[Nick Couldry](#)

In the place of a common culture, what?

Article (Accepted version)
(Refereed)

This version available at: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/17477/
Available in LSE Research Online: September 2013

http://eprints.lse.ac.uk

'IN THE PLACE OF A COMMON CULTURE, WHAT?'
NICK COULDRY, LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS[1]

The traditional notion of 'community' rests, on a close mapping of two things: the times and spaces where we live and are governed, and our sense (both cognitive and emotional) of commonality, of connection. But for all of us, even if in different ways and to different degrees, those things are being pulled apart. If you have lived, as I have, in an even moderately busy urban street, it makes sense, even if a weird kind of sense, that you do <u>not</u> speak to the person, living two doors down from you, who tends to go to work at the same time as you, even if (as in one bizarre case that happened to me) it turns out that person ends their journey to work only a few yards from where you do. On the other hand, it makes sense to experience and act out significant pleasure, when you meet only for the second time at a conference someone from a distant university with whom (apart from broad outlines of work specialisation) your life and its milieu have almost nothing in common. So there are good and bad sides, as always, to the stretching of time-space relations! But one effect is that any particular milieu is characterised by what the sociologist Martin Allbrow has called 'time-space social stratification' (1997: 52): our paths move in parallel with those of countless others we rarely see, so that, even when our paths do cross with theirs, the encounter may seem random rather than meaningful.

There is good reason, then, to loosen the tie between 'community' and the defined geographical area and, as Gerard Delanty (2003) argues in his useful recent survey of the term, to allow for 'communication communities' which stretch in a huge range of ways <u>across</u> space and time. To hold onto the assumption that community is based, at a minimum, on the grouping of people in <u>one</u> place (as the Penguin Encyclopaedia of Sociology still does: Abercrombie et al., 2000) is to condemn our definition to irrelevance. But the opposite is not true: relaxing our definition of community in this way does not <u>guarantee</u> its relevance, or not, at least, if it is relevance to 'politics' we want. The term 'politics' is itself subject to continuous redefinition within debates over global human rights and cosmopolitanism.[2] But, however we stretch and re-layer our concept of 'politics', the term is unimaginable without <u>some</u> meshing between, on the one hand, the 'places' where we live, work and are governed and, on the other hand, the places where we share with others something that impinges on how we are governed, something that might provide the <u>matter</u> of politics. For, as Chantal Mouffe in her book *The Democratic Paradox* has argued, 'the logic of democracy does indeed imply a moment of closure which is required by the very process of constituting "the people" [which] cannot be avoided', even if from a philosophical perspective we now insist on the paradoxical nature of that closure (Mouffe, 2000: 43). Democratic politics, Mouffe argues, drawing on Wittgenstein, requires some 'form of life', that is, a <u>sufficient</u> level of shared beliefs and 'practice . . . aimed at persuading people to broaden the range of their commitments to others, to build a more inclusive community' (2000: 65-66). Mouffe's use of the term 'community' is striking, even surprising, in the deconstructionist context of her book, but the fact that she is driven to use it illustrates precisely the tension I now want to explore.

The Problematic 'Place' of the Political

This tension has troubled me in my own work on culture and media for some time. It is the conflict between two apparently irreconcilable pressures: on the one hand, the

push to root out and deconstruct any notions of 'unity' or 'holism' lurking behind the everyday political language of 'society', 'state', 'culture' and 'community' (not least in their media glosses)[3] and, on the other hand, the pull back towards some notion of commonality without which any refounding of democratic politics seems impossible, even unimaginable. Where can we turn for the language, the concepts, the practices, that might express this commonality without unity?[4] Before I go any further, let me acknowledge that to put things this way – to foreground the preconditions of political engagement – might seem , to some, an intolerable diversion, if the ultimate goal is to link back to politics itself. But it is a step that I believe is necessary, and one which cultural studies has an important role in helping us formulate effectively; I return to the link back to politics as such at the end.

Taken at face value, the terms in Raymond Williams' well-worn notion of 'common culture' seem unusable in resolving the tension I have outlined: 'common', because it assumes something held in common that we can no longer assume; and 'culture', because of its embedding in long-deconstructed metaphors of closure.[5] But that does not mean we can abandon the conceptual site which Williams intended the term 'common culture' to mark, which is why my title today tries to keep that site open. We can at least hope that some new term might come to reoccupy this place; without this, Williams was right, I believe, to say that 'we shall not survive' (1958: 304), or at least democratic politics shall not survive.

How can this conceptual site be characterised, which Williams filled with the term 'common culture'? Mouffe writes of a contestatory democracy formed of 'friendly enemies', 'who are friends because they share a common symbolic space'(2000: 13). But she does not hint how that common symbolic space might be created or sustained. This gap in her argument is symptomatic; it is common to both political science and political theory. We might hope for solutions in the fast-growing literature on citizenship but for all its richness there is, as yet, as Thomas Janoski and Brian Gras (2002: 42) recently pointed out, nothing there that captures 'the informal aspects of citizenship integrating both the public and private sphere', precisely the gap between lifeworld and public connection with which I began. Instead the value of citizenship studies may lie in the nakedness of the questions it asks: 'what does it mean to belong to society . . .?' (Stevenson, 2002: 4), 'what counts as community and solidarity' (Elliott, 2002: 55)?

While such unanswered questions confirm the existence of a gap, I would want to go further and interpret this gap as symptomatic of a crisis in the practice of democracy itself, a crisis quite consistent with the survival (for now at least) of democratic values.[6] This is partly a crisis in the dominant liberal model of democracy, which, as its critics (Pateman, 1970; Barber, 1984) have long argued, is a thin concept of democracy, capable of living with a permanently disengaged minority, but which finds it harder to live with a disengaged majority (Wolin, 1992). But the crisis extends wider; it is a problem for all who want to work with an older language of politics, that has been stretched beyond all recognition by the competing forces of detraditionalization, individualization and globalization. As a result, the crisis applies equally to radical versions of democratic politics. Let me illustrate this by surveying, quite critically, some recent, mainly philosophical, interventions towards the redefinition of 'politics', or at least the preconditions of political engagement.

Jacques Derrida has provided, perhaps, the most vivid image of the crisis. In *Politics of Friendship* he writes of how 'the resonant echo of all the great [political] discourse' now issues, increasingly, in 'mad and impossible pleas, almost speechless warnings'. These warnings turn endlessly 'like searchlights without a coast, they sweep across the dark sky, shut down or disappear at regular intervals and harbour the invisible in their very light' (Derrida 1997: 81). For Derrida, the problem is a crisis in the nature of value itself, in 'the value of value' (ibid.). This cannot be addressed through some reworked democratic bond based on community, or 'fraternity', in any substantive sense, because it is the unsustainability of such political 'substances' that is the problem. Instead Derrida recalls Aristotle's concept of 'friendship', but with a sense, derived from Blanchot, of mutual strangeness and separation (Derrida 1997: 294). But what contexts, what reference-points, does Derrida give us for thinking about this new politics, and how it might be sustained? Apart from an enigmatic mention of 'a certain faithful memory of democratic reason and reason *tout court*' (1997: 306), there is no clue.

Nor, although many have turned to it for guidance, does the philosophy of Levinas provide, I would argue, many hints as to how we might sustain, let alone extend, its rethinking of morality into social practice and the possible refounding of politics. The unconditional, asymmetrical responsibility which Levinas argues we have towards the Other who faces us is <u>prior</u> to any social or cultural process; it is built into the prior <u>constitution</u> of the self. As Zygmunt Bauman puts it in his eloquent book *Postmodern Ethics*, 'it is through stretching myself <u>towards</u> the Other that I have become the unique, the only, the irreplaceable self that I am' (1992: 77). But how is this abstract vision of morality, which rejects any basis in something as contingent as consensus or mutuality, connectable to the progressive 'remoralisation of human space' for which Bauman calls (1992: 249, 240)?[7] It is far from obvious.

Something of the same impasse affects Jean-Luc Nancy's evocation of 'the inoperative community' (1991). This 'community' is inoperative in the sense that it is sustained only through the <u>absence</u> of the rhetorical operations of reification, on which conventional notions of 'community' depend: 'it is the work that the community does <u>not</u> do and it is <u>not</u> that forms community . . . Community is made of what retreats from it' (1991: xxxix). Like Levinas, Nancy turns to the originary constitution of the self for value: our prior sense of 'being in-common' with others which is indissolubly tied to our knowledge of our and their mortality. We should beware of exaggerating the novelty of these formulations; the insistence on the necessary intersubjectivity of the self goes back at least to the 1930s US pragmatist George Herbert Mead.[8] What is new here, however, beyond the elegantly paradoxical language, is not obviously helpful. For, by contrast with the US pragmatists like Mead and Dewey who connected philosophical issues to the social and cultural bases of democratic education and politics, Nancy turns his back on this: 'community' he writes 'is the <u>unworking</u> of work that is social, economic, technical and institutional' (1991: 31, added emphasis). 'Community', for Nancy, is something to be explored in the experience of seeing a friend die or in the philosophical foundations of literature, but not in anything that might readily be recognised as politics. Only one clue is offered, when Nancy addresses the word 'political' itself:

> '"Political" would mean a community ordering itself to the unworking of its communication, or destined to this unworking: community consciously undergoing

the experience of its sharing . . . undergoing, in whatever manner, the experience of community as communication' (1991: 40-41).

Once again, there is an echo of pragmatism: recall John Dewey's definition of communication as 'the way in which people come to possess things in common' (quoted Carey, 1989: 22). Nancy's idea, however, of a community that undermines, rather than simply sustains, its own 'unity' is an important one to which I return.

Ffor a less paradoxical account of the potential commonality that might ground any new politics, we can turn to work influenced by psychoanalytic conceptions of the self, not just in France but in Germany, Italy and the US. Kristeva's proposal that we be more open to strangers by becoming 'strangers to ourselves' (1991) is well-known, but similar connections between a more inclusive politics and the interrogation of the self have been developed by Axel Honneth (1995) and Jessica Benjamin (1998). It is a powerful line of argument, since it confronts the intense investment in exclusion, that, whether or not you think within a psychoanalytic framework, is plausibly central to the constitution of the subject. Alessandro Ferrara (1998) has gone further and argued that psychoanalytic insights into the healthy subject can provide an intuitive basis for a new vision of 'the good', that translates Aristotle's species-based notion of the 'good for man' into a shared, but always individually worked-out, value found in the richness of the life-narrative. At least one problem with this is that psychoanalytic perspectives on the self are themselves normalizing; they are based on a standard of the healthy, fulfilled self, which is hardly consensual, and that I, for one, would want to contest.

These psychoanalytic accounts, however, represent a major step forward away from the abstractions of the 'originary constitution of the self' to questions of process – the processes, including narrative processes, through which selves emerge and evolve their reflexive understanding. This connects with the political sociologist Alain Touraine's (2000) attempt to transvalue the standard terms of democratic discourse ('freedom, solidarity, equality') for a world where the nation as a founding 'essence' is neither desirable nor plausible. The way forward, Touraine argues, is through a new attention to 'the Subject':

> ' . . . we have to replace the old idea of democracy, defined as participation in the general will, with the new idea of institutions that safeguard the freedom of the Subject and permit communication between Subjects' (2000: 14).

But what might these communicative institutions be? Or, more modestly, on what principles can they even be imagined? Once again, we are offered few clues by Touraine beyond this general statement.

The only writer who I have found to offer a way forward here is the philosopher and narrative theorist, Paul Ricoeur. For Ricoeur, the self is always a narrated self: the self subsists through the never-completed stories it tells of itself. More than that, my individual story can never be sealed off from the stories others tell of themselves: 'the life history of each of us is caught up in the histories of others' (Ricoeur 1992: 161). This means that, in principle, each of us is disposed to be interested in the stories of others. What blocks, Ricoeur argues, a more open narrative exchange is the rigidity of collective identity, its tie to a founding event which must be kept unchanged, indeed

'incommunicable', to perform its political work (Ricoeur 1995: 7, quoted in Kaplan 2003: 97). In rejecting the closure underlying collective identities, Ricoeur follows all the other writers I have discussed, but crucially he goes further in suggesting some specific practices that might allow us to move beyond such unsatisfactory identities. One is what Ricoeur calls a 'translation ethos' (or 'language of hospitality'), that is, an openness to each other's narrative languages. Another is the 'exchange of memories', that offer conflicting accounts of overlapping events. We need, Ricoeur implies, institutions where, across apparent differences of collective identity, we can exchange narratives of past experience that, through their exchange, encourage shared narratives of the future.[9]

All this might seem to take me very far from the proper domain of a sociologist! But, as Touraine points out, if the crisis of democratic values runs as deep as many including him suggest, we cannot go on describing the social and political world as if nothing is changing. The very purpose of sociology, of critical social analysis in general, is at stake (2000: 11; cf Honneth, 1995: 207).

So, to sum up my argument so far, we need a language and a practice (or form of life) that can connect across our anxious cross-disciplinary searches, first, for the regrounding of ethics and morality, second, for new models of democratic politics, and, third, for new analytic concepts for critically understanding the social world. In this spirit I want to ask what contribution cultural studies might make to developing that common language and practice.

The Common Space of Cultural Studies

1. Research Priorities

Right away, let me stress that I have no illusions that cultural studies, more than any other academic subject, carries some automatic political force (there is no role now, as Bauman (1987) pointed out, for academic 'legislators'; so an academic subject's political 'force' must be generated through the specific and practical connections it makes to the world beyond it). Nor do I have too many illusions about the difficulties which the intensified rationalisation of contemporary academic life poses for such a political practice, particularly when cultural studies itself, as we saw at Birmingham in summer 2002, is a specific target of just those pressures. Nor, given the wider problem, precisely, of making connections between specialised forms of life, does it make sense to speak as if research and teaching can be reformed in isolation from shifts in practices outside the academy. Any principles we develop must open out into the wider democratic dialogue that in my book *Inside Culture* (2000: 140) I tried to capture through the phrase 'community without closure' – a phrase that was itself unspecific, I admit, but to which I want to try and give some substance here.

In doing so, I will be arguing for a research agenda for cultural studies that is rather different from its current one: this is intended not so much as a judgement on cultural studies' past, as a proposal that if cultural studies is to contribute more concretely to the crisis of democratic politics than some of the philosophical positions that I have criticised, it must change its priorities.

So how, given these qualifications, might we imagine the contribution of cultural studies? By cultural studies, I mean, since the question of cultural studies' disciplinary status seems permanently unresolved,[10] the range of work across the social sciences and humanities that acknowledges the inspiration of cultural studies.

Let's start with two points. First, we must be realistic: such is the fragmentation of the intellectual public sphere, in Britain at least, and cultural studies' dispersed and largely marginal position within it, that no single intervention is ever likely to have the impact that Raymond Williams' book *Culture and Society* did in 1950s Britain. A more differentiated network of interventions is needed that is open in multiple ways to exchanges beyond conference hall and teaching room: in how cultural studies conceives the research work appropriate to it, in how it translates that research into writing and other interventions, in how it disseminates that research and feeds it into ideas for further research and wider non-academic dialogue. It follows (and this is the second point) that it makes no sense for cultural studies to limit its questions to those that arise in an academic framework, ignoring the most urgent issues that face the social and political world, including the very crisis in democratic politics that I have been discussing.

Looking back to the situation faced by Raymond Williams, there is a striking parallel, as well as enormous differences. Williams articulated better than most around him the coming democratic crisis in a post-war society rigidly stratified by class, a Britain far from achieving the 'new common experience' that at the dawn of the welfare state T. H. Marshall (1992/ 1949: 33) had seen as central to its stable pact of citizenship. Marshall had used the terms 'culture' and 'common experience' in a cryptic way, but by forging those terms into the critical concept of 'common culture', Williams cut into the less than democratic languages and cultural politics of his day.

The crisis of democratic politics is far from over (hence the continuity with Williams), but the forms and conceptual tools through which it can be addressed are necessarily very different after five decades in which the landscape of capacities and experiences we call 'culture' has been massively de-stratified in some respects and relentlessly individualised in others. The issue remains the building of connections to resist the fragmentation of the 'world of discourse' (Williams, 1968: 133), but the divisions to be resisted are not so much the barriers of taste that differentiate types of cultural work from each other, but rather the divisions that block off the sites of possible politics from the rest of life (Bauman, 1999: 2).

There may now, in other words, be much less at stake in the general term 'culture' whose use, after all, has been endlessly expanded and whose political weight has been deconstructed to death (which is how I read the upshot of Tony Bennett's (1998) work); and much more at stake in the idea of 'common culture', or at least (as I put it earlier) in the conceptual site that Williams intended to mark by that apparently defunct phrase. For what is urgent now is not defending the full range of cultural production and consumption from elitist judgement, but defending the possibility of any shared site (whether or not overlapping with specialised spheres of cultural production) for an emergent democratic politics. The contemporary mission of cultural studies, if it has one, lies not with the study of 'culture' (already a cliché of management and marketing manuals), but with the fate of a 'common culture', and its contemporary deformations.

There are many ways of developing this insight into specific research. One - perhaps the most direct which is not to claim it is necessarily the best - is to look for new empirical routes into the problem of 'the political', as it is currently experienced and constructed; to examine how, from a host of different perspectives, 'the political' is being constituted, reformed and suppressed. Already there is work on the discourses of 'politics' in circulation, or, just as important, <u>not</u> in circulation (for example, Engin Isin's Foucauldian work on the construction of citizenship, or Henry Giroux's and Loic Wacquant's analyses of the displacement in US politics of issues of 'race' and exclusion).[11] Indeed, turning specifically to the term 'community', it is some years since Nikolas Rose (1996) explored this word's mobilisation in refiguring and desocialising the language of government. I want here, simply because it is closer to my own style of research, to focus on work with potential political <u>subjects</u>. Political subjects are important, because in their reflexivity can be sensed the local rhetorical work to which 'the political' and related terms are being put, or not put, and what, if anything, those subjects feel might still be at stake in these terms.

This is an area where, with Sonia Livingstone and Timothy Markham at LSE,[12] I am about to embark on a ESRC-funded project called 'Media Consumption and the Future of Public Connection'. This project is definitely <u>not</u> aimed at reinforcing the rigid assumptions about the place or nature of politics that characterise most political science. Rather it will take a broadly social constructionist[13] approach to politics, asking people who are not necessarily active in the formal political process for <u>their</u> reflections on where, if anywhere, a sphere of public connection lies beyond the private domain, and whether, if at all, media are involved in sustaining that connection.

This will be a difficult project because, without denying the concern for the future of democratic politics that motivates it, we as researchers must avoid assuming we know better than anyone else <u>where</u> and even <u>whether</u> politics has a future. 'Where', because as Larry Grossberg argued in his unjustly neglected book *We Gotta Get Out of This Place*:

> 'the analyst cannot assume that she or he already knows the proper locations at which people should invest themselves and construct their belongingness. Nor can he or she assume that the connections between such sites are always given in advance, so that people's travels through daily life are predictable.' (1992: 110)

We cannot assume 'whether' politics has a future, because that would be to ignore the particular privilege of the researcher as knowledge-producer (cf Bourdieu 2000) whose socially established role is precisely to elicit 'opinions' about matters already constructed as important in advance from the vantage-point of academic interpretation, whether or not they matter to the subjects of that research.[14] This is why the best empirical studies of political alienation and disconnection – those on which I hope our new project will be able to build - leave it ambiguous whether such positions are rational in the face of entrenched inequalities, including the fundamental political inequality between those who act (but may not listen) and those who (normally) are acted upon (Croteau, 1995; LeBlanc 1999; Buckingham 2000).[15]

This, however, is just one possibility. There are many other ways to research the current fate of 'the political' and, in order not to close down our sights unnecessarily, we should take seriously the exclusions which the term 'political' itself entrenches. One possibility would be to shift the focus away from individuals studied in the artificial situation of 'pure' research, and towards the institutional contexts in which people and systems mobilise, negotiate, and displace 'the political' and related terms. Cultural studies could do more, I suggest, to study institutional sites of discourse that are a long way from the formal process of 'politics' as usually conceived, yet hardly divorced from questions of 'the political' or 'community':[16] hospitals and schools, for example, as sites of formal work and voluntary work, both of them nodes in complex regulatory processes and spaces where class, educational and ethnic differences are daily negotiated.

There are, in fact, many sites where cultural studies could be bolder in its interventions: the whole range of work settings where in various ways 'the political' is negotiated or evaded. But, as soon as we think this, it becomes clear that it cannot be enough to study those sites in isolation from the wider life-trajectories of those who pass through them – because 'the political' may be precisely what is excluded or marginalised in the sphere of 'work', and many sites of leisure too.

To grasp this, attention must be paid to 'politics' in a different sense, the politics of speech or voice: the distribution, probably highly uneven, of people's sense (not necessarily directed to any space called 'politics') of themselves as effective agents and legitimate voices. Conventional political science has long travelled this coast in researching 'civic culture' and 'subjective efficacy' (Almond and Verba, 1963), but it has rarely gone far inland. We approach here the territory of 'identity politics', usually discussed at the level of group allegiances. But in times when, for some, the very meaning of 'community' or 'belonging' is at issue (see quotes from Stevenson and Elliott earlier), we cannot limit our research to identities legitimated by group membership, unless we are prepared to ignore the space of individual uncertainty that lies beyond them. Nor, if we understand identities as, in a sense, 'chosen', should we ignore how people's capacities to choose - or even their capacity to imagine themselves as agents who might choose - are shaped by the largely involuntary contexts of everyday work. This was brought home to me when, in a pilot for our ESRC study, involving questions posed to the UK's Mass-Observation Archive Panel, a recently retired female nurse wrote in her response:

> 'if my views counted for nothing after 50 years doing the job I knew about, why should they count about other things I know less about?'[17]

To be fair, these, as it were subterranean, connections between the crisis of formal politics and the undemocratic politics of work are beginning to be sensed within political science and political sociology (Bennett, 1998; Turner, 2001), but have not so far generated much empirical research.[18]

Cultural studies, in the broad sense I defined it, has, I believe, a great deal to contribute here. This might sound a long way from some versions of cultural studies. It does not foreground as such cultural consumption or identity-expression through cultural consumption; nor does it foreground as such processes of cultural production – not because they are unimportant (although, as I suggest, less may be directly at

stake in these areas than once was the case), but because it aims to <u>cut across</u> those domains to foreground another set of questions about the intertwined fates of individual agency and democratic politics. In doing so, cultural studies is not ceding its territory to a revamped political sociology (in case this sounds like a reverse imperialism!), but rather bringing to the inter-disciplinary question of the preconditions of democratic politics its interest in agency and voice, and the forces that constrain them (cf Couldry, 2000: chapter 3), a contribution which needs to be heard clearly and by a wider audience. Cultural studies, of course, cannot here work on its own: the alliances it makes with other disciplines, on the face of it more directly concerned with the stuff of politics, are equally crucial. But before turning to that, first let me explain what I believe has to change in how cultural studies sees it own practice.

2. Practice

There are plenty of potential spaces for politics, perhaps, but the key lack in the political domain may now be <u>time</u>, not space (Turner, 2002: 28). In a wonderful essay on the significance of rhetoric, the philosopher Hans Blumenberg wrote that 'what has been designated in our tradition as "rationality" has almost always benefited the element of acceleration . . . rhetoric, on the other hand, is, in regard to the temporal texture of actions, . . . a consummate embodiment of retardation' (1987: 444-445). As a result:

> 'a disproportion has arisen between the acceleration of processes and the feasibility of keeping a "feel" for them, of intervening in them with decisions, or coordinating them, through an overview, with other processes . . . [so that] There is something like the expediency of what is not expedient . . .' (1987: 445-446)

The resonance of this comment for the hyper-rationalised world of early twenty-first century educational institutions hardly needs explaining, but the implicit challenge must be articulated directly.

Henry Giroux in an eloquent lecture delivered last year – ironically enough in that often complacent seat of ancient learning, Oxford University – posed the question:

> 'How might public time, with its unsettling refusal to be fixed or to collapse in the face of corporate time, be used to create pedagogical conditions that foster forms of self and social critique as part of a broader project of constructing alternative desires and critical modes of thinking, on the one hand, and democratic agents of change, on the other?' (Giroux, 2003b: 160)

Can cultural studies, then, through the dialogues that its research generates, aspire to be one fragment of that imagined 'public time'? That, following Giroux, is what I want to argue.

We are not, to be clear, talking here about some version of public cultural provision – an important but very different debate. What is at stake is cultural studies' possible role in sustaining <u>practices of public connection</u>: practices through which people's fragmented, uncertain, incomplete narratives of agency (and all our narratives are inherently incomplete, as Ricoeur reminds us) are valued, preserved, and made

available for exchange, while being related, analytically, to wider contexts of power. Cultural studies could - and this was Williams' vision – contribute to sustaining dialogues that bridge the personal and the public, debate that engages with the current forms of politics and public culture (from music to film to literature to sport to spatial design), and the fragments of community embedded within them, while also being sharply critical, when necessary, of their contradictions and limitations. This is the space that Henry Giroux calls 'public pedagogy', intending it to apply well beyond the confines of academic institutions (Giroux, forthcoming); indeed this is a space whose horizon <u>must</u> extend into the less structured exchanges of civil society (even if our view of it there is easily blocked), if it is to have any meaning.[19]

This space should be characterised by what Ricoeur calls 'linguistic hospitality', providing a threshold for the exchange of memories and narratives by self and others. It would involve listening, as Ricoeur emphasises, across difference, but on this point we can also go back to Raymond Williams, recalling what he says in *Culture and Society*: 'wherever we have started from, we need to listen to others who have started from a different position' (1958: 320). But it would be a process which made no claims to negate difference through false aspirations to completion or certainty. Remember how Raymond Williams sought to replace the false closures of mass culture thinking with a new uncertainty in cultural discourse: 'to the degree that we find [that] formula inadequate for ourselves, we can wish to extend to others the courtesy of acknowledging <u>the unknown</u>' (1958: 289, added emphasis).[20]

The public time of cultural studies might, of course, from one point of view - that of rationalisation and government – be 'inexpedient' (in Blumenberg's word). Indeed, it would be a process that was 'inoperative' in Jean-Luc Nancy's sense, <u>undoing</u> the false work of discourses which seek to construct 'a unique and ultimate identity' out of the potential openness of communication (Nancy, 1991: xxxviii), working <u>against</u> the sanctioned languages of 'people', 'nation', 'society', 'culture' and even 'identity'. As such, it would enact Nancy's enigmatic words about 'a community ordering itself to the <u>unworking</u> of its communication' while at the same time, and through that very process, 'consciously undergoing the experience of its sharing' (Nancy, 1991: 40).

None of this, however, would matter much, if it were not embedded effectively within a sphere of public action. It is here we confront the crux between the work, say, of Paul Ricoeur and that of Hannah Arendt. Arendt, from a conservative perspective – but that does not, as Michael Warner (2002: 59) points out, make her insight any less powerful - saw in modernity 'the loss of the public realm' (1958: 55): the loss, that is, of an assured space of public significance where individuals can make sense of sacrificing their private time in order to speak to, and act in view of, others. Even if we think this too pessimistic, cultural studies can contribute nothing to the crisis of democratic politics unless in the course of its work, it makes connections beyond theory, within the space of politics itself. This is what I want to address in the final section.

3. The Link Back to Politics

The imaginability, within the space of theory, of such recent visions of the preconditions for a renewed politics tells us nothing about whether life contexts exist in which such a politics might take root as practice. Practice is where real agents, formed and operating under major constraints but always with a local sense of possibility, choose what to do with their scarce resources, including their time; what, you might ask, can theories of narrative tell us about the choices which people in fact make?

Indeed the 'problem' with individualization (and connected processes of 'de-socialization' (Touraine, 2000), that have undermined older forms of social context, institutional and communal) is not that the social world has become drained of meaning (a lack for theorists to fill in), but that it is saturated by personal and public meanings whose trajectory, however, is more and more difficult to connect into any shared space of public action. The fear, derived from Arendt, that the public realm may no longer even be compatible with contemporary living conditions, even if for a while it remains imaginable by theorists, is summed up by Oscar Gandy with nightmarish clarity when he writes that 'individuals may actually feel better about knowing less and less about the world around them' (Gandy, 2002: 452). What if, against this background, all cultural studies' sophisticated discussions about mutual understanding and questioning fed into, rather than challenged, this fragmentation of what I believe, following Habermas, we must go on calling the 'public sphere' (Habermas, 1989).

I said earlier that it is, in part, through the connections it will make with the wider space of politics that cultural studies can contribute to the democratic crisis. By way of conclusion, let me try to develop this point in two stages.

First, I want to answer the objection anticipated earlier that to spend so much time considering the preconditions of politics, as I have, is a diversion from the real matter in hand: politics itself. I have some sympathy with this: I have no liking for the 'politics' of academic writing that treats the sustaining of its own (relatively) privileged voice as the substitute for political action. But we must also beware of being too impatient here. It is striking that the historic public realm Arendt describes as lost, perhaps irrevocably, shares one feature with the community that other thinkers from Williams to Nancy have been trying to envisage for the future. For the essential feature of the 'public realm' is its 'publicity'. Publicity in Arendt's sense, even if couched in an older language, shares something important with those more recent visions. Here is Arendt:

> 'being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position. This is the meaning of public life.' (1958: 57, added emphasis)

The ability to acknowledge and listen to narratives told from different positions is crucial to the visions of Williams, Ricoeur, and Nancy. Which suggests two possible readings of those recent visions of the preconditions for politics: either as doomed in advance to search for something already lost or (the interpretation I prefer) as

<u>returning</u> in potentially a reinvigorated way to the path of a possible politics through public practices of mutual respect (cf Sennett, 2003).

Such practices of respect and mutuality must, of course, reach many sites and networks, from cultural production to formal politics to the world of work. What is needed, however – and this is Arendt's essential insight – is that in some way, those sites are <u>connected</u>, through a multitude of links, into a public space of shared significance and meaning. This is the emergent space that I have, provisionally, called a <u>'community without closure'</u>, a space that sustains practices of mutual openness to the uncertain accounts we are able to give of ourselves. But the name matters much less than the way we conceive the purpose of that space, which, while falling short of the achievement of politics, should enact one of its essential preconditions: that is, citizens' mutual respect for each other's inalienable capacity to contribute as agents to the public sphere. Cultural studies has, I believe, an important potential role in sustaining such a space.

But this, of course, cannot be enough. There has to be a second stage at which cultural studies connects with the specific spaces of politics itself and, at the same time, connects with other disciplines working to contribute to the specific content of political debate. In disciplinary terms, the connection with political theory that interrogates not so much the preconditions for, as the proper process of, politics (particularly deliberative democracy theory) is vital.[21] So too is the connection with the whole range of work across the social sciences and the policy arena that examines the nature of contemporary inequality and power. For it is ultimately in terms of this landscape that questions of voice and agency, and the violence done to them, matter; it is because the material conditions of speaking and acting in our own name are so unequally distributed that we must listen better to others; as Nancy Fraser (2000) has eloquently argued, we cannot leave the politics of recognition dangling, permanently disconnected from the politics of redistribution.

In all this, of course, I have only begun to map what the contribution of cultural studies – a differently focussed, differently connected cultural studies – might be both to the crisis of democratic politics and to the future practice of politics itself. The specific contribution of cultural studies as a discipline, if taken by itself, can at best be modest. But it would hardly be trivial – not if, through the way it conceives, writes and disseminates its research, cultural studies helps enact a 'public realm' (in Arendt's quaint but useful phrase) where it makes sense for us, and as yet unknown others, to exchange, critically and sceptically, the fragments left from earlier visions of 'politics' and 'community'. How <u>else</u>, we might ask, could something new and worthy of the term 'politics' emerge?

References

Abercrombie, N. et al. (2000). *Penguin Encyclopedia of Sociology*. 4th edition. Penguin: Harmondsworth.

Albrow, Martin (1997). 'Travelling Beyond Local Cultures: socioscapes in a global city'. In J. Eade (ed) *Living the Global City*. London: Routledge, 37-55.

Almond, G. and Verba, S. (1963). *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Arendt, H. (1958). *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Barber, B. (1984). *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Bauman, Z. (1987). *Legislators and Interpreters*. Cambridge: Polity.

Bauman, Z. (1992). *Postmodern Ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Bauman, Z. (1999) *In Search of Politics*. Cambridge: Polity.

Beck, U. (1997). *The Reinvention of Politics*. Cambridge: Polity.

Beck, U. (2000). *What is Globalization?* Cambridge: Polity.

Benhabib, S. (ed) (1996) *Democracy and Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Benjamin, J. (1998). *Shadow of the Other*. New York: Routledge.

Bennett, L. (1998). 'The Uncivic Culture: Community, identity and the rise of lifestyle politics', *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 31(4): 740-761.

Bennett, T. (1998). *Culture: A Reformer's Science*. London: Sage.

Blumenberg, H. (1987). 'An Anthropological Approach to the Contemporary Significance of Rhetoric'. In K. Baynes et al. (eds) *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?* Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Bourdieu, P. (2000). *Pascalian Meditations*. Stanford, Stanford University Press.

Buckingham, D. (2000). *The Making of Citizens*. London: Routledge.

Calhoun, C. (ed) (1992) *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Carey, J. (1989). *Communication as Culture*. Boston: Unwin Hyman.

Clifford, J. (1990) *The Predicament of Culture*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Corlett, W. (1989) *Community without Unity: A Politics of Derridean Extravagance*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Couldry, N. (2000). *Inside Culture: Reimagining the method of cultural studies*. London: Sage.

Couldry, N. (2003). *Media Rituals: A Critical Approach*. London: Routledge.

Couldry, N. and Langer, A. (2003). 'The Future of Public Connection: Some early sightings', ESRC 'Cultures of Consumption' working paper, available from www.consume.bbk.ac.uk

Croteau, D. (1995). *Politics and the Class Divide: Working People and the Middle Class Left*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Dalton, R. (2000). 'Value Change and Democracy' in S. Pharr and R. Putnam (eds) *Disaffected Democracies*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 252-269.

Delanty, G. (2003). *Community*. London: Routledge.

Derrida, J. (1997). *Politics of Friendship*. London: Verso.

Elliott, A. (2002). 'The Reinvention of Citizenship'. In N. Stevenson (ed) *Culture and Citizenship*. London: Sage, 47-61.

Ferrara, A. (1998). *Reflective Authenticity*. London: Routledge.

Fraser, N. (2000) 'Rethinking Recognition'. *New Left Review* (ns) 3: 107-120.

Gandy, O. (2002) 'The Real Digital Divide' in L. Lievrouw and S. Livingstone (eds) *The Handbook of New Media*. London: Sage, 448-460.

Giroux, H. (2003a). 'Spectacles of Race and Pedagogies of Denial: Anti-Black Racist Pedagogy Under the Reign of Neoliberalism', *Communication Review*, forthcoming.

Giroux, H. (2003b). 'Youth, Higher Education and the Crisis of Public Time: Educated Hope and the Possibility of a Democratic Future', *Social Identities*, 9(2): 141-168.

Giroux, H. (forthcoming) 'Cultural Studies and the Politics of Public Pedagogy: Making the Political More Pedagogical', *Parallax*.

Habermas, J. (1989) *The Structural Transformatino of the Public Sphere*. Cambridge: Polity.

Habermas, J. (1996) *Between Facts and Norms*. Cambridge: Polity.

Hannerz, U. (1992) *Cultural Complexity*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Held, D. (1995) *Democracy and the Global Order*. Cambridge: Polity.

Honneth, A. (1995). 'Decentered autonomy: the subject after the fall'. In *The Fragmented World of the Social*. Albany, NYC: SUNY Press, 261-271.

Inglehart, R. (1997). *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural Economic and Political Change in 43 Societies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Isin, E. (2002). *Being Political: Genealogies of Citizenship*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Janoski, T. and Gras, B. (2002). 'Political Citizenship: Foundations of Rights'. In E. Isin and B. Turner (eds) *Handbook of Citizenship Studies*. London: Sage, 14-52.

Kaplan, D. (2003). *Ricoeur's Critical Theory*. Albany, NYC: SUNY Press.

Keane, J. (1998). *Civil Society: Old Images, New Visions*. Cambridge: Polity.

Klingemann, H.-D. and Fuchs, D. (1995) *Citizens of the State*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

LeBlanc, R. (1999). *Bicycle Citizens: The Political World of the Japanese Housewife*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kristeva, Julia (1991). *Strangers to Ourselves*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Mead, G. (1967) [1934]. *Mind Self and Society*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Mouffe, C. (2000). *The Democratic Paradox*. London: Verso.

Nancy-, J.-L. (1991). *The Inoperative Community*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Pateman, C. (1970). *Participation and Democratic Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ricoeur, P. (1992). *Oneself as Another*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Ricoeur, P. (1995). 'Reflections on a New Ethos for Europe', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 21(5/6).

Rose, N. (1996). 'The Death of the Social? Re-figuring the territory of government', *Economy and Society*, 25(3): 327-356.

Sassen, S. (2002). 'Towards Post-National and Denationalised Citizenship'. In E. Isin and B. Turner (eds) *Handbook of Citizenship Studies*. London: Sage, 277-91.

Sennett, R. (2003) *Respect*. London: Allen Lane.

Stevenson, N. (2002). 'Culture and Citizenship: An Introduction'. In N. Stevenson (ed) *Culture and Citizenship*. London: Sage, 1-10.

Taylor, C. (1986) 'Foucault on Freedom and Truth' in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers volume 2*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 152-184

Tully, J. (1995). *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Turner, B. (2001). 'The Erosion of Citizenship', *British Journal of Sociology*, 52(2): 189-209.

Turner, B. (2002). 'Outline of a General Theory of Citizenship'. In N. Stevenson (ed) *Culture and Citizenship*. London: Sage, 11-32.

Touraine, A. (2000). *Can We Live Together?* Cambridge: Polity.

Wacquant, L. (2002). 'From Slavery to Mass Incarceration: Rethinking the "race question" in the US', *New Left Review* (ns) 13: 41-60.

Warner, Michael (2002) *Publics and Counter-Publics*. New York: Zone Books.

Williams, R. (1958). *Culture and Society: 1780-1950*. Penguin: Harmondsworth.

------- (1968) *Communications* 2nd edition. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Williams, R. (1993) 'Letter to WEA tutors' [written 1961] in J. McIlroy and S. Westwood (eds) *Border Country: Raymond Williams in Adult Education*. Leicester: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, 222-225.

Wolin, S. (1992). 'What Revolutionary Action Means Today'. In C. Mouffe (ed) *Dimensions of Radical Democracy*. London: Verso, 240-53.

Wolin, S. (1996) 'Fugitive Democracy'. In S. Benhabib (ed) *Democracy and Difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 31-45.

Young, I. M. (2000) *Inclusion and Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

---

[1] This article is based on a keynote address given at the 'Community' conference at Trinity and All Saints College, University of Leeds, September 18-20 2003; many thanks to the organisers for the invitation and to the audience for stimulating comments. I also am particularly grateful to Henry Giroux and David Hesmondhalgh for their helpful and detailed criticisms of an earlier draft.

[2] For example Beck (1997, 2000), Held (1995), Sassen (2002).

[3] See in particular my recent work on media rituals (Couldry, 2003).

[4] Cf Corlett (1989) on 'community without unity'.

[5] See Clifford (1990), Hannerz (1992) and for discussion Couldry (2000: chapter 5).

[6] On the latter, see Inglehart (1997); Klingemann and Fuchs (1995), Dalton (2002).

[7] Cf Ricoeur's attempt to displace Levinas' asymmetrical conception of morality within a broader, intersubjectively grounded ethics (Ricoeur 1992: 189-190, 337-340).

[8] Cf Couldry (2000: 51) and Ferrara (1998: 14-15), discussing Mead (1940).

[9] Cf James Tully's vision of multicultural constitutional politics (1995: 184). Note also that Ricoeur, like Derrida, draws on Aristotle's concept of friendship and reciprocity (1992: 181-94), but in a more precise and specific way.

[10] For my view (that cultural studies is best conceived as a discipline or at least a distinct methodological site), see Couldry (2000).

[11] See Isin (2002), Giroux (2003a), Wacquant (2002).

[12] Thanks to the Economic And Social Research Council for their financial support for this project (under Research Grant number RES143-25-0011). I wish to emphasise that the gloss I offer here on the project and its potential significance is my own, and not necessarily that of my colleagues on the project.

[13] Cf Neuman et al (1992), Gamson (1992).

[14] Thanks to Tony Bennett for making this point in response to a related paper I gave at the 2002 Cultural Returns conference at St Hughs College, Oxford.

[15] Note, however, that this is quite different from arguing, along with some Foucauldian positions, that 'the political' is merely a construction and nothing else is at stake in the term beyond the ceaseless constructions and discourses that play behind it. Much more helpful, if at first sight more 'traditional', is the work of Paul Ricoeur (see further below), which seeks to maintain connections between the political, morality and ethics, thereby avoiding the ultimate incoherence of Foucault's Nietzschean attempt to stand 'above' values (cf Taylor, 1986).

[16] For the distinction between 'politics' and 'the political', see Wolin (1996).

[17] For more details of this pilot, see Couldry and Langer (2003).

[18] A fine exception is Croteau (1995).

[19] Cf Williams' moving vision of adult education as a mutual process of transformation between teacher and taught, underwritten by their equality as citizens (Williams, 1993).

[20] There is some similarity here with John Keane's 'post-foundationalist' notion of civil society (Keane, 1998: 53).

[21] See for example Habermas (1989, 1996), Calhoun (1992), Benhabib (1996), Young (2000).