals and organizational frameworks, have been possible also as “pure” academic projects.

### **So what?**

Is it possible that ethnology students and researchers would benefit from losing some of their reluctance to deal with the practical and ethical consequences of their research, or by being unafraid to undermine their privileged positions in the academic ivory tower with its academic judgements and solutions?

This impertinent question is asked by the ethnologists Jakob K. Voldum and Louise Work Havelund (2008: 35), who worked at ReD Associates with the medical project described above. They argue that ethnologists should be prepared to learn more from practitioners that have experience of applied cultural research. We are inclined to agree with them. Listening to the consultants has made us see our own academic activities in a different light.

One of the lessons is that in the world of business and public organizations you are always confronted with the question: “So what?” All clients, regardless of their activity, want to know exactly what the cultural analysis will mean to their company. They will not be satisfied by the answer that the world is complex and that it takes time to understand people and culture. They take it for granted that the research results should have a real and immediate effect on what they are doing.

Another lesson is that more interdisciplinary co-operation is advisable to counteract monocular vision. In the medical device project, the ethnologists took advantage of collaborating with the client’s designers that were very good at practical solutions. But sometimes these designers got trapped by their creative thinking and initial sketches. On the other hand, the ethnologists were good at looking at the problems from unexpected angles, but often got ensnared in the webs of critical thinking. However, together these two parties made a more effective team, ready to answer the tricky question of “So what?”<sup>11</sup>

There is also something to be learned from the consultants’ experiences of how to work fast and efficiently, and how to utilize analytical perspectives in close cooperation with non-academics. The consultants are constantly trained in their ability to present both their professional competence and their findings in convincing and comprehensive ways. It is absolutely necessary for their survival in

this market to know how, for example, business people and officials in various organizations think and speak and how they look upon academic research. This is knowledge that university students need, as do teachers trying to produce courses with an applied profile.

In the applied courses we have been involved in it was interesting to note what kinds of problems were voiced when the pros and cons of applied research were discussed. Sometimes the student groups were split on matters of how, when, why and for whom they were ready to work. While some feared that the critical edge of research would disappear or that ethics would be ignored, others felt that this was an “ivory tower” attitude, an excuse for not having to do the messy job of applying knowledge and following it being put to use. Such heated debates are important and may provoke self-reflection on both sides.

### **Applied and critical research**

The ultimate goal of all research is of course to provide understandings that can be applied to the world around us. Yet the question of application is a touchy one among cultural researchers. Some debaters voice a fear of overreaching in accommodating to new market trends or demands. They see this process as a sliding one, where the role of humanities as providing first and foremost the tools of critical thinking is blunted or even pacified. How is the critical edge to be kept alive and sharpened?

Writing about the tasks of a critical ethnography Jim Thomas (1993: 2ff) points out that cultural worlds tend to entrap people in taken-for-granted reality, and the role of researchers is to question commonsense assumptions by describing and analysing otherwise hidden agendas that inhibit, repress and constrain people in their everyday lives. He reminds us that the dimension of power is always there, but often found in surprising places and forms.

Strikingly enough, it is precisely this critical perspective that the consultants found most important among the academic luggage they carried with them into their new careers. This again underlines the importance of our academic courses to nurture and develop a critical thinking. We should also remind students that research that desperately starts out by trying to be “useful” or “easily applicable” may in fact end up becoming predictable or non-challenging if it loses its open, reflective and critical perspective.

In this paper we have focused on the activities of consultants that in our view make interesting options and tensions visible. If anyone should think that we have presented a too rosy picture of their pursuits, it may be a consequence of our ambition to learn something new from their experiences and to argue for a better dialogue between their world and Academia.

At this preliminary stage of our ongoing study we have been interested in the self-understandings and experiences of consultants, but later on we would like to take a closer look at their work. There are several issues that we have only touched on briefly so far but would like to explore in more detail.

First of all, what are the special characteristics and conditions for the production of knowledge in this practical field? The expectation of doing cultural analysis under strict time limitations might call for analytical shortcuts or turn certain approaches into favoured routines. What kinds of critical scrutiny and feedback are possible, and how is new theoretical and methodological energy introduced?

Secondly, we are interested in how the forms of research presentation – the uses of short reports, PowerPoint bullets, images and video clips – influence the actual investigations. What spaces are open for discussing nuances, complexities and reflective self-criticism? In relation to the academic traditions the consultants carry with them, what do they eventually have to give up or find new forms for when working as consultants?

Thirdly, how does the interaction between consultants and clients run? What new possibilities are opened by the bridging of very different worlds of thought, and what kinds of more or less productive conflicts may appear?

Fourthly, we would like to know more about the ways in which the consultants nurture their academic identity, as cultural analysts, ethnologists or anthropologists. How do they influence attitudes to cultural research in the business world and what consequences might this have for the future labour market for our students?

So much for our curiosity in studying “them”, but such a project also need to include a reverse process: the consultants returning home to take a critical look at traditions, routines and rituals of research among those of us who have remained in Academia. What may they be able to problematize in a world we take for granted?

Today, students who choose to work as consultants experience that it is a one-way road. As one of our anthropological colleagues put it, “once you leave Academia to do commercial anthropology, you can never come back and nobody takes much notice of what you are doing out there”. We need better opportunities for people to move back and forth between the two worlds.

And maybe this is happening in new ways. For some of the gulf between applied and non-applied that is often guarded jealously in Academia is actually becoming a continuum. We have many colleagues who combine academic teaching and research with taking on applied jobs in order to make a living and find that this kind of research commuting can be both challenging and enriching. Considering ongoing developments in the job market for academics, we will see more of this.

Looking back on our own careers in academic research, we are also struck by the many times we have crossed that line between two worlds ourselves, doing

workshops with practitioners or giving advice to institutions outside of the university. Research that does not involve the ways potential users of the results act and think always misses something important.

**Billy Ehn** is professor of European Ethnology at Umeå University. He has published books in different fields of research, for example immigration and ethnicity, work and leisure, family life and socialization, and the culture of Academia. His latest book is *The Secret World of Doing Nothing* (with Orvar Löfgren, in press) at University of California Press.

**Orvar Löfgren** is professor emeritus in European ethnology at the University of Lund. He has published on themes like consumption, domestic media, travel and tourism, but is above all preoccupied with the cultural analysis of everyday life. His current research project is on the cultural dynamics of the inconspicuous.

## Notes

- 1 In his dissertation *Among the Interculturalists* the anthropologist Tommy Dahlén (1997) has investigated a special sector of consultants working with cultural perspectives, that of intercultural communication – the many international consultants and educators who help companies and business people to act in a “culturally correct” way in foreign countries. The literature about “intercultural understanding” is huge; one recent example is Rapaille (2006). See also Sharpe (2004) for a discussion of the use of ethnography in the business world.
- 2 The usefulness of cultural research is, of course, not only a question about getting employed as a consultant. A frequent more general critique of cultural researchers, at least in Scandinavia, is that they are too invisible and passive in media and political debates (see for example Hylland Eriksen 2006).
- 3 In the debate about the use of cultural research we also recognize the discussion about “Mode 2” as a novel way of doing “post-academic” science (see for example Ziman 2000). Moreover, the universities today are far from alone in producing scientific knowledge. The right to define such knowledge is highly contested.
- 4 We have been involved in the development of the education programmes for Cultural Analysis in Umeå, a four-year programme that has been running since 2002 (see Ehn & Nilsson 2006) and the international two-year programme Master of Applied Cultural Analysis (MACA), which is a joint project of Copenhagen and Lund Universities (see [www.maca.ac](http://www.maca.ac)). There are other examples of such projects, for example the programme for Social and Cultural Analysis at Linköping University.
- 5 “Do we jeopardize our scientific depth, or do we gain new insights useful to our ethnological methods and theory building”, is a common question that, among others, the editors of a special issue on applied ethnology, Cecilia Fredriksson and Håkan Jönsson (2008: 10), have asked.
- 6 We have interviewed Katarina Graffman at Inculture, Ida Hult at Trendethnography, both in Stockholm, Nicolai Carlberg and Søren Møller Christensen at Hausenberg in Copenhagen. We

have also talked to Caroline Beck at Nueva and visited ReD Associates, in Copenhagen. Moreover, we have received information from Helena Kovacs at Apprino and Jonas Modin at Splitvision, both in Stockholm/Gothenburg. The often elaborate websites have been another source of information.

- 7 One thing the students in Cultural Analysis at Umeå University had to learn was to adapt themselves to concepts like “marketing” and “career coaching”. They were also trained in networking and in elaborating their competence in applied cultural analysis, for example in the special branch of trade and industry (see Ehn & Nilsson 2006: 4ff).
- 8 Other handbooks look at experiences of applied ethnography in consumer, design and marketing research (see Mariampolski 2006, Randall et al. 2007 and Sunderland & Denny 2007).
- 9 One of the codes was approved in 1983 by the Society for Applied Anthropology (<http://www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethcode.htm>) and one in 1998 by the American Anthropological Association (<http://www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethics.htm>).
- 10 Since the presentation the ethnologists have continued to participate in various internal activities at the bank, such as education, consulting and leadership training. Now the bank has hired Trendethnography for a new project.
- 11 To her own surprise the anthropologist Barbara L. K. Pillsbury (2008) became an executive leader in a big company. One of the advantages of her anthropological education was, she thinks, that it conditioned her to understand and work with differences of all kinds. Another was that she learned to communicate with people of diverse backgrounds and statuses and to recognize that every organization has its own culture. But Pillsbury has also observed that the anthropological perspective in fact sometimes may be a hindrance for being an effective leader in a large organization. One may, for example, place too much emphasis on cultural differences and stumble over local truths that slow processes in today’s fast-paced world.

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## “Cultural Policy”: Towards a Global Survey

By Yudhishtir Raj Isar

### Abstract

The field of “cultural policy” has acquired sufficient purchase internationally to warrant a comparative global survey. This article examines questions that arise preliminary to such an endeavour. It looks first at the problems posed by the divided nature of “cultural policy” research: on the one hand policy advisory work that is essentially pragmatic, and on the other so-called “theoretical” analysis which has little or no purchase on policy-making. In both cases, key elements are missed. A way out of the quandary would be to privilege a line of inquiry that analyzes the “arts and heritage” both in relation to the institutional terms and objectives of these fields but also as components of a broader “cultural system” whose dynamics can only be properly grasped in terms of the social science or “ways of life” paradigm. Such a line of inquiry would address: the ways in which subsidized cultural practice interacts with or is impacted by social, economic and political forces; the domains of public intervention where the cultural in the broader social science sense elicits policy stances and policy action; the nature of public intervention in both categories; whether and how the objects and practices of intervention are conceptualised in a holistic way. A second set of interrogations concerns axes for the comparison of “cultural policy” trans-nationally. One possible axis is provided by different state stances with respect to Raymond Williams’ categories of national aggrandizement, economic reductionism, public patronage of the arts, media regulation and the negotiated construction of cultural identity. Another avenue would be to unpack interpretations of two leading current agendas, namely “cultural diversity” and the “cultural and/or creative industries”.

**Keywords:** Cultural policy; cultural politics; sociology of culture; cultural theory; cultural industries; cultural diversity; creativity and innovation.

## **“Cultural Policy”: Towards a Global Survey**

“Cultural policy” has acquired sufficient purchase internationally for a comparative global survey of different “cultural policy” stances and measures to appear both feasible and timely. The reflections that follow are prolegomena to such an endeavour, some of the necessary preliminaries to a systematic inquiry into “cultural policy” worldwide.<sup>1</sup>

At the outset, or even before the outset, two sets of issues should concern us. Both deeply influence the pertinence and usability of the literature one might have recourse to in carrying out such an ambitious project, short of carrying out an ethnographical inquiry in x number of selected or representative countries. First, the divided nature of research on “cultural policy”: on the one hand policy advisory work that concerns itself little with higher ends and values, and on the other so-called “theoretical” analysis which has little or no purchase on policy-making. Could a third party deploy conceptual tools that could bridge the divide and if so how? The second set of interrogations concerns ways of comparing “cultural policy” trans-nationally. I shall suggest several axes of differentiation that appear relevant, but only tentatively, as I have yet to settle on an overarching analytical framework.

### **A house divided**

What is understood by “cultural policy” and “cultural policy research”? My use of quotation marks so far in the present text is intended to signal my concern with the semantic bivalence of these terms: both are deployed, broadly speaking, in two quite distinct sets of ways by two different communities of inquiry, and for quite divergent purposes.

The first and most common understanding of “cultural policy” was neatly encapsulated many years ago by Augustin Girard (1983: 13): “a system of ultimate aims, practical objectives and means, pursued by a group and applied by an authority [and]...combined in an explicitly coherent system.” Here “cultural policy” is what governments (as well as other entities) envision and enact in terms of cultural affairs, the latter understood as relating to “the works and practices of intellectual, and especially artistic activity” (Williams 1988: 90). Its analysis means studying how governments seek to support and regulate the arts and heritage. It also means analyzing how the arts and heritage are seen as “resources” and are used in the service of ends such as economic growth, employment, or social cohesion. Increasingly, this instrumental view of cultural expression as resources (Yúdice 2003) means that the attention and the moneys lavished on them are increasingly justified in terms of “protecting” or “promoting” the “ways of life”

that, for example, audiovisual culture in the European Union setting is considered to express, shape and represent (Schlesinger 2001).

There is something missing in these sorts of approaches. This is because state policy is far from being the only determinant of what we might call the “cultural system”. Clearly, today a range of other forces are at work: the marketplace, or societal dispositions and actions, notably civil society campaigns related to cultural causes and quality of life issues, impact on the cultural far more deeply than the measures taken by ministries of culture... At the forefront of India’s contemporary cultural system, for example, stands the popular culture generated and disseminated by “Bollywood” and other major centres of film and television production. The “policies” of the ministries responsible respectively for “culture” and “information” impinge but superficially on particular universe. Instead, they support institutions of “high culture”, offer awards and prizes to artists and writers, and pursue efforts of cultural diplomacy (the latter in particular pales into insignificance in comparison to the international reach of the private film industry). Furthermore, in India as in many other multi-ethnic nations, cultural policy thinking at the governmental level is inscribed in terms so narrow that it misses both the ways in which discourses of nationalism, development, modernization and citizenship have mobilized different forms of cultural expression, and the ways in which subtle hierarchies in these discourses trump officially sanctioned notions of “authenticity” or “tradition” (Naregal 2008).

What is more, this kind of cultural policy research is overwhelmingly descriptive. The culture of the “cultural policy researchers” – most of whom work as consultants for one public authority or another – is a mostly unproblematised object, analyzed in more or less functionalist terms. Their critical research questions rarely range beyond the delivery or non-delivery of *outputs* (in turn generally just the outputs of governmental action), but the premises on the basis of which those outputs are defined, the values they embody, or the sometimes covert goals they pursue – in other words the *outcomes* – are rarely questioned.

Totally different is a field of academy-driven scholarship for which “cultural policy” means

the politics of culture in the most general sense: it is about the clash of ideas, institutional struggles and power relations in the production and circulation of symbolic meanings... (McGuigan 1996:1)

In the same vein, Lewis and Miller see “cultural policy” as “a site for the production of cultural citizens, with the cultural industries providing not only a ream of representations about oneself and others, but a series of rationales for particular types of conduct” (Lewis and Miller 2003: 1). This academic tradition emerged relatively recently – only in the 1980s in fact. Influenced largely by cultural studies (as well as by critical sociology, e.g., that of Pierre Bourdieu – who, paradoxically, disparaged cultural studies), the perspective here is inherently contestatory and critical: cultural policy is “cultural politics” – and hence broadens its remit to

include the workings of the marketplace, usually doing so in admonitory terms. In many cases it also cites the increasingly vigorous claims of “cultural civil society.” It should be noted in passing that in European usages there is some slippage around and between “cultural policy” and “cultural politics”. While *politique culturelle* in the Francophone world concerns the taken-for-granted role of the public authorities in cultural provision, and their role alone, the German notion of *Kulturpolitik* is inherently ambiguous; it could involve only such cultural provision, or embrace the critical dimension we are alluding to here.

As the ideological moorings of much of this work are radical leftist and/or libertarian in inspiration, constructive engagement with policy-makers themselves is rarely part of the programme. Often, such engagement is deliberately shunned. Not surprisingly, the findings of this brand of scholarship are unpalatable to policy-makers, for most of the latter cleave to overtly instrumental agendas. Also, it must be said, much “cultural theory” often expresses itself in terms so abstruse and convoluted to be hermetic to the policy-making audience.

There are of course other, humanistic, traditions of research that do not involve the “flattening of human complexity and meaningfulness” as Rothfield put it (1999: 2); yet he too rues the limited purchase of such scholarship in the face of the political and economic forces that dominate, in his case, the American cultural system. It is possible nevertheless to apply a critical rationality to the “broad field of public processes involved in formulating, implementing, and contesting governmental intervention in, and support of, cultural activity” (Cunningham 2004: 14).

Such is the triple wager set out just over a decade ago by Tony Bennett. First, to understand how cultural policies are “parts of a distinctive configuration of the relations between government and culture which characterise modern societies”; second, to encompass “complex forms of cultural management and administration” in ways that deliver adequate historical understanding and theoretical purchase; third, to forge “effective and productive relationships with intellectual workers in policy bureaux and agencies and cultural institutions – but as well as, rather than at the expense of, other connections and, indeed, often as a means of pursuing issues arising from those other connections” (Bennett 1998: 4).

Winning Bennett’s wager would appear to be somewhat out of reach still. The divide between the two versions of “cultural policy” remains deep. This divide was addressed by another Bennett, Oliver, in an essay reviewing the Lewis and Miller *Reader* cited above and the late Mark Schuster’s book *Informing Cultural Policy: The Research and Information Infrastructure*. Each work represents a world “largely oblivious to the preoccupations of the other” (Bennett 2004: 237), the first limited by “an uncritical attachment to a simplistic notion of the progressive”, while for the second “what constitutes both cultural policy and cultural policy research seems broadly to be what governments, their ministries of culture, arts councils and related organisations determine them to be” and is limited to

“the investigation of instrumental questions through empirical social science” (ibid.: 242). Although he is happy to recognize multiple approaches because of the “intellectual vitality” that could be engendered by their encounter, Oliver Bennett still sees an unavoidable “clash” between two worlds that are, adapting Adorno, the torn halves that can never add up to a whole. The arena for the clash in question is the English-speaking West; Bennett (building on Ahearne 2004) contends that it does not exist in France and Germany, where many public intellectuals have contributed to cultural policy debate. His point is made principally to challenge the claim to representativity of the Lewis and Miller *Reader*. Yet there is little evidence that, on the “continent”, the conversation between academic inquiry and policy-oriented advocacy work is in reality less divided, despite Ahearne’s evocation, for France, of collaborations between government and the likes of Bourdieu and de Certeau. These, he claims, “have played an important part in the elaboration of what one might call a nationally available critical cultural policy intelligence” (Ahearne 2004: 11). This seems overstated. Although both Pierre Bourdieu and Michel de Certeau among other social scientists were commissioned in the 1970s by Augustin Girard at the French ministry’s *Département des études et de la prospective* to carry out research that would enrich official reflection, the record shows that scant use was made of their findings. Much of their work was most probably never even reviewed by ministers and senior officials.

On the one side, then, we see entities such as research funding bodies or councils, departments and programs in universities that have a remit for research on cultural issues, university-level programmes in policy studies and/or public administration (or other fields) that include a focus on the culture and media sectors, or dedicated university-based or independent research centres. In the other camp (and only sometimes do they involve the same people), stand those who provide paid analytical services to ministries and art councils; to government-commissioned survey bodies; to agencies in the arts, cultural and media industries; to private foundations and to regional and international organizations, such as the Council of Europe and UNESCO (Bennett 2002).

While it may appear inevitable that the two camps will continue to advance separately and in parallel, some sub-disciplines appear to be bridging the gap. Cultural economics, for example, engaged as it is by necessity with market forces, informs policy-making for culture in to some extent the same way as do economists who deal with money, employment or industrial development, or like sociologists and political scientists whose findings inspire guidelines for the governance of various social and political sectors. But analogies in other domains are hard to find. Most “cultural” research seems only to enjoy purchase on policy when done in the name of some form of institutional promotion or advocacy. To be sure, public policy is intrinsically instrumental in nature. Clearly, in the current climate, it would be difficult for it to be otherwise, as neo-liberal frameworks favour privatisation and deregulation, threatening in the process hitherto secure

funding levels of the subsidized cultural sector: witness the proliferation of “economic impact studies” in the 1980s, the “social impact” work of the 1990s (Bennett 2004), and all the boosterism around the “creative industries” today.

### **How to bridge the divide?**

A way out of the quandary would be to privilege a line of inquiry that analyzes the “arts and heritage” both in relation to the institutional terms and objectives of these fields but also within a broader “cultural system” whose dynamics can only be properly grasped in terms of the social science or “ways of life” paradigm that embraces state, market and civil society together so as to encompass the constitutive position of culture in all aspects of social and public life (Hall 1997).

This solution has its dangers. There is the problem of over-extensivity, of a definition so broad that it is of limited analytical usefulness, leading to the kind of generalized confusion that Marshall Sahlins warned about “when culture in the humanistic sense is not distinguished from “culture” in its anthropological senses, notably culture as the total and distinctive way of life of a people or society. From the latter point of view it is meaningless to talk of “the relation between culture and the economy”, since the economy is part of a people’s culture...” (World Commission on Culture and Development 1996: 21). Yet in reality, since the adoption of the totalizing grab-bag definition proffered by MONDIACULT, the 1982 World Conference on Cultural Policies held in Mexico, not just international organizations such as UNESCO and the Council of Europe, but also most national governments would now claim, rhetorically, that the true reading of culture today is this vexingly expansive, so-called “anthropological” definition.<sup>2</sup>

We know of course that this rhetorical trope is honoured far more in the breach. Yet there are significant exceptions such as the advocacy of a “cultural exception” (now transmuted into “cultural diversity”) for audiovisual goods and services (Isar 2006). The argument is made for the latter not principally for their own sake, *qua* the sector of audiovisual production, but because they are seen to embody the distinctive “soul and spirit” or “cultural identity” of different peoples or nations. The champions of this reading of “cultural diversity” are on to something though, for their perspective does oblige us to begin to articulate a critical discourse on what ministries of culture do that embeds these activities in broader societal dynamics and processes (Dubois and Laborier 2003). Such an inquiry would need to address: i) the ways in which subsidized cultural practice interacts with or is impacted by social, economic and political forces; ii) the domains of public intervention, e.g. home affairs, social welfare or immigration, in which the cultural in the broader social science sense elicits policy stances and policy action; iii) the nature of public intervention in both categories – whether subsidy or investment, directly controlled or at arms length; iv) whether and how the objects and practices of in-

intervention are brought together and conceptualised conjointly as actually constituting a “cultural policy”.

Such research would do justice to two dimensions of the centrality of culture. On the one hand it would allow the analyst to capture the epistemological weight of culture today, its position in relation to knowledge and concepts, how “culture” is used to transform people’s understanding, explanations and visions of the world. On the other it would help her uncover the substantive centrality of the cultural: the actual empirical structure and organization of cultural activities, institutions and relationships and their “significance in the structure and organization of late-modern society, in the processes of development of the global environment and in the disposition of its economic and material resources” (Hall 1997: 236). In so doing it would also compensate for the persisting anomaly of restricting cultural policy to arts policy, thus excluding media and communications, arenas that are so intricately with the substantive centrality of the cultural...

Such an approach could also do much to reduce the gap between what governments frame as cultural policy and a cultural landscape that is increasingly dominated by both the global market-driven cultural economy and civil society activism. The activities and processes of the former in particular “sit uneasily within the public policy framework”, as Pratt points out (2005: 31). Policy-makers have engaged in very limited ways with market-driven culture, whether “high” or “low”. Instead, they have focused on providing support in the form of subsidy to expressive cultural forms as public goods. The mainly not-for-profit cultural sector remains the principal object of cultural policy, in a relationship of increasing tension vis à vis the mainly for-profit cultural industries. As I have observed elsewhere (Isar 2000), most ministries/departments responsible for cultural affairs have neither the mandate nor the technical expertise to grasp the complexities of cultural production, distribution and consumption. A great deal of the latter is market-driven; outputs do not conform to traditional canons of valuation and valorisation and they require measurement in terms that challenge the assumptions, such as market failure or public goods, on which policy rests. Conversely, cultural sector actors find that their environment and needs are simply not understood by the policy-makers. In culture as in other fields, the state needs to play the role of interlocutor, advisor, honest broker, persuader and “incentiviser”, to coin a term...

Policy-makers face three further interconnected sets of challenges; each demands an analytical response (Pratt 2005). First, the challenge of a *transversal approach* that embraces different agents (the public authorities at different levels of government; the private sector; civil society) and different domains of action such as tourism, education, environment, foreign affairs and labour, amongst others. Second, the need to forge conceptual tools that address *strategic longer term questions*, in other words to dispose of the information needed for some degree of indicative planning of future policy, particularly as regards the ways cultural pro-

duction and consumption are organized. Third, the need for *new infrastructures of public participation* in order to sustain a sufficient momentum in favour of this holistic approach, in other words a more open and democratic form of decision-making. The cultural policy “consultants” cannot provide the analytical tools required for such purposes; nor will policy-makers obtain them from the academic world, for want of the right theoretical and methodological frameworks.

The more general challenge therefore is to be able to inform both policy-makers and academia through research that has sufficient conceptual and empirical purchase on the cultural systems of today and tomorrow. This is the horizon identified already in 1996 by the World Commission on Culture and Development, which devoted a chapter of its report, *Our Creative Diversity*, to the idea of “Rethinking Cultural Policies” (World Commission on Culture and Development 1996: 231-253). Meeting the challenge would contribute to reconciling Tom O’Regan’s four purposes for cultural policy studies, viz. state, reformist, antagonistic and diagnostic (O’Regan 1992: 418). It is also why, for the purposes of *The Cultures and Globalization Series*, we adopted the following working definition of the “culture” for our publication:

Culture in the broad sense we propose to employ refers to the social construction, articulation and reception of meaning. Culture is the lived and creative experience for individuals **and** a body of artifacts, symbols, texts and objects. Culture involves enactment and representation. It embraces art and art discourse, the symbolic world of meanings, the commodified output of the cultural industries as well as the spontaneous or enacted, organized or unorganized cultural expressions of everyday life, including social relations. (Anheier and Isar 2007: 9)

## What axes of differentiation?

If cultural systems – government, market, civil society – are to be analyzed comparatively in meaningful ways, what axes of differentiation might we use? On what basis to construct a typology of stances and situations? Before addressing this question, let me first take up a more general need, which is to take into account a range of contexts in which cultural systems exist. By “context” I mean the overall economic and socio-political environment in which policies are articulated and enacted, as well as the histories within which these have developed. In much of Asia and Africa, for example, the institutionalized cultural sector is small and of relatively recent origin; most cultural life does not take place in venues such as theatres and museums. Such institutions exist, together with bodies devoted to heritage preservation, both as colonial legacies and recently developed tools of cultural “modernity”, adopted as adjuncts to nation-building. The budgets of the cultural ministries responsible for such bodies are minute; their action too is often largely rhetorical. Many societies have not experienced the societal changes that have made “culture” a recognized domain of public intervention – I am not referring here to the special case of the United States, which still rejects such a gov-

ernmental role on principle, but to the overwhelming majority of countries where the reverse principle obtains, but is not respected. In Latin America, (excepting perhaps those of Brazil, Colombia and Mexico), the role of cultural ministries may well be as marginal to the cultural system as they are in South Asia, although the institutionalized cultural sector does have deeper roots. In these settings, where the state has played a role in broader cultural policy debates, the question, as García Canclini asks, is how different groups, ethnic communities, and regions have been represented. In many ways, the process of definition of national cultures has “reduced their local specificities to politico-cultural abstractions in the interest of social control or to legitimate a certain form of nationalism” (García Canclini 2000: 303). Yet cultural ministries have been relatively weak in pursuing goals such as these, ill-equipped as they are to develop adequate regulatory instruments, incentives, infrastructures, and the like.

Throughout the world, political rhetoric uses the “ways of life” notion: the “cultures” of different nations, as in the MONDIACULT definition already cited. But in every case, “high” culture is the real remit. The issues arising from the broader notion are addressed by other departments than the ministry of culture or not at all. Recently, however, “ways of life” notions are beginning to receive policy attention to the extent to which the latter are perceived as threatened by global forces. These anxieties have given a bit of edge to cultural policy. The rapidity and intensity of the flows of cultural content and products present new challenges to “cultural identities”, clearly enhancing the salience of domains such as culture, tourism and sports – in all of which we can observe a range of different domestic pressures to stem, encourage, or take advantage of culture flows (Singh 2007). There is another sense in which the issue of context arises: these recent developments also challenge the relevance of the nation-state “container”. As a result of globalization,

the nexus of culture and nation no longer dominates: the cultural dimension has become constitutive of collective identity at narrower as well as broader levels... What is more, cultural processes take place in increasingly “deterritorialized” transnational, global contexts, many of which are beyond the reach of national policies. Mapping and analyzing this shifting terrain, in all regions of the world, as well as the factors, patterns, processes, and outcomes associated with the “complex connectivity” (Tomlinson 1999) of globalization, are therefore key challenges (Anheier and Isar 2008: 1).

Returning now to the possible bases for cross-country comparison, McGuigan (2004) recently revisited the not-very-well known five axes of state/culture relations defined by Raymond Williams in 1984. On the basis of the distinction he drew between “cultural policy as display” and “cultural policy proper” Williams suggested the following articulation: under the first category, “cultural policy as display”: 1) national aggrandizement and 2) economic reductionism; under the second, “cultural policy proper”: 3) public patronage of the arts; 4) media regulation and 5) negotiated construction of cultural identity. The five categories in the

template remain germane, despite the fact that the distinction between what is “proper”, i.e. what the welfare state is supposed to do conscientiously and perhaps even disinterestedly and what is (mere) “display” is no longer tenable. Not only have the lines between the two become irreparably blurred, the disinterested propriety of Williams’ vision may well have been an illusion in the first place. Yet if cultural policy as display is here to stay, and right across the board, each of the five categories remains pertinent (although media regulation, i.e. media policy, is all too often hived off from cultural policy studies. Perhaps nowadays one would simply want to add to the understanding of both 2) economic reductionism and 4) media regulation, the policy issues raised by the much more prominent place of the cultural industries, as discussed in the previous section.

As regards 3), public patronage of the arts, Hillman-Chartrand and McCaughey’s typology of State stances (1989) – the Facilitator State, the Patron State, the Architect State and the Engineer State – also retains its relevance, although recent developments, particularly multiple convergences and the growth of the cultural industries, have complexified the landscape. Briefly put, the *Facilitator State* funds the arts essentially through foregone taxes or tax deductions, provided according to the wishes of individual and corporate donors, the marketplace being the main driver. The United States alone embodied this model when it was first proposed as it still does today. Most, however, remain the *Patron State*, e.g., the United Kingdom, that honours the “arm’s length” principle, or the *Architect State* that constructs an official system of support structures and measures (France and The Netherlands). An increasing number of countries, including according to Mangset et al. (2008) the Nordic countries, may be a cross between the two. The final model, that of the *Engineer State*, ideologically driven and owning the means of cultural production, is no doubt an almost extant species, yet many aspects of the Engineer role are aspired to in developing countries that practice a *dirigiste* cultural discourse.

Another analytical grid could be built on the basis of the binaries put forward some years ago in a Council of Europe publication: choices between competing visions, imperatives or priorities that can be conceived as a “balancing act” (Matarasso and Landry 1999), between. Two of the “framework” choices – so-called because they determine cultural policy positioning in relation to political, social and ethical values – would serve our purpose well.<sup>3</sup> One is the distinction between the *democratization of culture* and *cultural democracy*: either giving people *access* to a pre-determined set of cultural goods and services or giving them tools of agency, voice and representation in terms of their own cultural expressions. The first approach assumes that a single cultural canon determined on high can be propagated to “the masses.” Nor has it been successful, as the unequal distribution of “cultural capital” in society has made access to culture either problematic or unsolicited by the intended beneficiaries, while the scale of market-driven cultural industries has reduced the reach of subsidised cultural provision. *Cultural democ-*

racy on the other hand, seeks to augment and diversify access to the means of cultural production and distribution, to involve people in fundamental debates about the value of cultural identity and expression, while also giving them agency as regards the means of cultural production, distribution and consumption...

Given the prevalence of instrumental rationales for cultural policy already discussed, a second useful axis of differentiation is between *culture for its own sake* or *for the sake of other benefits*. The option here is between intrinsic “quality of life” arguments for cultural expression and other related cultural values versus the idea that they should be tools or instruments for other social and economic purposes. The instrumental position is now challenged in both Western Europe and North America (Holden 2006); in many settings elsewhere, it has not yet taken hold to anywhere near the same extent, if at all.

Other choices explored in the volume are also relevant; these arise in various other areas, such as implementation, social development, economics and management. Most of these, although presented as choices to be made within cultural administrations, could also be the basis for comparisons between them, e.g., in the realm of implementation, the options between consultation or active participation, between the search for prestige as opposed to community development, or between national (local) visibility or international; in the realm of social development, the definition of the “community” in singular or plural terms, a monist definition of culture vs. a pluralist one, a privileging of the past (heritage) or of the present (contemporary arts), of visitors (tourists) over residents, of an external image in favour of internal reality.

### **International Agendas in Cultural Policy?**

Finally, what leading agendas internationally might be foregrounded for comparative purposes, or so as to discern major long-term trends? I would suggest two, both of which require clarification and unpacking, as they are now used as catchwords in a plethora of ways. These are i) *cultural diversity* and ii) *the cultural and/or creative industries*.

As a consequence of the culturalism of our time, which Appadurai nicely characterized as being “the conscious mobilization of cultural differences in the service of a larger national or transnational politics...” (1996:15), *cultural diversity* is no longer just a given of the human condition but has become a globally shared normative meta-narrative. In addition, the debate at UNESCO around the 2005 *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* has transubstantiated the notion into the right and responsibility of nation-states to support the production of cultural goods and services that express their “national identity”. This rather reductive understanding of a hitherto more capacious theme emerged through a discursive reframing of the *exception culturelle* that had been the rallying cry of the Canadian and French governments since the

end of the Uruguay Round in the mid-1990s. The shift from “exception” to “diversity” as the master concept allowed their cultural diplomacy to move from a negative to a positive stance; more importantly, it enabled it also to tap into a variegated range of anxieties everywhere, stemming from the real or perceived decline in “cultural diversity”, this time understood very much in the anthropological sense. Thought to be dramatically accelerated by globalization, this very decline has, dialectically, generated a dynamic of culturalist repluralization.

Unsurprisingly, multiple interpretations of its scope now appear to be crystallizing around the UNESCO Convention, as different constituencies, including sub-national communities and minorities, see the treaty as a powerful tool to advance cultural claims other than those of “cultural goods and services” or for that matter, just States alone. There is a growing awareness, as Stolcke has put it (1995: 12), of the “political meanings with which specific political contexts and relationships endow cultural difference. It is the configuration of socio-political structures and relationships both within and between groups that activates differences and shapes possibilities and impossibilities of communication.” It is for such reasons that in our Brief for the third volume of *The Cultures and Globalization Series* (Anheier and Isar 2010) devoted to the topic “Cultural Expression, Creativity and Innovation” we asked contributors to address questions such as the following. What are the dimensions of diversity in cultural expression: artistic languages, repertoires and practices? Are there diversifying genres, fields, regions and localities, or professions and organizational systems, or certain types of clusters? Conversely, are there other areas that show less diversity or appear to be either stable or regressive? How is diversity in cultural expression being communicated and exchanged on the global canvas?

Finally, some reflections on the *cultural/creative industries*, simply because this sub-sector has become a, if not *the*, dominant paradigm in Western European cultural policy discourse. This conceptual development sits so well with the instrumentalizing frameworks of the reigning neo-liberal capitalist system that its hegemonic status it is acquiring equally hegemonic status elsewhere, from Brazil to China. An ubiquitous new “creative industries” hype needs to be deconstructed, if only to better grapple with the very real issues that lie behind it. Today, an ever-increasing range of economic activity is concerned with producing and marketing goods and services that are permeated in one way or another with broadly aesthetic or semiotic attributes. The aesthetic has been commodified; and the commodity has been aestheticized. While the industrial and the digital mediate practically every cultural process, “cognitive-cultural” goods and services have become a major segment of our economies; their production and distribution mobilize considerable human, material and technical resources.

In the process, the idea of “creativity”, that till recently artists had the principal claim on, has been vastly expanded and is applied today to a very broad range of activities and professions, many of which are far removed from artistic creation.

In this capacity, the “cultural” has become a key economic policy issue. Witness the 2006 study *The Economy of Culture in Europe* done for the European Commission and the subsequent foregrounding of the field in EU policy. The question is whether all types of cultural production can be justified in terms of economic gain. While the cultural sector itself may find it opportune to do so rhetorically, if only to garner support for its activities and institutions, such opportunism pinions it to neo-liberal understandings. It is therefore crucially important, as a range of cultural economists, geographers and other social scientists are already doing, to explore this segment of the “cultural system” more deeply. In eliciting contributions from such researchers for the second volume of *The Cultures and Globalization Series* on “The Cultural Economy” we asked them to address questions such as the following. How do commercial viability and artistic creativity relate to each other in this context? To what degree do the imperatives of the market threaten (or possibly foster) collaborative or process-based arts activity? How do market-driven phenomena create new figures of the creative artist in increasingly hybrid and precarious working environments? What are the current and emerging organizational forms for the investment, production, distribution and consumption of cultural goods and services? As cultural production becomes part of a mixed economy at the national level, what are the emerging patterns transnationally? Who are the “winners” and “losers” as the cultural economy becomes globalized? Are some art forms and genres being marginalized, becoming increasingly excluded, while others move to the centre of transnational cultural attention and economic interests?

### **Concluding thoughts**

Both sets of questions raised in this article concern “big” issues. Both have to do with lacunae that must be transcended if cultural policy research is to rise to the challenges of our time and, *a fortiori*, if robust international comparisons are to be made. For “culture” today crystallizes great expectations and great illusions. The two go together; both stem from visions yet at once overblown and truncated, from simplifications that are both partial and reductive, and ultimately from readings that are excessively instrumental. The agenda adumbrated here is designed to escape these pitfalls, but it is no doubt easier to advocate than to accomplish.

**Yudhishtir Raj Isar:** Professor of Cultural Policy Studies at The American University of Paris and *Maître de Conférence* at Sciences Po. Independent public speaker and advisor. Board member of several cultural organizations. President of *Culture Action Europe*, 2004-08. Earlier, at UNESCO, Executive Secretary of the World Commission on Culture and Development and Director of the Cultural Policies for Development Unit.

## Notes

- 1 An earlier version of this article was published as “Cultural policy: issues and interrogations in an international perspective” in Svante Beckman and Sten Månsson (eds.), *KulturSverige 2009. Problemanalys och statistik*, Linköping: SweCult.
- 2 The MONDIACULT definition: “...culture may now be said to be the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group. It includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, values systems, traditions and beliefs” (UNESCO, 1982).
- 3 The authors list the narrower and broader notions of culture as their first overarching “framework” choice. Their word, “dilemma”, is surely too strong. For in actual practice there is no such duality: cultural policy still deals preponderantly with “high” culture. The challenge of moving it forward is how to broaden its scope.

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## Spaces and Places of Cultural Studies

By Mikko Lehtonen

### **Abstract**

As cultural studies has sought for a foothold in universities, it has faced pressures of modern disciplinarity it aims at to challenge and alter. In the conjuncture of neo-liberal university policies new weight is given to multidisciplinary as an instrument for reshaping universities in favour of cost-effectiveness and quick-fix applications. In this new situation cultural studies has to defend purposeful and enduring diversity in and of universities. In order to be able to do this it has to think of itself not only as a critical space but also as such place where universities could critically reflect themselves and their place in the world.

**Keywords:** Cultural studies, universities, disciplines, neoliberalism, diversity

## Spaces and Places of Cultural Studies

Stories told of cultural studies stress its worldly nature, repeating that its agenda is, or at least should be, informed by the contexts studied.<sup>1</sup> Along with scholars who work e.g. in fields of women's studies or postcolonial studies, cultural studies practitioners like to see themselves as cunning smugglers of earthly questions inside the walls of academia.

The multi-, cross-, post- or anti-disciplinary project of cultural studies came famously into existence outside the universities. It has, however, for 40 years sought its place inside academia (e.g. Bennett 1998, Dworkin 1997, Grossberg 1997a and 1997b, Lee 2003). Establishing cultural studies projects, programmes, centres and like, has in the last decades primarily taken place in academic contexts. There has been some discussion on how cultural studies changes the academic contexts it works in (e.g. Hall 1992, Williams 1989), but not that much debate on how academic contexts have produced various pressures on the forms cultural studies has assumed.<sup>2</sup>

In this text, I outline the two-way traffic between cultural studies and its academic contexts. First, I discuss university cultures that form immediate contexts of cultural studies scholars' activities, looking at both heteronomous and autonomous elements of these cultures. Second, I look closer at workings of academic disciplines and the pressures disciplinarity produces for cultural studies. Finally, I look closer at various locations of cultural studies in the contemporary (neo-liberal) academia in the light of two somewhat different notions of cultural studies, i.e., cultural studies as a space and as a place.

### I University Cultures

What kinds of contexts of action are universities for cultural studies? In order to get a grip on this, let me discuss the notion of *university cultures*. By "university cultures" I refer to certain simultaneously real and symbolic practices.<sup>3</sup> These practices consist of certain procedures and assumptions, a body of relatively stable workings and suppositions. The shared values, norms and behaviours constitute a certain culture pervading all academic disciplines (classic portrayals of the phenomenon are Becher 1989 and Clark 1987, see also Ylijoki 2000, 2005 and 2008).<sup>4</sup>

Usually university cultures are thought to consist of such things as an interest in knowledge for its own sake, critical thinking, specialised knowledge, disputation, openness, scepticism, tolerance, reflection, academic freedom and the like (e.g. Merton 1968). Such characterisations, however, are first and foremost ideal, based rather on how academia wants to be seen than on how it actually works.

## Heteronomy

One of self-idealizations of academia is the tendency to see itself as a predominantly autonomous field of action. But university cultures are not self-sufficient in the sense of being dependent only on themselves. On the contrary, it is relatively easy to perceive various ways in which university cultures are heteronomous, that is, dependent on factors other than universities. Let me refer to just three such elements:

*First*, various academic disciplines are linked to trajectories of life and professions their practitioners study and educate functionaries to. To take one example, literary studies, in which I graduated, are in many ways tied to literary institutions, reproducing not only their values but also the institutions themselves. In the late modern world it would be quite difficult to imagine literary public sphere without the research and training contributions of academic literary scholars. Another example is media studies, in which I currently work. Media scholars too reproduce the phenomena they study – not only by educating journalists and passing on certain professional habits and attitudes but also, for example, by acquiescing to the division of labour between different media forms as they scatter into groups of print media, television, radio, film and internet researchers<sup>5</sup>.

*Second*, the national considerations also have their impacts on university cultures. In late modern nation states there are certain canons of subjects that nations must study and teach at the highest level if they want to be considered as modern and civilised. These canons vary to some extent (say, between Australia, India or Sweden), but the specific variations are all built on certain modern classifications, differentiating between natural and human sciences, social sciences and the humanities, international and national fields, theoretical and empirical sciences etc. Much the same way as each nation has to have a flag and a national anthem, they also need to have universities with certain academic disciplines in order to be accepted as full members of the family of modern nations. This, of course, is just one of the paradoxical outcomes of the modern universal compulsion to clothe transnational imperatives in national guises, but it nevertheless has its impact in shaping the assumedly universal institutions into particular national forms (e.g. Sassen 2006).

*Third*, universities are as educative and research institutes tied in manifold ways to transnational and national economies, politics and cultures. The forms of practical connections between universities, economic agents, states and actors of civil societies vary, but they all have their hopes and fears in relation to universities. Political and economic agents also have their ways of ensuring that universities assume their designated place. The compulsive or persuasive policies towards universities vary from one conjuncture to another. In the current neo-liberal conjuncture universities are coerced and coaxed to recreate themselves in the image

of enterprises (e.g. Slaughter & Leslie 1997, Canaan & Shumar ed. 2008) that behave largely in a market-oriented way while competing for external funding.

Cultural studies exists in ambiguous relation to these elements of heteronomy. For cultural studies there are no self-evident professions or institutions to reproduce. Neither is cultural studies a predominantly national (let alone nationalistic) field of research in the sense that it would have been born for purposes of constructing nationally oriented understandings of contemporary world. Cultural studies also tends to have a critical stance towards various transnational and national economic, political and cultural forces, even though there are also pressures towards exploitation of its findings among entrepreneurs and policy makers. Instead of dependencies outlined above, cultural studies brings forward other kinds of ideas on relations between universities and civil society, stressing that academic researchers are not in their work responsible first and foremost for nations, enterprises or professions but for those who cannot in conditions of modern division of labour work as intellectuals.

### **Autonomy**

Universities and single academic disciplines rarely reflect these dependencies. Perhaps this is part of their persistent habit of not paying too much attention to reflecting their own actual ways of thinking and acting (apart from idealisations produced on various ceremonious occasions).

To stress the heteronomous nature of university cultures is not, of course, to say that they are determined only from the outside. The centuries long traditions of universities themselves also imprint these cultures, as is often stressed at various academic anniversaries. Usually these traditions are seen to emanate from mediaeval universities, famously based on a model offered by the guilds (Reeves 1969). As mediaeval guilds, the first universities also distinguished between apprenticeship, journeymanship and mastership from each other. This model gave the universities four premises that still largely persist: First, novices do indeed belong to the same organisation as the masters. Second, there are progressive levels in learning. Third, the disciples in the middle of their education (journeymen) can teach the novices. Fourth, the master has a monopoly of teaching and learning.

Modern universities are much more diverse and segmented in structure than the mediaeval ones<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, in addition to the traditional task of teaching, modern universities have also assumed the more recent task of research. In recent years these two tasks, teaching and research, have been further complemented by a third one, known as service activities, that in the neo-liberal conjuncture first and foremost imply an incentive to contribute to economic development.

In spite of the introduction of new duties, the mediaeval guild model is still recognisable in modern universities, especially within academic disciplines. The guild model is not officially subscribed to, but practically it is adhered to.

What makes the suppositions, norms and practical workings of universities effective is primarily the fact that they are largely implicit, not publicly articulated nor subjected to critical scrutiny (cf. Gerholm 1990). This, of course, is a normal *modus operandi* of power. Only a dim-witted ruler would try to make explicit the workings of his power. (On the other hand, a witless ruler would probably not even know what the sources of his power are.)

The implicit cultures influence daily academic practices in such a strong way that in comparison to this mute coercion and patronising all that universities publicly proclaim of themselves – be they strategies, statutes, degree requirements or other – are doomed to seem quite insipid. Anyone wishing to study the values, norms and workings of universities in printed form would no doubt be disappointed as the values, norms etc. are not recorded, but must be ferreted out by each and every one as best they can. This, in its turn, guarantees that the power of the masters remains largely unquestioned.

Cultural studies has an uneasy relation to allegedly autonomous features of universities. In its multi-, inter-, cross-, post- or anti-disciplinary tones it resembles in some ways pre-modern universities with their generalist approaches. In stressing worldly research and teaching agendas it represents an alternative view concerning new “service activities” of universities, willing to work not for enterprises but for civil society. Finally, in relation to disciplinary power, cultural studies aims to work as a meta-discipline, a field where university can critically measure itself. (I will return to this last point.)

### **Academic feudalism and socialism**

Two metaphors come relatively effortlessly to mind when trying to decipher what is going on in contemporary universities. They are metaphors of universities as feudal states and of universities as “actually existing socialism”. The former depicts traditional modern university with relatively big autonomy and small external economic pressures, whereas the latter describes (paradoxically) the current “academic capitalism” (of which see Ylijoki 2003).

Feudal states were famously made up of the king, noble landowners and vassals who were granted possession of land by the landowners. The feudal system was characterized by absence of public authority and the exercise of administrative and judicial functions by local lords. Academic disciplines are indeed reminiscent of autonomic fiefs with their own noblemen and limited openness in their functioning. The noblemen, known as professors, “form the core of local, national, and international scientific establishments” and “play a key part in the development of scientific knowledge” (Elias 1982: 5). Socialisation into one’s own discipline here equals socialisation into implicit traditional knowledges of one’s fief (cf. Gerholm 1990). After learning the unwritten rules one gains inclusion in the disciplinary “us”.

If the universities at the level of disciplines are reminiscent of feudal fiefs, as wholes they recall “actually existing socialism”. “Actually existing socialism” meant, among other things, modifying reality into a highly aesthetic form in the sense that what mattered was not the quantity nor indeed the quality of production or the population’s actual quality of living. What mattered in this simulation was, instead, how the production was represented to central government and how the powers-that-be represented the reality to the people.

Under the neo-liberal university policies the university reality is largely aestheticized in the sense that *Schein* (how things seem to be) takes precedence over *Sein* (how things actually are). In other words, in contemporary universities outer appearances take precedence over the real state of things, at least in relations between universities and ministries of education or in the public images of universities. At stake in negotiations between state funded universities and ministries of education is not what the universities really do (particularly in relation to the actual quality of teaching or research), but what they appear to do in numerical terms. The neo-liberal university policies cast the university leaders in the role of factory managers in “actually existing socialism” and the heads of faculties and departments in the roles of middle management. The discussions between universities and governmental departments concern what the universities say they produce, not what they really produce.

Both models are awkward for cultural studies project. Feudalism tends to produce neurotic disciplinary identities with constant guarding of academic borders, occasional xenophobia and (luckily infrequent) ostracism. Actually existing socialism creates aversion towards research agendas set from the civil society as well as towards production of critical knowledge.

## II Disciplinarity

Modern university cultures are predominantly disciplinary cultures. First year students or new PhD students do not acculturate into universities as wholes but into disciplines. One way to characterise the invisible disciplinary acculturation of novices into academia is to portray it as their acquisition of a discipline-specific habitus.<sup>7</sup> This does not involve the explicit transmission of rules or learning of roles, but “a tacit understanding gained by participating in the practices of a certain field” (Becher & Huber 1990: 237). Socialisation or acculturation to university cultures occurs largely by learning the norms and workings of disciplines by trial and error.<sup>8</sup> These norms and workings constitute the hidden curriculum of each discipline, conceptualized by Oili-Helena Ylijoki (2000: 341) as their *moral orders*.<sup>9</sup>

The new members of staff are recruited from those who have internalised this tacit knowledge. The university cultures thus reproduce themselves first by invisible teaching of invisible norms, and, second, by filling teaching positions with

those who have absorbed these norms thereby successfully acculturating to the discipline in question.

These invisible norms form a glass ceiling, felt sorely by many who have tried to spark off debates on the paradigmatic matters of various disciplines, only to find that with their best intentions they have been condemned to be heretics, not one of “us”.

If the values, norms and workings of universities were explicit and public, free for all to read, weigh up and criticise, universities would surely be different. This might bring with it such academic freedom of thinking and interaction that is not available to those who have to grope their ways blindfold through the normative jungle. Now, however, we live in universities where the norms and workings are neither explicit nor rationalised.

Cultural studies relation to disciplinarity is uneasy – not least because many of its practitioners are forced or other refugees from disciplines they were educated in. For some time cultural studies has been seen as a means by which the university thinks about itself (Hall 2008: 18). In its anti- and inter-disciplinarity cultural studies is a “reluctant discipline” (Bennett 1998) or a meta-discipline (“meta” meaning here that it is a field that does not take disciplinarity as an unquestioned premise but tries, instead, to scrutinise the conditions and consequences of academic disciplinary system). As such, cultural studies has a potential to be simultaneously a free field (“third space” between discrete disciplines), a battlefield (a forum for demarcations and confrontations) and a field of overlap<sup>10</sup>. It has a potential to produce hybridising bricolages and to bring together elements that have elsewhere been separated from each other. (I will return to this towards the end of this text.)

### **Tacit and expressed disciplinarity**

To stress various negative consequences of disciplinarity, as I have done above, is not to say that the disciplinary organisation of academic research and teaching is totally without foundation. Obviously there has to be *some* kind of division of labour between academic researchers so that they can produce cumulative areas of knowledge. In order to be able to say something about something one has to delimit the topics one is talking about as well as the ways one talks about them. As in all other discursive action, in academic work, too, one has to define an object and a way to speak about it.

Modern disciplinarity, however, has also non-productive dimensions. Choosing the object and accepted ways of talking about it inevitably excludes numerous things from disciplinary considerations. In the last instance disciplines can only institute themselves by the aid of what lies outside them, by distinguishing themselves from that which they are not, i.e., what they exclude or expel from their limits (Hall 2008: 71–72, Weber 1987). Also disciplines, indeed, have constitutive

outsides and cannot, hence, be “self-identical, independent, autonomous, or self-contained” (Hall 2008: 72).

The homogeneity of academic disciplines is produced, however, not only tacitly but also overtly. The homogeneity is based, on the one hand, on various attempts to draw distinctions between one’s own and other disciplines, and, on the other hand, in a constant guarding and homogenising of areas thus formed. Disciplinary power resides first and foremost in questions concerning what is studied and how. It also underlies in questions concerning for whom or what the research is carried on. In other words, disciplinary power is power to define proper objects of knowledge and correct ways to view them.

The openness of cultural studies lies in this sense exactly in its anti-disciplinary nature. In cultural studies there are no given objects of knowledge. “Culture” is no such object, since cultural studies approaches culture not as something that is already known. Culture is not in cultural studies something that is used to explain things, but a thing that has itself to be explained. For cultural studies culture is not an answer but a question and a means of asking. In this sense cultural studies is not grounded on a given theory of culture but is rather meta-theory that aims at explaining the explainer, that is, culture.

### **Multidisciplinarity**

Advocating multidisciplinary used to equal being against the academic grain. All of a sudden multidisciplinary, however, seems now to be the hottest hot among academic policy makers. For cultural studies practitioners who have been advocating the blessedness of multidisciplinary for aeons, it is baffling to come across the new academic fashion of reiterating the seemingly identical mantra in official speeches and documents. Today, it is not uncommon to hear even from state authorities that cross-disciplinary areas of research are vital to the future of universities.

An optimistic reading of this twist would point out that universities and officialdom have finally realised that the modern disciplinary division of academic labour does not fit the logic of the late modern world and that most of today’s relevant research questions lie in the no man’s lands between modern disciplines. An optimist would relate new weight given for multidisciplinary to the fact that contemporary disciplinary divisions were formed in conditions of classical modernity and that they do epitomise modern sphere logic (e.g. between “society” and “culture”), as well as the logic of the internal divisions of the public sphere (e.g. between press, literature, film and television, music, drama, visual arts etc.). The optimist would further stress that in late modernity it is increasingly troublesome to try to understand these spheres and modalities in isolation from each other.

The pessimist, on the other hand, might think that the new inclination towards multidisciplinary is linked to neo-liberal policies where universities are turned upside down in order to eliminate overlap, to build bigger units than before and,

instead of basic research, to emphasise such applied research that would yield immediate harvests. In this new mode of knowledge production (Gibbons et al. 1994) university research is “transforming from the traditional discipline-based basic research into transdisciplinary, problem-oriented project research carried out with external funding” (Ylijoki 2005: 557).

The pessimist might further ponder whether the new multidisciplinary does really entail a critical stance towards current logic of disciplinarity – apart from possible administrative reforms. Does not the policy that consumes basic resources of universities in fact buttress the walls between the disciplines as each discipline curls up around its “core contents”? In this sense one might even ponder whether this specific form of multidisciplinary in fact contributes in maintaining the disciplinary borders intact.

### **III Spaces and Places of Cultural studies**

Like other cultural formations, the university cultures, too, are ambivalent, entailing tradition and innovation, structure and action, subservience and autonomy. If university cultures were purely repressive, academia would be occupied exclusively by masochists. Even in the prevailing circumstances innovation, action and autonomy are salient elements of research and teaching.

The thousand-dollar question is, then: How could innovation, action and autonomy also be necessary elements of university cultures? By this I mean the challenge of organising research and teaching so as to promote true innovativeness (instead of contemporary self-proclaimed “innovativeness” that mostly serves a quick productive application) and the activity of those working at the universities.

#### **Organising Anarchy**

Here we come up against the classical question: How to organise anarchy? My own, undeniably Utopian but perhaps for that very reason most topical answer is: By making visible violence that is intrinsic in disciplinarity and hence re-opening the domain of politics in universities.

To open this up a bit: The disciplinary system tends to represent itself as a natural one, but, in order to function as legitimately instituted fields of knowledge, disciplines must repress their multiple dependencies on existing power-relations. Disciplines cannot found itself, as Gary Hall (2008: 73) reminds. Instead, their authority must come from somewhere else that is outside the disciplines and precedes them. This authorizing authority is none other than state (ibid.).

Disciplines must be actively reminded of the constitutive violence on which their identities are built. They must be time and again pointed out that “any such differentiation or demarcation that goes to institute a discipline – the judgment or decision as to what to include and what to exclude, what should be taken inside

and what expelled – is an inherently unstable and irreducibly violent one” (Hall 2008: 73).

Trouble is that in current disciplinary university system it is difficult to produce spaces and places for openly *political* discussions concerning academic work. By “political” I mean such dialogues where participants would from the outset admit that there are no pre-given or self-explanatory premises for outlining the place, content or segmentation of academic work. If the historical and discursive character of disciplines were made explicit, the domain of politics could be perhaps (re)opened in universities. By making the academia to remember what it has forgotten, i.e., by denaturalizing the basic assumptions of current disciplinary system, cultural studies could represent a new political challenge of *organised diversity* in universities.

### **Cultural Studies as a Space and a Place**

In order to be able to do this, cultural studies should be thought not only as a space but also as a place. What do I mean by this? Cultural studies is often depicted as a space, that is, an area for actions and effects. As a space cultural studies is, as it were, a free field, a “third space” somewhere beyond disciplinary determinations. But should we, given the diverse institutionalisation of cultural studies in the last decades, also speak of cultural studies in less abstract terms, that is, as a place? And if cultural studies was seen as a place, what kind of place would it be?

The problem in this shift of perspective is, of course, that places are all too often spoken of in terms of stasis with more or less clear cut boundaries. Prevailing notions of places imply that they are more or less limited and gain their identities from and within themselves. These notions imply that places are containers, so to speak, and not clusters of relations<sup>11</sup>. Places are not conceived as interfaces, but as enclosures with permanent origins and immovable centres. These images effectively prevent us from thinking of places from the perspectives of activity, de-centredness and change. On the contrary, the prevailing imagery calls for emphasizing the borders that keep places apart from other places, instead of foregrounding all the connections places have to the realities of which they are parts. Moreover, in these images each individual is first and foremost tied to one single place, whereas in real life, of course, people are successively and often also simultaneously linked to many places. Place is represented in this imagery as a self-sufficient autotopy. It is a locus of constant guarding of borders, of endless inclusion of “us” and exclusion of “them”.

Perhaps such notions of places have made cultural studies scholars speak of their project more in terms of space than place. But should one not try to redefine the dominant notions of what places are also in relation to cultural studies? This would not necessarily be a futile exercise, since the conceptualisations of what a place is also have implications for the ways academic disciplines and fields of

research are conceived of. Perhaps it is no coincidence that dominant ideas of places closely resemble dominant ideas of disciplines as such autotopies in need of constant border guarding?

The alternative way of imagining places that might also help to think of cultural studies as a place in a new way would be an idea of a place as a historical formation where numerous elements from outside the place "itself" are present. This would entail thinking of a place as a cluster of relations, not as a container. To adapt a metaphor widely used in cultural studies, places could be perceived as *diasporic*.

A diasporic place? Perhaps, but not a diasporic place in the sense of it being filled with nostalgic longing for some original home terrain one has been forced to relinquish. Perhaps, instead, a diasporic place in the sense of a dwelling for a considerable number of people who have had to find refuge, a different place to be in, a new terrain of hope and new beginnings. A diasporic place as a field in which one can feel anchored and at home in, but which is not expected to be eternally identical with itself. A place without "roots" in the sense of origins, but with a lot of "routes" in the sense of passages and pathways (cf. Gilroy 1995).

The idea of cultural studies as a diasporic place might bring back the idea cherished at the beginning of the 1990s, that is, the idea of practitioners of cultural studies as nomads (e.g. Grossberg 1992: 126). The idea of a diasporic place is close to a notion of researchers as nomads in the sense that those in diaspora must also be acutely aware of their own positionality. But whereas the idea of a nomad easily leads to romanticizing cultural researchers as some kind of free-ranging intellectuals without any external determinations, the idea of cultural studies as a specific diasporic place might bring with it questions of institutional power. To ask who, when, how and under which conditions have to travel and temporarily settle down is to ask in what contexts the intellectual movement in question takes place. What are the institutional power relations that determine such displacements and dislocations? How do these relations over-determine diasporic formations? In other words, how do the power relations imprint the spaces and places of cultural studies, and how does this affect its make-up?

### **The challenge of cultural studies**

As the mantra of multidisciplinary gains popularity among neoconservatives, it is vital to bear in mind that multidisciplinary, too, always has its contexts that affect its forms and usages. Multidisciplinary is not an automatic passage to critical heaven. It can also be used as a neo-liberal instrument for readjusting universities in favour of cost-effectiveness and quick-fix applications. Such multidisciplinary often leaves the traditional disciplinary borders untouched and is organised around projects where researchers from various disciplines gather temporarily only to quickly return to their immutable academic homes.

In relation to such multidisciplinary the challenge that cultural studies should represent along other fields with expressed emancipatory interests of knowledge is different. It is the challenge of *purposeful and enduring diversity*. If disciplinarity equals scarcity, regulation and control, purposeful and enduring diversity represents abundance, variation and potentiality. It represents an effort to build an environment conducive to diversity, an effort to put “diversity at the centre of the curriculum and the demographics of university” (Appadurai 1996: 26). It is a project where there are no given objects whose meaning and nature is established in advance by disciplinary conventions (Nelson and Gaonkar 1996: 18).

Purposefully diverse new formations do not easily enter universities where each feudal lord stands guard over his modest plot. New formations may not be viewed with delight in university leaderships for whom they may not at first glance represent a promise of such results that would bring riches to their institutions. And yet the hope for universities lies in hybrids and impure cross-breedings. In a world where modern divisions between economy, politics and culture are increasingly blurred and where media boundaries become more and more insignificant, the hope of understanding what is going on does not lie in fostering the purity of disciplines.

In late modern contexts the pursuit of disciplinary purity would mean the pursuit of a dead space. In order to fight against disciplinary pressures as well as neo-liberal coercion towards artificial multidisciplinary, spaces of cultural studies should also be organised into places – places of discontent, endless suspicion and questioning that is also directed towards the non-place one dwells in. As a meta-discipline where university critically reflects itself cultural studies might also contribute to another kind of university (Hall 2008) that is not only a possibility but also a necessity.

**Mikko Lehtonen** is Professor of Media Culture at the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Tampere. He is director of the research project “The Power of Culture in Producing Common Sense (POWCULT)” funded by the Academy of Finland. Among his other present research interests are relations of “real” and “symbolic” as well as commodification of culture. Lehtonen has published in English a monograph titled “The Cultural Analysis of Texts” (Sage 2000). His books in Finnish cover theories of subjectivity, cultural construction of masculinities, the future of book as a media form, significations concerning 9/11 and the challenge of rethinking Finnishness.

## Notes

- 1 An often cited example of this is Hall 1992, especially pp. 278–279.
- 2 To give just one relatively recent example of such pressures: In today's Finnish academia, it is nowadays virtually *de rigueur* to write in English and submit manuscripts to international, most often Anglo-American, forums. Otherwise one's chances of success in the battle for domestic research funding are thin. Now, this is diametrically opposed to the worldly ethos of cultural studies, creating a situation where an increasing proportion of cultural research is directed at other scholars and not to those whose lives are the topic of research. This produces, indeed, a vicious circle where one has to publish extensively in English in order to publish more in the future – again in English. By this I do not intend to say that Finnish cultural studies practitioners should publish only in Finnish or that Japanese colleagues should always prefer their own mother tongue. English is undeniably *lingua franca* of also the international cultural studies community with all obvious pros and cons (of which see Fornäs and Lehtonen 2005). One cannot escape the imperatives of English when communicating with colleagues from all over the world. This, however, should not divert Finnish, Japanese or other cultural studies scholars from acting as public intellectuals also in their own languages and home countries.
- 3 Cf. what Ludwig Huber (1990: 241) writes: “The term culture refers here to both everyday life and social and cognitive structures of universities and is linked to an idea of acculturation or socialisation as the development of certain dispositions to act that are specific for universities and disciplines, produced in and reproducing their culture.”
- 4 The conscious choice of the plural – ‘university cultures’ – instead of the singular refers, of course, to the fact that in universities there are several disparate (normally discipline based) cultures. Disciplines differ from each other in many ways, among them attitudes to socio-political issues, social background of their practitioners, external relations and resources (Huber 1990). The most common breeding grounds of cultural studies – humanities, social sciences and education – are, however, not necessarily that different from each other.
- 5 The emergent research area of multimodality and intermediality (of which see, e.g., Kress and van Leeuwen 2001) is an exception to this rule.
- 6 It is well known that in mediaeval universities there were no modern disciplines. Instead, teaching was organised so that students were first trained in *trivium* (logic, grammar and rhetoric) and *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music), specialising only after that in medicine, jurisprudence or theology. The university went by the name *universitas*, meaning a whole or the whole world.
- 7 A small example of this comes from my own university where students are in their exam papers always asked to identify their main subject. As I teach the multidisciplinary Media Culture program that is a main subject only at the MA and PhD levels, my basic degree students have routinely to affirm in the beginning of each exam that they do not belong in the last instance to the field they are studying with me but are instead inhabitants of another area .
- 8 “Any person entering a new group with the ambition of becoming a fully fledged, competent member has to learn to comply with its academic rules. This applies also to academic departments”, writes Tomas Gerholm (1990: 263).
- 9 Ludwig Huber (1990: 248) describes this acculturation or socialisation as follows: "individuals act as they do only in part consciously and directly in response to goals. Born into certain fields and then initiated to others, and finding themselves in certain positions surrounded by clusters (groups) of people sharing this situation, people somehow grasp how the game works, learn by doing and incorporate the generating schemes very much as a child learns its mother tongue and patterns of social behaviour, i.e. a practical competence [...] without knowing the rules or consciously complying with them."
- 10 On these three types of fields, see Fornäs & al. 2002.
- 11 On these metaphors, see Lehtonen 2005. On conceptualisations concerning spaces and places, see Massey 2005, part four.

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## The Future of the European University: Liberal Democracy or Authoritarian Capitalism?

By Sharon Rider

### Abstract

This paper examines the prevalent notion that the production of knowledge, academic research and teaching can and ought to be audited and assessed in the same manner as the production of other goods and services. The emphasis on similarities between industry and the academy leads to a neglect of fundamental differences in their aims and, as a consequence, a tendency to evaluate scientific research in terms of patents and product development and colleges and universities in terms of the labour market. The article examines the idea of the free academy, on the one hand, and compares and contrasts it to the idea of free enterprise, on the other. It is argued that the view of the university as a supplier of specific solutions for pre-determined, non-scientific needs (a workforce with skills currently in demand, innovations for commercial partners, justifications for political decisions, etc) undermines the public legitimacy of university science and weakens the fabric of scientific training and practice. The article proposes that the university's main purpose must be to provide a recognized neutral, autonomous agency of rigorous, disinterested investigation and scientific education, which constitutes a necessary condition for an enlightened liberal democracy: an informed, capable and critical citizenry.

**Keywords:** Academic freedom, basic research, higher education, innovation, Humboldt, research policy, science studies.

## The Demise of the Classical University

In a recent article in *Foreign Affairs*, Azar Gat has convincingly argued that there is good reason to question the standard assumption that the inherent desirability of liberal democracy or its supposed economic efficiency constitutes a guarantee of its continued success and proliferation (Gat 2007). To the contrary, he argues, the reason for the failures of autocratic capitalist regimes earlier, as well as the triumph of leading liberal democracies, must be considered also in terms that have nothing to do with form of government, but rather accidents of history, geographical and demographic factors. His conclusion is that authoritarian capitalist regimes such as Russia and China might well prove to be equally or more efficient at producing wealth than liberal democracies, and thereby also possess a strong appeal to developing countries, pose a political as well as economic challenge for established liberal democracies.

This aspect of globalization has already had a palpable effect on the university, one of the most important institutions of liberal democracy. This development has three elements. First of all, the Humboldtian ideal of the unity of research and teaching has been in practice scrapped in favour of a division of labour, the function of which is to produce more efficiently: patents and citations, in the case of research; highly skilled labourers, in the case of teaching. Second, this division of labour is necessary insofar as the university is seen primarily as an economic motor for the region (understood locally for smaller colleges and nationally for the major universities). The classical ideals of *Lehrfreiheit* and *Lernfreiheit*, the academic equivalents to free speech and civil rights in liberal democracies, are eroded as they constitute impediments to achieving the market ideals of efficiency in production and distribution of goods (goods here understood as more engineers and fewer humanists among students, for example; patents and technical applications instead of *Bildung* and basic research.). The goals of New Public Management are achieved through accounting systems devised in the private sector to monitor direct measurable effects. As a consequence, the long-term ideals of education and science (seen as two sides of the same activity) for the betterment of the individual and the society, which does not lend itself to this sort of accountancy, is regarded merely as a failure to produce. Third, to the extent that the university is seen to have a responsibility beyond serving the economic needs of the county or country, this responsibility is interpreted in terms of political ends (the humanities and social sciences can provide, for example, ideological arguments for desired goals: ethnic tolerance, gender equality, sustainable development).

Once more, the value of the university is seen in terms of measurable results, independently of the specific aim of the classical university, its basic mission, in which the value of scientific study was its content, how it was performed, not the results at which it arrived. The university of our day is concerned first and fore-

most with the production of things: degrees, citations, innovations. The classical university was originally conceived as a place where one formed, or produced, a certain kind of person: someone capable of sound judgement in, for instance, political issues. The deterioration of the idea of the university poses a danger to science and to liberal democracy. The risk for science is that it cannot justify itself without recourse to its products, seen in economic terms (jobs for its students, innovations and citations for its faculty). This reduces its aims to those of any actor on the market. At the same time, democracy itself is associated with the market, rather than with a society of informed citizens. The results of the university bereft of its essential mission, in political terms, would be technocratic rule of an uncritical populace of consumers, not a civil society.

It seems to me that one of the main responsibilities of researchers and teachers in the cultural sciences is to take notice of what recent developments in their own backyard, the university, may have for unforeseen consequences beyond the academy. In the words of R.G. Collingwood:

The fate of European science and European civilization is at stake. The gravity of the peril lies especially in the fact that so few recognize any peril to exist. When Rome was in danger, it was the cackling of the sacred geese that saved the Capitol. I am only a professorial goose, consecrated with a cap and gown and fed at a college table; but cackling is my job, and cackle I will. (Collingwood 1940/1998: 343)

## **The Birth of the Innovative University**

In Sweden, an agency was founded in 2001, the name of which is derived from a specific view of the aim and purpose of research: Vinnova, the “Swedish Governmental Agency for Innovation Systems”. In short, the agency was founded with the explicit purpose of promoting an innovations-system approach and cluster-theory in research policy. The agency both supports economically oriented research and promotes a specific set of ideals concerning what constitutes social, economic and intellectual value. The most striking thing about Vinnova is that it is the product of consensus across party lines and throughout different sectors of society as to what science is and should be, a consensus that is all the more striking because it is so deeply problematic.<sup>1</sup>

The ideals represented by Vinnova are in no way unique to that agency; rather, that the agency was formed is merely a symptom of the pervasiveness of the agenda of which it is a part (Eklund 2007; Miettinen 2002). One of the most basic assumptions in current research policy, in Sweden as in the rest of Europe, is that there exists an intimate relationship between academic excellence and “innovation”. In fields of research where technical applications have a clear commercial value, such as biotechnology and information science, this assumption poses some challenges, but is nonetheless in harmony with the goals of technical development. (see Bok 2003, pp. 1-17) What is problematic is rather the generalization

from the specific purposes, methods and practices of research and development centres to science as a whole. In short, we need more serious discussion about what it means for the future of science and higher education to eradicate the difference between fundamental research and teaching, on the one hand, and the production of patents and products, on the other, by means of economic policy. In this essay, I will argue that the picture of scientific inquiry peddled by policy-makers in Europe is misleading, and constitutes a direct threat to the welfare of the scientific enterprise as such, and ultimately to the society which is thought to reap its benefits. (There may well also be good reason to question to what extent these ideals are ultimately compatible with the classical liberal notion of free enterprise, but that is another issue. See Svensson 2008):

When one raises the sorts of criticisms that I will be making here, it is common that one is accused of romanticizing or idealizing the free academy; therefore, it must be admitted at the outset that the classical ideals of science associated with the model of the Humboldtian university were, in fact, *ideals* and indeed, as with all ideals worth striving for, rarely if ever realized in full. Yet this is precisely its virtue. Goals that are realizable to such an extent that one can measure with precision how well they are being met are, by definition, not ideals. An ideal is something which guides behavior by not being fully realizable in practice. In point of fact, to replace classical academic ideals with measurable outcomes and results (such as examination frequency or number of citations) is to lower our ambitions - in the name of "excellence".

The ideals associated with Wilhelm von Humboldt in the early 19th century became the blueprint for the (then) new university in Berlin and later many other universities in Germany, the United States, and throughout the world. The Humboldtian ideal is characterized by two essential features. One is the unity of teaching and research. Research and teaching are to be conducted by the same people, as two sides of the same activity. Since lecturers lecture about their research, or alternatively, since researchers explain their research in lectures, teaching is always about ongoing research, its form and/or its content. Thus the Humboldtian university is decidedly theoretical by definition. It is not primarily concerned with practical applications, technical skills or vocational training. The aim of university teaching is to educate and cultivate in a general sense, as distinct from occupational training. The second characteristic of the Humboldtian university is academic freedom. This entails freedom for the professor to decide on which topics to do research and which material to teach. But it also entails the freedom of the student to decide on his own program of study and work at his own pace. There were no standard course plans or employability requirements for classes at the Humboldtian university. That sort of things was rather associated with trade schools.

A more recent formulation of academic ideals is sociologist Robert Merton's statement of the guiding norms for science, called CUDOS, which he saw as the implicitly binding values of the scientific community. They are: *Communalism*, which entails that scientific results are the common property of the entire scientific community writ large; *Universalism*, which means that all scientists can contribute to science regardless of race, nationality or gender; *Disinterestedness*, which demands that scientists' results should not be entangled with their personal beliefs, private interests or political causes. (In short, scientists should have a scientific interest in science, not a personal interest in their findings); *Originality*, an characteristic that was added later on by the physicist and theorist of science John Ziman, states that research must add something new or different to our knowledge and understanding; *Scepticism* requires that scientific claims be exposed to critical scrutiny before being accepted. <sup>2</sup>

One can interpret both Merton's norms and Humboldt's idea of the university as regulative ideals, insofar as they were thought to express what all serious science has had its aim, whether or not the aims were achieved in practice, either by the individual or the scientific community. What made science science was this set of shared ideals, a kind scientific self-image, as a litmus test for how well we, as scientists and scholars, were working in accordance with our highest ambitions. In this sense, the academy was autonomous, that is, self-regulating.

But since the 1980's, policy in the US and Europe has been concerned with auditing not the scientific value of scientific work, but its economic and political value. Mertonian norms have been jettisoned in favour of a regional, institutional and commercial picture of science, in which it is seen in terms of dubious entities such as the "Triple Helix", "clusters" and "innovations systems". "Collaboration", which formerly had rather distasteful political connotations, has become a *sine qua non* for "excellence". In this respect, the autonomy of science, academic freedom, is seen as constituting a hinder to achieving excellence. The freedom to form research questions is increasingly circumscribed, via economic steering, to the freedom to formulate methods for solving policy-defined problems (assimilation of immigrants, alternatives to fossil fuel, etc.). In higher education, the freedom to develop a course of education is increasingly, again by way of economic incentives, limited to the freedom to design courses that would attract students and meet the labour needs of industry. Politicians and policy-makers have succeeded in this radical transformation of the very notion of science with the enthusiastic support of industry, as well as the engineering community and even a number of labour unions. (Widmalm 2008) The transformation was not based on what we know about scientific discovery and progress from, say, studies in the history of science.

More than mere agreement, there appears to be a sense of urgency in the unending flow of proclamations about the need for basic research to converge with

R&D. In what respect basic research remains basic when its questions are formulated in advance in terms of direct application, patents and/or economic benefits is, however, unclear. To the contrary, these calls are in essence a demand to filter resources from fundamental research and broad academic training to short-term corporate and political interests. Yet if they were to be heeded without reservation, the Swedish university could no longer claim to underwrite the bill of rights signed in 1988 by the vice-chancellors of Europe's universities, the *Magna Charta Universitatum*. The question is how many signatories would be left.

Yet the question has to be asked: what is lost, really, if the university were to become an extended arm of politics and industry? Why shouldn't the idea and practice of science change, along with everything else? What's wrong with prioritizing our scientific interests and concentrating our resources and energies in the direction of perceived needs? In the following sections, I will try to point to possible dangers. I see these as falling into two groups. The one group has to do with the future of science and scholarship as such; the other has to do with the future of a culture in which science as an ideal of non-partisan, disinterested search for knowledge for the benefit of humanity (as opposed to a certain nation, a certain group, a certain set of economic interests) is no longer a cornerstone of civil society.

With regard to the first question, there is good historical reason to reflect critically upon the politically popular portrayal of the classical university as a huge, plodding sauropod that inefficiently consumes enormous resources and is destined to be replaced in the struggle for existence by smaller, quick-footed and more adaptable forms. The first university still in existence, the University of Bologna, was founded in 1088. According to a Carnegie Policy Study, of 66 corporative entities existing between the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the middle of the twentieth, 52 were universities. No businesses have displayed a similar resilience, a comparable capacity to adapt to change, or to interact with a new society, under new conditions. The ideal of scientific autonomy is arguably an important factor explaining the continuity of the university throughout the upheavals of the last two centuries. If we transform it into the extended arm of industrial policy, we do irrevocable damage to the eco-system of independent, critical thought. The free academy may well be a necessary condition for sustainable development, both in science and in society. In any case, truly groundbreaking research, excellence as a scientific ideal and not an empty phrase to fill with whatever industry or politicians want at the time, is, as the philosopher of science Imre Lakatos has argued, something that shows itself in hindsight. No one has ever succeeded in formulating a sure-fire, risk-free guarantee for scientific fecundity, novelty or reliability or criterion for determining which of these is most important. It seems unlikely that bureaucrats in Stockholm or Brussels are equipped to formulate and prioritize such criteria when philosophers, historians, sociologists and scientists have failed.

As for the role of science in society, it should be noticed that the notion that science can and should be directed in specific ways, on the basis of political and economic goals and interests has been tried at least twice before: in the Soviet Union and in Nazi Germany. It was in response to these that Merton formulated his scientific norms (Gustavsson 2008:18); Merton called Nazi science “anti-science”. The fact that modern research policy is capitalist rather than socialist does not make it less totalitarian, and it does not make it more scientific. Rather, by stressing the need for funnelling funding into economically productive fields, policy-makers are, in the words of the historian of science Sven Widmalm, “in effect making the national system for research into a money-laundering business, transferring tax-payer’s money into support for local industries” (Widmalm 2008: 269). And just as nobody can foretell when and in what context the next great scientific breakthrough will occur, nobody can say for certain what society will be like or will need in fifty or a hundred or two hundred years. If there were a group in a better position than others to analyze and understand social, scientific and historical developments such as to be able to make reasonably informed guesses, it would be historians, political scientists, sociologists and anthropologists. But their research receives precious little funding. (After all, where are the immediate economic benefits or industrial applications?)

### **The Rhetoric of Free Enterprise and the Free Academy**

Science has been seen as holding promise for the realization of many social, political and economic goals since at least the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Shapin 1996). But rarely, if ever, have the possibilities and potential of research been the source of so much economic planning as today. In the words of the OECD: “In the knowledge-based economy, science and technology and their applications in industry and communications are major sources of economic growth and well-being.” (<http://oecd.org/about/0.2337>) In Sweden, a slew of government-sponsored studies, policy documents, propositions, proposals have been produced, disseminated, discussed, debated and implemented during the last decade which express the ambition to utilize science as an instrument of economic growth. In 2005, the Swedish government presented a research policy proposal, *Research for a Better Life* (*Forskning för ett bättre liv*), with the pronouncement that “in order to realize the vision of Sweden becoming the most competitive, dynamic and knowledge-based economy in Europe, Swedish research must continue to keep up with the world’s best.” (Prop. 2004/05:80: 9) <sup>3</sup> The proposal expresses great confidence in science to deliver technological solutions that will generate jobs for Sweden’s citizens and profits for its industries and businesses. It also explicitly renounces the classical scientific and academic idea that there is or can be a tension between basic, interdisciplinary science and demand-driven, applied R&D. More recently, in *Re-*

*sources for Quality (Resurser för kvalitet, SOU 2007:81)* and *Research Funding: Quality and Relevance (Forskningsfinansiering - kvalitet och relevans, SOU 2008:30)*, two government-commissioned reports, the investigators argue for a market-model for university funding, in which the state would no longer play the role of guarantor of basic research that may not be of immediate interest or use, that is, which is not "competitive" or in demand on the open market. Rather, all these documents have in common an emphasis on increased competition between universities, but also between departments, research groups, and even individual researchers. The idea behind increased competition is naturally to promote first-class research, and thereby reap its technological and economic rewards. Thus everyone is in agreement that first-class research is important; if there is room for discussion, it rather concerns how to achieve it.

One standard approach is to play the reasonable middle-ground, and acknowledge that the university has two compatible responsibilities: to supply industry and society with answers to pressing questions, but also to conduct basic research and maintain academic standards of scientific independence and neutrality. In an op-ed article (*Dagens Nyheter*, 20 February 2008), the Swedish Minister of Research, Lars Leijonborg, argues for the importance of basic research for social development, and insists upon the need to raise its status and reinforce its structure.<sup>4</sup> While the authors of the reports cited above see salvation in the marketplace of science, where the role of the state is substantially diminished and faculty, research groups and universities compete with each other for students and funding, the minister wishes to emphasize the value of basic research and see to it that it receives the resources it requires. That the minister displays concern for the future of basic research would seem to be especially re-assuring at a time when politicians and industry seem to demand almost instantaneous results and solutions for the perceived technical, practical and political needs of the day. Yet one wonders how deeply he has considered what constitutes basic research: in what, if anything, the essential difference between basic research and technical development lies. The answer is not self-evident.

A possible definition of basic research would be that it is merely academic freedom applied primarily to research (rather than teaching). In other words, basic research is research conducted by scientists and scholars, for scientific and scholarly reasons, and not primarily with an eye toward some specific non-scientific end (that is, not intended to be used in non-scientific contexts immediately). Given this definition, one might be inclined to think that basic or free research thrives best in the kind of competitive atmosphere proposed by the propositions and policy documents mentioned earlier. After all, wouldn't successful competition in the free market of ideas be both an incentive and a guarantee of quality and creativity in research? In what follows, I wish to suggest that this common-sense way of formulating the question conceals a number of gravely problematic as-

sumptions concerning the nature of science and the idea of academic training and research.<sup>5</sup>

One problem with the idea that excellent scientific research is best promoted through increased competition is that it implicitly assumes that the issue of quality is tied to production and distribution. Much policy today regards the university as essentially a certain kind of enterprise, the business concept of which is to produce and distribute knowledge as efficiently as possible. The "shareholders", in this case, the Swedish taxpayers via the state, receive "dividends" in the form of increased job opportunities and tax revenues that can be translated into public goods, all of which are expected to be created along with new products and applications (in particular, those designated "innovations"). In order to make production and distribution more efficient, the majority of documents arrive at something like the following: 1) the university system should produce scientific knowledge of high quality; 2) the product (knowledge) should be delivered as quickly as possible to its users (industry, county councils, etc) to be converted into commercial or other applications; and 3) there ought to be a central authority or set of authorities to oversee (1) and (2). In this way, it is thought, the state can guarantee the quality, understood as utility, of the knowledge produced. Concepts such as "quality control", "strategic investments", "trade marking", "cutting-edge research", "target groups", "market adjustment" and the like proliferate in the attempt to find means of *controlling* how academic knowledge is produced and disseminated, to ensure its usefulness. One difficulty, however, is that the usefulness of scientific knowledge in the deepest sense is far more difficult to plan and gage than those outside of the academy (and unfortunately, a fair number within it) seem prepared to acknowledge.

It might well be that this deeper sense no longer has a place in our thinking about the university and its purpose. This discourse of academic excellence constitutes a contemporary textbook example of neo-liberal governmentality, in the Foucauldian sense. The explicit attempt here is to create apparatuses, institutions, agencies, systems and services the aim of which is to inculcate a certain mentality within a population (in this case, university teachers and researchers): we are to see ourselves as free and enterprising, autonomous actors in an open market, and to behave accordingly. Thus the control exercised is intended to create a mentality among academics, a form of intellectual life, not through governance in the sense of the imposition of rules, regulations, laws and mandates, but through structuring the field of academic activity in such a way as to ensure that academics govern themselves in such a way as to attain the desired effect in their behavior. Ideally, we will all think in terms of citations, the international publication market and rankings as the objective goals for, and proof of, our intellectual activity (rather than, say, the search for truth).<sup>6</sup>

To see how this discourse functions, there are certain recurring features of the thinking that permeates research policy in Europe today that should be noticed. Most significantly and pervasively, there is a tendency to ignore or at least belittle the basic difference between the *idea of academic research*, on the one hand, and the aims of demand-driven research, on the other. The idea of the modern university, "the free academy", requires that the scientific investigation and training, which are its unified *raison d'être*, shall to the greatest extent possible be conducted *with no regard to* the extra-scientific preferences, aims and goals of interest groups, political alignments or economic interests. To state the matter paradoxically, the purpose of the university is to guarantee that it will not take into consideration the pressures and demands placed on it by its stakeholders, i.e., those who pay for it and who stand to benefit from its results. A necessary condition for the success of this odd construction is that university teaching and research are seen as professions, whence it would be absurd to demand that their criteria and methods should be assessed or designed by laymen. The whole point of professionalism is that its practitioners are deemed capable of making judgments which those not trained in the profession and deemed competent by its peers cannot. Thus the state pays the university to maintain its neutrality with regard to the science it conducts: the university is expected to strive toward complete independence with regard to how it formulates its research questions, which methods it uses to investigate these questions, and the results at which it arrives. It shall be recalled, as stated earlier, that is only an ideal and, as such, has rarely, if ever, been achieved in practice. Nonetheless, it is this ideal that has guided all serious scientific investigation since antiquity. The idea of business, of "free enterprise", is in this respect the opposite of the free academy. The idea of business is to develop commercial solutions *with regard to* the interests, demands and preferences of the society in which it operates. In business, as opposed to science, the customer is always right.

The first and primary principle in the *Magna Charta Universitatum*, the European universities' bill of rights, states:

"The university is an autonomous institution at the heart of societies differently organized because of geography and historical heritage; it produces, examines, appraises and hands down culture by research and teaching. *To meet the needs of* the world around it, its research and teaching must be morally and intellectually independent of all political authority and intellectually independent of all political *authority and economic power.*" (emphasis added).

The results of a study of a certain commercial product can be problematic for certain economic interest groups; the results of a study on certain cultural patterns may be offensive to certain ideological alignments; the results of a study of certain policy decisions can stir political agitation, and so forth. But such reactions are, or should be, of no relevance, academically speaking. The point of publicly financed, state-secured appointments of university faculty after scientific assess-

ment is to guarantee that academic researchers and teachers should be able to render results publicly, “speak truth to power”, without fear of reprisal. Only with this guarantee in place can the university assure that it strives to meet the needs of *all* of society. This is the crucial part of what it means for it to be autonomous, that is, independent of all political and economic interests. This is the quintessence of the idea of science, of the mission of university research and teaching. This is how it *qua* university can best serve society at large.

In free enterprise, the opposite applies. The extent to which a business fulfils its idea, i.e., meets the needs of the society in which it functions, is *never* an internal affair. Rather, the value of what it does is by definition something decided by others, outside of the business. Suppliers decide whether or not they deem the company credit-worthy, sufficiently interesting from the point of view of development, or production, or logistics. Customers, other companies or individual clients, decide if the company produces goods and services that fit with their respective financial structures and needs. How well the company succeeds is thus a matter of what potential and existing clients and customers think of their way of producing and delivering their product, it is the clients and customers who determine the value of what the company does (Håkansson & Waluszewski 2007): this is the nature of competition in free enterprise. It is here that we must notice that what applies to the market cannot apply to the university without changing essentially and irrevocably its meaning and mission. If science is tailor-made to meet the needs of a specific clientele, if its value is a matter of popularity or public opinion, then it has no specific task *qua* university.

One might compare academic freedom with freedom of speech in this respect. The aim of legislating the latter in liberal democracies is to ensure the right to speak out, even when, or rather especially when, what one wants to say is precisely something that others do not wish to hear. Civil rights of this sort were originally formulated as a necessary safeguard against authoritarian attempts to stifle individual rights; in other words, the assumption behind the establishment of rights is the recognition that there exists a tension in society between different interests, necessitating laws that guarantee this right. Without this pressure, such legislation would be meaningless. One might go as far as to say that the legislation of such rights in itself constitutes a recognition that they are always inevitably under siege. Similarly, the point of a special article in national law guaranteeing academic freedom for teachers and researchers at the university is to guard against the exploitation of university teaching and academic researchers by interests outside of the university (political interests, economic interests, ideological interests, etc). It is this tension between the ideal of the university as a neutral agency of research and teaching and the temptation on the part of various elements in society to use it for its own ends that gives meaning to all references to academic freedom such as formulated in the *Magna Charta*. If we fail to recognize this es-

sential tension, academic freedom becomes an empty phrase, an ornament to make university research more prestigious and classy, a sentimental tribute to the heydays of the university as an indispensable institution for a civil society.

## The Industrial University

How can the university interact with society and fulfil its function without jeopardizing internal criteria of scientific quality? The first and most crucial step is to recognize that there exists a tension between the idea and ideals of scientific investigation, on the one hand, and the economic, industrial function of the university, on the other. This tension between the demands of science and societal and political expectations has always existed and, one may hope, always will. It's a sign that research and teaching are bold and vital, that the open, critical quest for knowledge is still the guiding principle of the academy. If this essential tension is suppressed, there is simply no reason for there to be universities. If "the free pursuit of knowledge" is in fact allied with corporations or organizations with an interest in steering the direction of research, then it cannot be the economic responsibility of the taxpayer or the moral responsibility of the citizen to support it.

Two possible objections to the claims above come to mind. First, don't we, the academic community, have a responsibility to our fellow citizens to be engaged in the problems of our day? Shouldn't we do what we can, with our special competence as scientists and scholars, help to do something to stave global warming and reduce its consequences, cure illnesses and save lives, contribute to a healthier lifestyle in the industrialized world, investigate the causes of war, criminality and poverty and propose methods of reducing them, and so forth? Is it not our responsibility to do our share, especially given that the European university is publicly financed? The short answer is, naturally, yes. But this is only to say that the knowledge we produce should be made available and put to use when and where it can be used. The question of how it is put to use, when it should prove useful, to whom and in what circumstances is not something that we can foretell, and it is not part of science as science, but rather of science seen primarily as technological development.

A second objection is that all references today to the Humboldtian university are merely nostalgic; the university has *de facto* been integrated into a political economic system from which it cannot remain separate without serious damage, if not outright destruction, of both. But a critique of present need not be interpreted as a call for a return to the past; as Nietzsche so wisely pointed out, man is not a crab. There is no return to Humboldt. What we can do, however, is recall the spirit, not the letter, of Humboldt's reforms. In the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, Humboldt saw the need to reform the university, not only administratively, but in its very conception. His reforms were intended to make the university

something of use to mankind by entrusting its functions to the scientific spirit of its faculty and the diligence of the students. Vocational schools, he thought, were almost damaging to students, by depriving them of the possibility of widening and deepening their understanding at too early an age. This is an important point, because the pressure toward the “vocalization” of the university is seemingly ever-present and nearly irresistible. This following remarks, written over a hundred years ago, are hauntingly perspicuous as a description of the contemporary university:

But the present age is, as aforesaid, supposed to be an age, not of whole mature and harmonious personalities, but of labour of the greatest possible common utility. That means, however, that men have to be adjusted to the purposes of the age so as to be ready for employment as soon as possible: they must labour in the factories of the general good before they are mature – indeed so that they shall not become mature – for this would be a luxury which would deprive the “labour market” of a great deal of the workforce[...] Believe me: if men are to labour and be useful in the factory of science before they are mature, science will soon be ruined just as effectively as the slaves thus employed too early. I regret the need to make use of the jargon of the slave-owner and employer of labour to describe things which in themselves ought to be thought of as free of utility and raised above the necessities of life; but the words “factory”, “labour market”, “supply”, “making profitable” and whatever auxiliary verbs egoism now employs, come unbidden to the lips when one wishes to describe the most recent generation of men of learning. Sterling mediocrity grows even more mediocre, science ever more profitable in the economic sense. (Nietzsche 1874/1999: 99)

By applying economic criteria to scientific thinking, the discourse of academic excellence has actually introduced a new concept of quality (namely, quantity), whereby actual academic quality in scholarship and instruction are diminished in the service of mass production (of degrees, citations, “qualified labour”, etc). What we need to do now is re-conceive how the university can fulfil its mission, let us call it the mission of intellectual freedom (as distinct from freedom of choice in the economic sense), in our day. Humboldt’s problem situation is not ours. But we can learn from how he created something new (in relation to the Church, the State, the Napoleonic laws, etc). In the same way, we can learn something from Merton’s critique of Soviet and Nazi science, even if we do not subscribe to his CUDOS as relevant or accurate today. We can analyze our own situation, in the spirit of critique and self-critique, the basic requirements of enlightened thinking.

In “The Age of the World Picture”, Martin Heidegger defines reflection as “the courage to make the truth of our own presuppositions and the realm of our own goals into the things that most deserve to be called into question.” (Heidegger 1938: 115) In the essay quoted, he goes on to reflect, in the aforementioned sense, upon the notion of science and links it, in our day, with the notion of research (as distinct from the *doctrina* and *scientia* of the Middle Ages, and from the Greek *episteme*). One of the essential characteristics of modern research, he says, is that

the extension and consolidation of the institutional character of the sciences secures methodological unity and objectivity. Thus science becomes an ongoing activity or industry (*Betrieb*), in two senses. In the first sense, which he seems to think is the proper and adequate sense for scientific inquiry, science comes into its own: “The scholar disappears. He is succeeded by the research man who is engaged in research projects. These, rather than the cultivating of erudition, lend to his work its atmosphere of incisiveness. The research man no longer needs a library at home. Moreover, he is constantly on the move. He negotiates meeting and collects information at congresses. He contracts for commissions with publishers. The latter now determine along with him which books must be written.” (Heidegger 1938: 124). This might sound critical, but Heidegger contrasts this sort of research, which he finds in the natural sciences but also in historiographical and archaeological research, with disciplines that “still remain mired in mere erudition” (the humanities). He remarks further that to the extent that modern researchers take seriously the actual form of their science, the more ably and willingly they will offer themselves, as a collective, to the common good and “return to the public anonymity of all work useful to society.”

But there is another sense of industry, that of “mere business”, rather, mere “busyness” (*des blossen Betriebs*) or “bustle”. In this kind of ongoing activity, science forgets its point and purpose, leaving it behind as a given; it does not bother with the confirmation and verification of its results and calculations of these, but “simply chases after such results and calculations” (Heidegger 1938: 137). Thus, he argues, precisely because scientific research must be an ongoing activity, because its self-perpetuation is its essence, “mere business” must at all times be combated: “the more completely research becomes ongoing activity, and in that way mounts to its proper level of performance, the more constantly does the danger of mere industriousness grow within it. Finally, a situation arises in which the distinction between ongoing activity and busyness not only becomes unrecognizable, but has become unreal as well.” (Heidegger 1938: 137). This is the situation we find ourselves in today, of which I will offer examples in the next section.

### **Science in the Marketplace and the Republic of Ideas**

The tension between the university’s internal criteria and demands and desires from actors from without (the state, political groups, the church, etc) has always existed. We have every reason to hope that it will continue to exist. It should be seen as something positive, a clear indication that the academy is alive and well; that research and teaching are healthy, vigorous and unafraid; that we are industrious and not merely busy. It means that the serious, open, critical quest for knowledge and understanding of the world, regardless of whatever debate to

which it might give rise, is still the mission of the university, and the call of its faculty. If this tension is stifled, the university no longer has a mission that distinguishes it from any other institution that conducts teaching or training (such as consultancy firms or trade schools) or research (pharmaceutical companies, the automobile industry, the information technology industry). Why should taxpayers finance a university when in point of fact, its employees are not servants of the people, but allied with specific interests?

What is worrisome is that representatives for the academy, those responsible for its organization and financing, neglect, conceal or even explicitly reject that this tension between the academy and interests outside of it is something requiring vigilance. They seem not to notice, or not to care, that “collaboration” with industry, for example, logically requires that there be two distinct entities: a university, on the one hand, and a company, or companies, on the other. The more entangled the two are, the less reasonable it is to call the phenomenon “collaboration”. The university becomes rather a supplier of resources (labs, personnel, equipment) for industrial development. Yet it has become increasingly common to embrace this vision as the point and purpose of the university.

A recent Swedish example is the so-called Radio Center Gävle – Center for Radio Frequency Measurement Technology, a collaboration between Gävle University, the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH), Gävle County Council and Ericsson Radio Systems and over twenty other corporations. According to Claes Beckman, Professor of Electronics and one of the key figures at the centre, collaboration is and should be the highest priority: “The college must collaborate, collaborate, and collaborate in order to supply the region with suitable competence.”(Wall 2008: 4-5). Beckman argues that research is not a goal in itself, nor a primary goal, for a scientific community such as a university. “Basic research” is, in this sense, a myth. Without collaboration, there is no science: “You can’t read your way to knowledge. You have to do it yourself, be where it’s happening, in order to learn.” Further, research is always just a means to an end. Research must contribute to regional development, and researchers ought to work primarily for the benefit of the region (in this case, Gävleborg county). In his view, the aim of the university is to attract young people, and give them training that will lead to good jobs and induce them to settle down in the region. Moreover, the college should see to it that “they have a good time together, enjoy themselves, move in together and raise a family: that’s economic growth.” The Radio Center laboratory, housed in Ericsson’s Gävle headquarters, is about as close a collaboration as one can imagine, and is conceived to achieve these ends. Instruments are purchased with funding from the corporations involved, the city and county, and the university itself. Funding for research comes from the various research councils and agencies, which in turn rely heavily and in some cases exclusively on public funding. According to Beckman, seven eighths of the centre’s budget is externally

financed. (The various techniques and instruments developed are not publicly owned.)

Whatever one thinks of such collaborations, it is disturbing that a representative of the academy publicly proclaims that no valuable knowledge can be derived “merely from reading”; that the production of knowledge should be geared toward a specific community with specific interests, and not toward increasing the common store of scientific insight; that the scientific enterprise is just a means towards achieving political and economic ends.

To call into question the view that the university need not aim at universality, that knowledge is always and everywhere a means and never an end in itself, or that there is no value in purely “theoretical” understanding cited above, is not to suggest that the “old academy” lived up to its stated ideals of universality, integrity and intellectual openness and vitality. One might argue, for instance, that it as a rule regularly fails to live up to principle 3 of the *Magna Charta*: “Rejecting intolerance and always open to dialogue, the university is an ideal meeting-ground for teachers capable of imparting their knowledge and well equipped to develop it [...]” We all know that the university is not the boiling cauldron of critical thinking from different points of view that it ought to be. Powerful alliances between different networks, disciplines and research groups will often employ the rhetoric of scientific standards and academic consensus to stifle novel, dissident or simply different kinds of research, rather than engaging them in an open critical discussion. In practice, a dogmatic, self-satisfied scholastic orientation can enjoy an extremely high academic standing within a discipline by virtue of coalitions and strategies, rather than by virtue of intrinsic value. Here there is most certainly room for self-criticism and self-examination. There are good reasons why students as well as administrators and policy-makers want to hold the academy accountable. The problem is that the means that have been introduced are likely to have the opposite effect. Citations in highly ranked journals, for instance, tend to confirm and reinforce standard models, mainstream theories and conventional methods. It often takes decades for novel ideas or bold hypotheses to receive general recognition. (See Altbach (2006).

Thus to defend the ideal of the classical university, the ideal of the unity of teaching and research for the good of mankind, rather than of this region or that region, this county or that country, is not to defend the old, pompous academy with its robes and arrogance and class privileges. That university is, at any rate, quickly dying off. It became sclerotic, with its senile anecdotes about legendary lectures by great men fluent in thirty tongues, heated debates between Professor X and Privatdozent Y at the infamous seminar in March, 1958, etc. It became a dusty relic of itself, a collection of dead forms, emptied of vitality and meaning. Thus it was seen by many, perhaps especially the students, as something that no longer commanded the respect that it assumed it deserved; it became in the eyes

of many, and with some justification, simply ridiculous and unnecessary. But this is simply to say that it no longer could live up to its own ideals, that these ideals were no longer the principles and values by which its teachers and researchers lived. Science as a calling was reduced to science as a paid hobby and, by the 1960's, the students sensed it. But the modern bureaucratized university, with its perpetual assessment exercises, economic guidelines, strategy documents and the like turn the republic of ideas into a homogenous, international conglomerate whose employees are just that, traders in the marketplace, rather than citizens of the republic of ideas (with the freedom and responsibility, the rights and duties, that citizenship entails).

The strategies promoted by policy-makers and university administrators (and as we've seen, even certain members of the professoriat) assume that we can know in advance where science is going, what ideas and which methods will "pay off", either scientifically or economically, in the long run. In this respect, the policies and strategies themselves do not exhibit the characteristics of being "open to dialogue" or committed to stringent testing of its assumptions. To the contrary, they have rather the character of articles of faith, as emphasized by Nobel prize-winner Arvid Carlsson and Swedish MP Finn Bengtsson:

[...] the mantra among today's professional pundits concerning the organization and financing of research, constantly stressing the notion of "strong research environments", bears witness to a lack on insight into and reflection about how unique research results and their applications actually arise [...]. It is most likely the case that the presence of a "strong research environment", the concept of which usually implicitly includes the need for a top-down organization and standardization of thought, to the contrary could have killed the further development of ideas of innovative character [...]. When this sort of idea is first hatched, it is by one or a few people and hardly by a collective research-strong environment. Often enough, the idea itself is at that point in a far too delicate phase to overcome resistance so that the thought can be thought through and come to the point where convincing evidence for the thesis can be generated and development toward useful applications can take place. (Carlsson & Bengtsson 2008)

In short, strategy models benefit neither innovative scientific thinking nor social needs. Basic research, on the other hand, unencumbered by managerialism, is a necessary pre-requisite for all technical developments, applications and innovations. As Tord Ekelöf, Professor in Elementary Particle Physics at Uppsala University has pointed out: "Who experienced the need to be able to generate electrical power and distribute it in society before the fundamental laws of electricity were discovered? [...] Who formulated the need for radio or television before the laws of electro-magnetic radiation were discovered? [...] The needs arose, or could be formulated, first after basic research had come so far that a technical development could be discerned." (Uppsala Nya Tidning, 10 March 2008). Examples of this kind proliferate in the history of science.

A particularly telling example of how basic research can be radically transformed into useful applications can be gleaned from the pre-history of information

technology. Frege and Russell, both philosophers and logicians, and Hilbert, a mathematician, worked independently of each other at the turn of the twentieth century, each concerned with establishing the basic foundations of mathematics. This sort of project belongs properly to philosophy, i.e. the project was purely theoretical. Neither Hilbert, nor Frege nor Russell were concerned with technical solutions for industry, or even primarily with applications in mathematics. But as a matter of historical fact, a result of this project was a highly useful discovery: formalisation. This discovery made possible the development of formal languages, recursion theory and algorithm theory, which in turn form the foundation of computer technology. Frege and Russell did not have World of Warcraft or Ebay in mind when they attempted to work out the foundations of mathematics. They were engaged in philosophical reflection on mathematics, and their project, their aim, was philosophical. Thus in retrospect it is possible to identify a concrete historical link between theoretical philosophy, on the one hand, and all commercial solutions developed within the information technology industry, on the other: but who will provide society or industry with knowledge the use of which cannot be determined or assessed in advance, if academic knowledge production is steered towards what seems beneficial from the vantage point of short-term interests and goals?

Perhaps the most impressive example of the gap between motives and expectations, on the one hand, and actual applications, on the other, is that of classical mechanics. For Newton, the point of the study of physics was to achieve clarity with regard to the mechanisms of nature. In other words, Newton's studies were devoted, in the first instance, to "natural philosophy". One must consider his achievement to be a paradigmatic case of "basic research" in the deepest sense: Newton wanted to determine the essential mechanisms of nature, once and for all. The later discovery of the theory of relativity showed, however, that the question was not resolved once and for all. Newton's theory did not constitute the ultimate theoretical description of nature as he had hoped. But it did turn out to be one of the most powerful scientific tools ever invented, and showed itself to be useful in applications which Newton could never have imagined. It is rather characteristic for the great scientific discoveries that the greater the discovery, the less it was understood at the time how it could be used. That, if anything, is a strong utilitarian argument for allowing researchers to formulate their own questions and fumble along with their own attempts at answering them. No citation index in the world, however sublimely contrived, will tell us in advance where to find the next Newton. To the contrary, the more we try to control and predict scientific innovation, the less likely that our science will be capable of producing a Newton.

The risk Europe is taking in trying to control what knowledge is produced, where and when, is that the kind of research that is not deemed marketable, relevant, useful, tactical, desirable or interesting just now simply won't occur. In the

long run, we will lose many great opportunities for scientific discovery. We will lose potential gains, both economically and scientifically, if we are not willing to take risks. In science as in sports, there is always uncertainty, a risk of failure: no pain, no gain. The majority of new businesses fail after the first year, the majority of new commercial inventions never find a use, but end up in a curiosa cabinet. How is it that something that neither scientists nor businesses are capable of determining in advance is something that research-policy administrators can so confidently plan and control?

The examples of the philosophical foundations of E-bay and Newton's metaphysical concerns are not pulled out of a hat. They meant to point to a very serious issue having to do with the status and future of the humanities and social sciences. The university has a mission to support and maintain different scientific traditions, to keep different ways of seeing, studying and understanding our common world alive. A number of these disciplines have grown out of intellectual traditions stretching back a millennium or more, as have a number of the classical disciplines within the natural sciences (such as mathematics and physics) and the professions (law and medicine). In this context, what is to be supported and maintained are not merely "competences" or "areas of expertise", that can be achieved through strategic investments or political directives. Rather, the disciplines manifest a way of thinking that has taken generations of scholars and scientists to evolve. Nor is it a matter of practical knowledge that is directly tied to the labour market or societal needs. Naturally, it does happen that research and teaching in these subjects happens to be directly useful or in demand in some profession or commercial context; in such cases, there is very good reason to make strategic investments. But such considerations are not what have kept these disciplines alive over the centuries.

What is it then that constitutes the core of research and teaching in disciplines where the utility of the subject is not self-evident? What is the difference between science as a calling and science as a career? The answer has to do with the attitude one takes to one's subject matter; this is where Humboldtian ideals and Mertonian norms come in. The scientific attitude is one of a personal interest in and commitment to a subject matter or a research problem combined with the conviction that there is an intrinsic value to this form of knowledge being kept alive and available to future generations of researchers, teachers and students (See Rider 2007b).<sup>7</sup> In other words, the goal of scientific thinking is its own further perpetuation. Science, like virtue, is its own reward. The scholarly attitude can be characterized as a sense of duty to see that a particular academic culture, its scientific values, scholarly norms and intellectual standards as much as its objects, theories and methods, continue to develop and be related to a new world and a future science with new challenges and new problems. It is this commitment and this conviction that keeps science going, especially the cultural sciences, despite constant

intervention and control by administrators and policy-makers and ever more meagre resources for teaching. If this commitment and conviction is lost, we will lose with it intellectual traditions and scientific domains which we will not be able to transmit to future generations. History has shown that traditions and cultures are destroyed much more swiftly than they are built. And what is lost here is not something that shows itself in the instant, but rather in what we will be capable or incapable of, as a society and as a culture, as citizens and scientists, for many years to come. And this not only in terms of inventions that will arise or applications that will never come about, but in what sort of society we will have as a result of the teaching the next generation of doctors, lawyers, engineers, administrators, lawyers, teachers, psychologists, politicians, economists, journalists and ministers, as well as researchers, come into contact with during their years at the university.

Change and renewal are important, and nothing says that they must stand in conflict with the idea of science. To the contrary, internationalization, cooperation with organizations and pursuits outside the university, etc. are an important part of the evolution of science, and need not threaten its autonomy. The free academy can even be an extremely important factor in attaining societal goals, *precisely because teaching and research are conducted on the academy's own terms*. From this point of view, universities and researchers should most certainly be encouraged in their attempts to relate their activities to the world in which they find themselves. This is what it means for the university to be a vital institution. But if we really want to ensure quality in research and teaching, we should preserve its integrity so that, in the best-case scenario, it maintains a continuity and a tradition that guarantees scientific development not just in ten or twenty years, but in fifty or a hundred, when a new political rhetoric, other economic models and different educational policy trends prevail.<sup>8</sup>

**Sharon Rider** is Associate Professor of Theoretical Philosophy, Vice-dean of the Faculty of Arts at Uppsala University, and a research associate at Uppsala University Science and Technology Studies Center. She has taught and written on various aspects of the relationship between theoretical conceptualization and practice.

## Notes

- 1 The article uses the Swedish university as its primary example, but parallels can be found throughout the European Union as well as North America, Australia and New Zealand. The UK, for example, pioneered the use of metrics in the Academic Assessment Exercise already in

1988 (interestingly, professional societies in England have for the first time issued criticism of the practice this year).

- 2 See Merton (1973) and Ziman (2000).
- 3 “För att förverkliga visionen att Sverige skall bli Europas mest konkurrenskraftiga, dynamiska och kunskapsbaserade ekonomi måste svensk forskning fortsätta hålla världsklass.”
- 4 “Regeringen prioriterar medicinsk forskning” (“The Government Prioritizes Medical Research”).
- 5 An indication that the minister of research did not actually understand what it was that he was defending in his defence of basic research was his reply to an op-ed article appearing in *Svenska Dagbladet* which criticized the government’s research policy (*SvD*, Brännpunkt, 10 November 2008). Leijonborg responded that the “opposition” between basic research and innovation policy was “counterproductive”, a common viewpoint among research policy-makers. (*SvD*, Brännpunkt, 14 November 2008). But why would the European university chancellors who countersigned the *Magna Charta* insist so stubbornly upon such a “counterproductive” opposition, namely, the boundary between sovereign basic research and research steered toward innovation? The insistence issues from the recognition that as soon as research is steered by interests outside of science, it ceases to be science. Dirigisme with regard to what research will render which innovations may well be desirable from a politician’s point of view, but it is not at all clear that it works (*SvD*, Brännpunkt, 24 November 2008).
- 6 I am thinking here of course especially of Foucault’s essays in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (1991) as well as *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (1988).
- 7 It would behove both research administrators and even members of the academy to remind themselves of the characteristics of science as vocation, especially as articulated by Max Weber in his classic “Science as a Vocation” (Weber 1946).
- 8 Parts of the article have appeared, in slightly altered versions, in *Research Europe*, 4 September 2008 (“Ivory Trade”) and 13 November 2008 (“Innovation’s Debt”). A Swedish article with the same themes appeared originally in *Kulturella perspektiv*, Nr. 2, 2008 under the title “Nytta av den akademiska friheten” (“The Utility of Academic Freedom”). I would like to thank Steve Fuller, Sverker Gustavsson, Ylva Hasselberg, Alexandra Waluszewski and the participants in the Higher Seminar in Philosophy at Södertörn University College for inspiration, information and critical discussion.

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