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Critical Dialogues: Thinking Together in Turbulent Times

Book

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Introduction: "Voices in my head": thinking critically as dialogic practice.

This book is strange in many ways. It has been a different sort of book to produce and will, I am certain, be a strange book to read. However, it has also been a joy to produce: it features conversations with a dozen leading academic thinkers *talking about thinking*. The twelve voices contained here are people who have inspired many of us – across a range of disciplines and fields – from political theory (Wendy Brown) to social policy (Fiona Williams), and from geography (Wendy Larner) to anthropology (Anu Sharma). More particularly, these voices belong to people who have helped me to think about the problems of doing critical intellectual work in hard times. These conversations explore the difficult relationships that are in play between politics, theorizing, and the practice of academic work.

As a consequence, this is necessarily a strange sort of book. Although academics talk all the time, we rarely record our conversations – as opposed to the public presentation or the structured interview. Yet conversation is intrinsic to our way of working: it involves thinking out loud, responding to questions, provocations and arguments, taking account of others, and thinking on 'your feet' (even if sitting down). Some of my most memorable academic moments have come from watching people whom I admire engaging with the question and the questioner, trying to re-articulate their arguments, trying to make connections or explore differences. Quite a lot of those who gave me such memorable moments are present in this book, precisely because they (literally) embody the qualities of thinking through talking and thinking out loud.

So the book partly emerges out of a puzzle: given what a significant part this sort of dialogue plays in our lives and our work, why does it so rarely feature in the public forms and formats of academic work? I suspect this is partly a product of how the forms and formalities of academic work combine in creating the varieties of 'finished work' that represent our public face: the article, the book, the presentation or even the carefully crafted interview. But so much of our real work takes place in this other mode – arguing in research teams, negotiating with co-authors, discussing with audiences, or even just fretting about some elusive topic over a cup of coffee or a drink. This book represents a chance to make this practice of 'thinking out loud' more visible and more audible. It is also about the way in which such thinking is not the rarefied reflections of the brilliant individual but an *intersubjective* process – a dialogue in which things develop dynamically. That too is missing from most accounts of academic work which still celebrate the heroic individual who thinks great thoughts in splendid isolation.

1. **Voices in my head**

This project has a number of inspirations, most of them deriving from disconcerting moments of realization. The first emerged at a workshop with a group of researchers at the Open University ('early career researchers' to give them their current organizational designation) on the topic of working collaboratively. As we explored the pleasures and problems of collaboration, I said that one of the great joys of collaborative working was that I had never had an original thought in my life. This evoked polite protests from several people and led me to clarify what I had intended by the statement. Since arriving as a postgraduate student at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in 1972, I have been privileged to work in collaboration with a wide range of people in a variety of research, writing and teaching projects. These collaborations have generated lots of original ideas and innovative work, but the generative processes were collective ones. They involved discussion, argument, criticism and iterative processes of drafting and development. I will have more to say about such processes later, but the question of 'original ideas' made me think about how our views of intellectual work are overshadowed by highly individualistic conceptions of thinking and working. One of the purposes of this book is to unsettle those

conceptions and open out the collective and collaborative processes by which so much critical thinking is done in practice.

The second trigger for the project took the form of another phrase that I find myself using with increasing frequency when talking about my work – a claim that it is constantly shaped by "voices in my head". This is, of course, a profoundly ambiguous observation: it is a way of paying tribute to those whose voices travel with me, reminding me of what we know and think, prodding me to do better, and always providing a sort of location device, connecting me to a set of relationships in which thinking takes place. On the other hand, it also evokes images of hearing voices as a psychological disorder, a different and unsettling image that requires the normalizing conception of the unique and coherent thinking individual (McCarthy-Jones, 2012). While I do not intend to underestimate the distress and disorientation that people suffer from the experience of 'hearing voices', I do want to borrow the phrase for my purposes. As several authors working in the field have argued, hearing voices may be a much more common phenomenon than its psychiatric pathologization implies and may, indeed, point to much more heteroglossic (multi-voiced) senses of the self (from *very* different starting points, see Billig, 1987, Longden, 2013, and McCarthy-Jones, 2012 and 2017). In what follows, I will connect these "voices" to my understanding of the processes of intellectual work as a dynamic and relational practice of thinking with and against others.

This brings me to my third starting point which emerged in discussions about 'critical thinking' in a class at Central European University. This lovely group of smart and engaged students were exploring issues and approaches loosely clustered under the heading of 'Critical Policy Studies', when it became clear to me that all of us were extremely good at the critical deconstruction of positions and arguments. Each of the chosen readings could be taken apart, weighed and found wanting in important ways. In an effort to interrupt our collective power of criticism, I suggested that whoever introduced one of the readings for the class also had to include a comment about what they had gained from the reading. This proved to be a challenge: some rose to it with more grace than others but it memorably culminated in one student reminding me of the rule after I had launched into a long and hostile attack on one of the papers we were looking at: "Didn't you say that we were

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supposed to also think about what we had got out of it, rather than just what's wrong?".
The rest of the group smiled and looked expectantly at me… It took me back to significant
moments of my own postgraduate work in cultural studies in Birmingham when I would be
recurrently impressed by Stuart Hall's capacity to dig out the 'good sense' of positions and
analyses that I had learned to deconstruct and dismiss. That capacity, that willingness to
think *with*, as well as *against*, seems to me to be one of Stuart's gifts and one that is central
to the process of thinking critically.

I was reminded of it as I began work on this book in the shadow of Stuart's death and the
problem of accounting for one of the most salient voices in my head. At that point, I read
David Scott's beautiful and moving book written to, and about, Stuart: *Stuart Hall's Voice*
(2017). I will say more about Stuart – and David's idea of an 'ethics of receptive generosity'
– later in this introduction, but the possibility of 'thinking with' provides one of the
cornerstones of this project. The voices collected here are ones that have regularly helped
me to think. They are in my head in complex and rewarding ways, but it might be worth
noting other ways in which such voices might be imagined. At an event at the University of
Leeds held to celebrate the retirement of Fiona Williams (one of the voices in my head),
Fiona talked about the same experience, but in terms of having her interlocutors perched
on her shoulder, whispering in her ear.

The final prompt for this project was my retirement from the Open University in 2013 which
gave rise to considerable thinking – and talking – about the people, processes and practices
that had filled my working life and had enabled me to do the sort of work that I had enjoyed
(the commodification and managerialization of higher education notwithstanding). It made
me want to settle accounts with the relationships that had supported and sustained critical
thinking in a range of settings, and to draw some of the people who played important roles
those processes into thinking out loud about critical thinking and thinking together. I had
the ambition to find a dozen people and spend time with them and a recorder to try to
reflect on these experiences. Of course, I found my twelve who appear here: Tania Li, Larry
Grossberg, Wendy Brown, Anu Sharma, Jeff Maskovsky, Paul Stubbs, Allan Cochrane, Fiona
Williams, Davina Cooper, Wendy Larner, Gail Lewis and Janet Newman.

However the process was not straightforward. I say more about two of 'missing voices' (Stuart Hall and Doreen Massey) in section 5, but there is a wider sense of absent voices too. I have worked collaboratively with many people since my first immersion in the pleasures and problems of the process in the Subcultures group at CCCS (see Hall and Jefferson, 1976). There were other collective projects as the Centre, notably the 'mugging group' that produced *Policing The Crisis* (Hall et al., 1978). I have spoken (and written) elsewhere about the collective processes that were fundamental to the Centre's work – organizational as well as intellectual (Clarke, 2016a). Subsequently, there were many course teams (later renamed module teams) at the Open University that proved an education in themselves as we struggled to cope with the demands of being a collective teacher and with the pedagogic puzzles of teaching at a distance. There have been research projects and writing collaborations with many wonderful people, all of whom have helped me to think – to think better, to think differently, and perhaps most importantly, to think *again*. Critical thinking, I will suggest, cannot, and should not, stand still.

2. Thinking Critically, but not alone.

In trying to work out what this book might be about, I thought it might be about the process of 'critical thinking', but then I discovered that, like most academic terms, the phrase was already owned and occupied. This, too, took me back to the practices of cultural studies: none of the topics or issues on which we worked was readily available to an emergent approach. On the contrary, everything from literature to television, from youth cultures to the state, already existed as someone else's territory, with all the established canons, hierarchies and proprietorial claims that such academic institutionalization implies. As a result, cultural studies often felt like a practice mobilized through cross-border raids in which we (and this was certainly a way in which the collective identity really mattered) would turn up somewhere to explain how much more interesting and significant topic X would be if only it was turned around and reconfigured through a cultural studies framing. While cultural studies was certainly an emergent approach – it was also an insurgent one. So let me briefly return to this mode of reframing – what in cultural studies terms might be called re-articulation – in relation to 'Critical Thinking'. Critical Thinking is currently organized and circulated as an approach to thinking systematically about any issue. The

capacity to do critical thinking is now widely viewed as a set of skills that are indispensable for success in education, professional training or life in general, and is articulated through a wide range of books and courses, of which my current favourite is *Critical Thinking for Dummies* (Cohen, 2015). Systematic guidance about how to do Critical Thinking is offered in a range of books and pamphlets and through websites such as *The Critical Thinking Community*. Drawing from a statement by Michael Scriven and Richard Paul adopted by the National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking in 1987, they note that

> Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. In its exemplary form, it is based on universal intellectual values that transcend subject matter divisions: clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and fairness. (http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/defining-critical-thinking/766).

In the current epistemological crisis, there are many points to celebrate here and challenges to ill-informed and biased intellectual short cuts do have to be maintained. Nonetheless, there are troubling assumptions here about how critical thinking is to be performed and judged. It is firmly lodged in the Enlightenment framework of rationalist and positivist reason, despite the occlusions, limitations and problems associated with that universalising view of reason. Equally, it is to be treated as a normative standard against which almost all thinking necessarily falls short:

> Everyone thinks; it is our nature to do so. But much of our thinking, left to itself, is biased, distorted, partial, uninformed or down-right prejudiced. Yet the quality of our life and that of what we produce, make, or build depends precisely on the quality of our thought. Shoddy thinking is costly, both in money and in quality of life. Excellence in thought, however, must be systematically cultivated.
> (http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/defining-critical-thinking/766 with the following attribution: (Taken from Richard Paul and Linda Elder, *The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts and Tools,* Foundation for Critical Thinking Press, 2008)

For me, this juxtaposition of Critical Thinking and its opposite short-circuits important questions about framings, dispositions, political and affective investments and the limitations of both available information and dominant ways of knowing. Most noticeably for a 'Cultural Studies boy', the problematic relationships between knowledge and power have disappeared, which leads me to puzzle about what the word 'critical' is doing in the phrase 'critical thinking'. Presumably the critical thinkers celebrated in this model are, in fact, critical of those who think less well? But for the purposes at hand, I am most struck by what a lonely process this version of critical thinking is: it is undertaken by a disciplined intellect, separating itself from its social contexts, rising above local biases and arriving at its conclusion (and its fulfilment) through a process of individualized ratiocination. At its very (unexamined) core, this is the critical thinking *self*: 'Critical thinking is, in short, self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking.' (*op.cit*.) I am sure there are people who think in such a way, or at least who understand themselves as thinking in such a way. But it feels a long way from my experience of what Michael Billig has described as the necessarily entwined processes of arguing *and* thinking. As he puts it, "... humans do not converse because they have inner thoughts to express, but they have thoughts to express because they converse" (1987: 111).

I want to draw two conclusions from this process of thinking critically about critical thinking. The first is the simple proposition that thinking *critically* might be socially and politically motivated, driven by a desire to challenge formations of power and knowledge; to unlock ways of knowing that obscure, deny or legitimate inequalities and injustices. That is, I would like to redeem the word 'critical' for political purposes. The second is to insist that thinking is *necessarily* social, both in the sense of being conditioned by contexts and in the sense of being intersubjective. Even when we are thinking alone, we are engaged in forms of argument; we are in conversation with the voices in our heads. Or, to put it in more formal terms borrowed from Mikhail Bakhtin, our thinking is both dialogic and heteroglossic: each of us contains, works with and negotiates multiple voices.

3. **Thinking Critically: with and against.**

I suggested earlier that many versions of thinking critically or engaging in critique involve a practice of deconstruction that demonstrate the thinker's superiority over X or Y's approach. I am not about to suggest that such processes of challenge and deconstruction are unnecessary – as our post-Brexit, post-Trump, post-Modi world reminds us, there is still much that needs to be challenged, criticized and deconstructed. There are also plenty of critical approaches that leaving me feeling frustrated and grumpy. Among my friends, colleagues and students, I am well known for such frustrations and my tendency to dramatise them as conflicts that are simultaneously personal and political. And yet, there is always another dimension. I remember once being introduced to someone at a conference as 'this is John: he's a contrarian. He will begin every sentence with "yes, but…".' And I think there is some truth in that: it speaks to a desire to hold more than one thought in play at once. So I can both be frustrated by Foucault's unwillingness to pay attention to how power works in practice (whether he is talking dismissively about the 'witches' brew' of what happens in the prison or the business of governing rather than the neoliberal programme, see Clarke, 2009) and still think it impossible to deal with the relations between knowledge and power, for example, without him. One doesn't have to be a Foucauldian to think with Foucault… Indeed, I am not sure how one thinks without Foucault after Foucault, any more than I can imagine how to think without Marx after Marx. Both re-organized intellectual and political horizons in decisive ways, but so too do many other individuals and movements, such that the challenge of thinking critically is to work, creatively, carefully, collaboratively, with the tensions, possibilities and gaps that surround us. Thinking critically is then something other than taking down a much-loved theory and saying here's another example of how right it is. Such mechanical deployments engage in the problems of the moment (whenever that moment is or was) in only the thinnest sense, even if they are deeply satisfying to the ones doing the deploying. One result is the disconcerting intellectual oscillation between the desire to claim that everything is new (we have now arrived at an era of….) or that this is just another instance of what we already know. Instead, many of the conversations in this book engage with the problems, and pleasures, of having to think again.

These relationships between theory, thinking and the moment are a continuous theme of Stuart Hall's work as David Scott makes clear when he calls Stuart 'a theorist of the

contingency of the present' (2017: 55, italics in original). But Scott also insist that what is to be gained from Stuart is a disposition to thinking as a dialogic process – of listening and answering in an open-ended practice of 'clarification':

> Clarification is a way of approaching thinking – and learning – that aims to make us more aware of what we are thinking or doing… That is to say, clarification involves endlessly saying the *next* thing, never the last thing. Clarification therefore does not presume the possibility of resolution; on the contrary, there is no presumption of closure, only successive provisional resting points along the way where we gather our thoughts for further dialogic probing. (2017: 16, italics in original)

Two points flow from this. First, it describes a process of thinking with as well as against – and, in some respects, the 'with' is more significant since it implies a commitment to maintaining an engagement, a relationship with the other (whether the other is a person or a text). It implies a necessary willingness to avoid 'closure': that moment of declaring the process over with a definitive verdict (after which the issue, theory or text can be put away). I remember the sheer shock – and joy – of a collaborative project in Paris, organized by the French anthropologist Catherine Neveu, which involved Catherine, Evelina Dagnino, Kathy Coll and me working around questions of citizenship (see Clarke et al, 2014; Neveu et al, 2011). One vital dimension of our work together was to explore readings on the topic which we would discuss, and then return to the following day, or the following week in a drawn-out process of 'clarification'. Academic work is rarely so generous with its time and temporal rhythms, but in this instance we found and made use of the time/space to work in a manner that was both intense and slow – and, I believe, productive.

Second, Scott's observation makes visible the important difference between 'closure' and 'provisional resting points': the points that are necessary in order to be able say something other than the next round of clarification. Thinking together in this sense is a process that underpins and makes possible interventions into debates, discussions and issues, but such interventions are always, and contradictorily, provisional. Interventions – be they comments in discussions, blogs or full-length books – are necessarily provisional: they are 'the best we can do for now', rather than the definitive statement. One of the features of the

Birmingham Centre when I went there was its house journal whose title, *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, has always struck me as an indispensable reminder of this provisionality – and I do not think I have written anything since that has not been a working paper in this sense. But provisional is not the same as tentative: I write and say things that are assertive, that make claims, and that argue for positions. I have no doubt that some will find them frustrating, dogmatic or wilfully wrong-headed. But they are, nevertheless, provisional, with the intention of intervening in a discussion or issue to 'clarify', to move the argument along or to open it up to new possibilities. And by the time it has been published (even in the digital age), I may well have had occasion to think again. There is then a paradoxical combination of assertiveness and provisionality involved in this model of clarification and conversation.

Finally, the notion of *conversation* plays a significant role in this view of thinking as a dialogic process. It has both a real and a symbolic quality. On the one hand, dialogue implies a conversational relationship – and this book is a tribute to the importance that conversations have played in my life. It is also a theme that runs through David Scott's book on/to Stuart Hall, given the central role that both voice and listening plays in his account of Stuart's way of working and way of being. But the idea of the conversation also plays another role in academic work where we imagine ourselves as 'joining in' or even 'starting' a conversation by writing an article or book. These, it should be said, are rather strange conversations. Sometimes, our arguments get noticed and commented upon; occasionally, they may be reviewed or even referred to in someone else's work (and, sometimes, those doing the referring get the idea at stake). But writing in academic forms also resembles sending a letter in a bottle, or broadcasting messages into outer space, and wondering if there is anyone out there. At best, these are oddly disjointed and dislocated forms of conversation – although they do, as a consequence, allow plenty of room for replies that begin 'I have had more time to think about this...'. But academic writing strains to be dialogic and all too easily turns into a monologic mode of address. My friend Ann Davis once commented on the draft conclusion for a book that I was writing by saying 'Are you writing for friends? Are you hoping to persuade people? If so, why are you shouting at them?' She was, of course, right; and the conclusion was revised into a slightly more conversational style. But there are reasons why talking *with* has rewards that are different from writing *to*, or even writing *for* –

and one aim of this book was to show why talking about thinking has been a significant part of my life.

4. Dialogic selves: thinking subjects

The book rests on an underlying theory: that we are all 'dialogic subjects', who think, reason, reflect and argue as a fundamental condition of our sociality. This view derives from the work of the Russian linguist and literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (Holquist, 1981) who took the view that utterances and texts emerged out of a condition of *heteroglossia* – the coexistence (not necessarily comfortable) of different voices and ways of thinking. My connections to Bakhtin's work have been enabled by a number of intermediaries, especially Michael Billig in his development of a linguistic or discursive approach to social psychology and Dorothy Holland and Jean Lave whose collection of essays *History in Person* (2001) demanded that we think about subjects who 'answer back' rather than simply being the bearers and reproducers of dominant ideologies. They found Bakhtin's view of the dialogic creation of selves – what Holquist (1981) calls 'dialogism' – a foundation for grasping how individuals were both socially produced and played active parts in their own formation.

> History in person can in no way be confined to discrete persons. Durable intimate formations result from practices of identification in historically specific times and places. Dialogism insists upon the always engaged-in-practice, always-engaged-in-dialogue, unfinished character of history in person. The person is necessarily "spread" over the social environment, becoming in substance a collection point of socially situated and culturally interpreted experience. And herein lie important sources of stability and thickening. Weaker parties to struggles, as well as the strong, can durably create their own discourses, practices, and emblems of struggle.

> Given the uneven playing fields of power depicted in this volume, it is important that dialogism provides a way to think about a generativity that "fills up the space between transgression and reproduction" (to borrow Willis's borrowing of Aretxaga's phrase from the seminar). In the course of local struggles, marginalized groups create their own practices. Participants in these groups both are identified by these practices and

often identify themselves as "owners" of them. These practices thus provide the means by which subjectivities in the margins of power thicken and become more developed and so more determinant in shaping local struggles. (18-19)

Dialogism builds on Bakhtin's view of heteroglossia as a condition of sociality – that we all inhabit a complex (and shifting) landscape of multiple languages, voices and ways of thinking about the world and our place within it. Bakhtinian subjects are active participants: reasoning, negotiating, anticipating others' arguments and arguing back. This view has been helpful and productive for me: that idea of a 'space between transgression and reproduction' invites us to think about subjects as complex, social and creative, rather than either dupes or revolutionaries. Rather it raises the possibility of thinking about the multiple ways in which people live their subordination, sometimes consenting, sometimes refusing but more often finding accommodations and distancing devices and living with/in ambivalence. During a research project on the emergence of citizen-consumers in public services in the UK, we described our respondents as 'little Bakhtinians' as a way of describing the complex capacity to negotiate and reason about the different messages, images and interpellations in play (Clarke et al, 2007: 142). The same issues – and the value of Bakhtin's view of the dialogic subject – were also important in a subsequent research project where we asked advisers working in Citizens Advice Bureaux how they understood the 'citizen' in 'Citizens Advice' (Kirwan, McDermont and Clarke, 2016). Here, too, we found people borrowing creatively from diverse repertoires about citizenship (conditionality, systems of rights and responsibilities, its links to nationality, etc.) to offer alternative accounts of who might be a citizen. Most recently, Janet Newman and I have been writing about aspects of Brexit, including an article about political subjectivity in which we have again borrowed from Bakhtin (and Holland and Lave) to resist views of people as singular and coherent political subjects (Clarke and Newman forthcoming). For me, the idea also has productive echoes of Gramsci's view of 'common sense' as a plural noun – common sense contains many diverse (heteroglossic) elements on which people and political projects draw, selectively, creatively but not necessarily coherently or consistently.

All of this emerges in the context of trying to make sense of subjects 'out there', encountered in research projects or political situations. But I do not think we (academics)

should be in the business of having theories about people 'out there' in which we cannot simultaneously recognize ourselves. One of the great advantages of Bakhtin's dialogism from my point of view is that it works equally for thinking about the 'in here' – in the world of the academy and inside my own head. We – working academics – are also social subjects, not transcendent individuals. And we proceed through thinking, negotiating, arguing, anticipating and accommodating across a heteroglossic terrain. We may do so more formally, conditioned by a set of codes about how to articulate our thoughts and reasoning (with added references and footnotes), but we are also contextually produced subjects and dialogic – intersubjective – ones. One of the aims of this book is to make this more visible and more explicit: that I (and we) think dialogically, both in conversations with others, and in imagined conversations with those others in our heads. Which brings me back to the voices.

5. Introducing the Voices

When the idea for this project (my retirement project, remember) came to me, I started to make a list of people with whom I would like to record conversations, both for the pleasure of talking with them and to mark the ways in which talking to them had shaped my thinking. After a week or so thinking about this, it became clear to me that a multi-volume series was probably not viable: the list was simply huge and so began the harder task of limiting myself to a dozen possibilities. Several criteria shaped the final selection. They should be people with whom I was currently in some engagement, rather than past collaborators no matter how significant they had been (this ruled out a lot of friends and collaborators from my early cultural studies days). Second, they should be relatively accessible to me. This turned out to mean I could access people in the UK and in North America, thanks to a travel grant from the OU's Social Science Faculty that extended a trip to a conference in San Francisco. That excluded friends and collaborators in continental Europe – such as Catherine Neveu, Fabian Kessl, Prem Kumar Rajaram, Mikko Lehtonen – and beyond, such as Margaret Wetherell in New Zealand. Finally, they should be willing, and I am delighted to say that all those I approached agreed to take part, though not without some initial puzzlement at times: 'what, just sit and talk??'. Or at least, those were the original organizing criteria. I had missed out a further critical one, that they should be alive. In the time between having the

idea and putting it into action, Stuart had died, followed by Doreen Massey just as we were talking about when to meet. I talk about these and other 'missing voices' in the next section, but here I am just going to say something briefly about the dozen who are present here.

Most obviously, they are all Anglophone, though they work in and on very different places: from the USA to India, from the UK to Indonesia. That points to something important about the skewing effected by the model of 'conversation' in play here: conversations tend to be monolingual, even if dialogic. They are also generationally skewed, missing out younger scholars encountered at conferences, workshops and through both CEU and the OU. The selection is slightly biased towards anthropologists (3 out of 12: Tania Li, Jeff Maskovsky, Anu Sharma). This reflects my later life seduction by anthropology which played a role in taking me beyond the 'little Britain' tendencies of both cultural studies and social policy. I was lucky in the anthropologists that I fell among on my first visit to a mega-professional conference (Washington, DC in 2001) who have sustained me since then in a spirit of considerable generosity. But the dozen also includes cultural studies people (Larry Grossberg), social policy scholars (Fiona Williams, Janet Newman and Paul Stubbs, even if he would rather be an anthropologist), legal scholars (Davina Cooper), geographers (Allan Cochrane, Wendy Larner), and those in politics (Wendy Brown) and psycho-social studies (Gail Lewis). But in some ways, these disciplinary categorizations are misleading: all of them are more than those designations might imply and indeed I suspect that these conversations are possible because people both outrun these disciplinary classifications and operate on their margins, making friends across such boundaries.

My conversations with all of them start from happy encounters – from standing behind Wendy Brown in a queue for accommodation at a conference to being told by Stuart that I should try to find Larry Grossberg in deepest Illinois when I went to the US in 1986 (Urbana-Champaign is indelibly lodged in my memory). They have different temporalities: I have known Allan Cochrane the longest (since an encounter in Catherine and Stuart Hall's living room in Birmingham in 1976 to discuss whether a Birmingham branch of the Conference of Socialist Economists might be set up – no) and we subsequently shared an office and much else at the Open University for over thirty years. And they have different rhythms and intensities: I live and write with Janet Newman which gives it a sort of daily character, where

others are more interrupted and intermittent. But they are inextricably linked by the sense that, without them, I would not think as I do. Each of them gets a slightly fuller introduction at the beginning of their chapter.

6. The Missing Voices.

As I noted earlier, there are many missing voices who have shaped my work and thinking by adding to the overlapping, intersecting and unsettling conversations through which I have discovered things. Those things include topics (from being drawn into work on youth subcultures with Tony Jefferson, Dick Hebdige and others in 1972 to research on school inspection with Jenny Ozga and others in 2010); keywords and concepts (from taking citizenship seriously with my 'three sisters' – Kathy Coll, Evelina Dagnino and Catherine Neveu – to contemplating legal consciousness with Morag McDermont and Samuel Kirwan); and different domains and practices (finding social psychology through people like Margaret Wetherell and Mick Billig) and constantly being invited to think about social movements and social relations by activist-intellectuals who helped me to de-normalise my place in the world (as a white, male, able-bodied and straight academic). From Richard Dyer to Ann Phoenix, John Cho to Linda Gordon, I have benefitted from the generosity of 'clarifications' that have helped me to ensure that – in thinking, at least – biology is not destiny. I could write a long intellectual-political personal history that traced these intersections and their transformative effects, but this is not the place for it. Rather I need to pay a little more attention to the two missing voices – those 'absent presences' who, as Althusser suggested, are visible in their effects: Stuart Hall and Doreen Massey.

The first – Stuart – is both exceedingly simple and overwhelmingly complicated. It is simple in the sense that I would not be here today, doing this, without Stuart. The Birmingham Centre rescued me after a dismal undergraduate experience. Under Stuart's leadership (he became Acting-Director as I arrived), the Centre provided me with friends, collaborators, confidence and a sense of why it was worth bothering (some of this is explored in interviews with Hudson Vincent, 2013, and Kieran Connell, 2015). Stuart was also personally central to how all this unfolded, as a supervisor, mentor, collaborator, colleague and friend from 1972 until his death in 2014. As so many others have said, he was a brilliant, passionate, inspiring

and wonderful person with whom to spend time, and with whom to think. He was also a rather frustrating exemplar, at least for me. His sustained personal, intellectual and political generosity set a standard that is difficult to match. I still clearly remember those moments in Birmingham where I would have bad-temperedly wrestled with some new source, arriving at my very crabby dismissal of their failings and limitations, only for Stuart to turn things on their head and tease out what we might gain from taking them more seriously. He was, of course, usually right – both substantively and in principle. But the accumulated frustrations of a would-be radical and critical scholar are also part of this learning process. By the time, I (and often we) had got to our diagnosis of the problems of Althusser, Poulantzas, Foucault – that is, the moment of 'thinking against' – Stuart was ready for thinking 'after Foucault', both with and against. He still sits in my head as both the impossible standard and the eternal support, insisting that yes, we can think better … and that it matters to try. This, I think, is my more ambivalent take on David Scott's wonderful articulation of Stuart as a practitioner of an 'ethics of receptive generosity'. He is right when he reminds us – and Stuart – of how this ethics was

> already there in your particular practice of thinking aloud with others, your style of speaking that is simultaneously a hermeneutics of listening. To my mind, you are an exemplary receptive giver insofar as you strive to practice a mode of effecting change among others that is, at the same time, a mode of changing yourself through the influence of others…

> I don't think anyone would need much persuading, Stuart, that you were a generous self in exactly this sense of a receptive giver. You were never merely a privatized intellectual self, but also a *builder* and *sustainer* of intellectual community. And as such you were never-not sharing yourself with those around you, enabling, shouldering, bolstering and supporting them in the common endeavors in which you were together engaged… But at the same time you would have been you would have been the first to tell me that all of this giving was also, reciprocally, a paradoxical kind of receiving as well. You, Stuart, were an *insatiable* learner. You were a *congenital* borrower of the ideas of others. You were never so closed or proud as to be unable to gain something from others. You had no false conceit about originality. You had no

misplaced fear of recycling. And I think this liberated you into a kind of modesty, and courtesy, a sense of proportion really, that was your true gift. (2017: 14041, italics in original).

It should be clear that I share the view of thinking as a dialogic process that underpins this celebration of Stuart's capacity to do it in practice: he modelled a distinctive version of how be a public intellectual, not just in terms of making interventions into the public realm, but as an embodied mode of conduct and a way of being with others. This is a mode of conduct that remains depressingly uncommon among intellectuals, and among male intellectuals in particular. But I am grateful for being exposed to it for such a long time – and to the voice that carried it. There are many more substantive gains from working with Stuart: about why Gramsci matters, about how articulation works, about how it is impossible to grasp the British social formation without its racialization, and more. I suspect I am also 'a congenital borrower', though my intellectual borrowing is probably more shameless than modest. But I certainly continue to try on, and try out, other possibilities for thinking about the present in a process that Alistair Pennycook nicely called 'borrowing, bending and blending' (2007: 47). In a recent collaborative project on transnational policy flows (Clarke at al., 2015), we took Pennycook's phrase as a perfect description of the unfinished process of theorizing that our book offered. Others, it should be said, took a different view, suggesting that our lack of overall coherence and rigorous theorization fell short of proper standards and ignored the overwhelming claims of particular intellectual schools (Actor Network Theory, most notably). But I have lived long enough in Stuart's ambit not to find this the most upsetting thing to have said about my work.

Stuart is inextricably linked to Doreen Massey in my head, partly through their joint working lives at the Open University, following Doreen's arrival as Professor of Geography in 1982, which regularly featured political-intellectual discussions in Stuart's car on the drive to and from Milton Keynes. But they were also connected in the search for a new politics – after Thatcherism and after neoliberalism, originally through *Marxism Today*, then as co-founders (with Michael Rustin) of the journal *Soundings*. They similarly took responsibility for *The Kilburn Manifesto* (Hall, Massey and Rustin, 2015). Doreen, quite simply, taught me to think about space – an experience I share with many others. For me, space was where things

happened – a series of passive contexts for action, events, movements and more. Doreen was a passionate advocate for the necessity to think actively about space and, more particularly, to think about space as relational – beautifully and powerfully argued in her book *For Space* (2005). I have written a farewell to Doreen elsewhere – in *Cultural Studies*, at the prompting of its editor, Larry Grossberg, who also knew Doreen and her work well (Clarke, 2016). I don't want to go over that ground again, except to say that I stressed the conversational qualities of her thinking, arguing and writing. She had a dialogical style well suited to the collaborative and collegial world of the Open University as well as the socialist and feminist milieux in which she was formed and to which she remained committed.

I will, though, pause over one facet of our relationship: we spent a lot of time thinking and talking about the 'conjuncture'. Stuart developed the idea from Gramsci's work and it became a focal point for one version of cultural studies (see *Policing the Crisis*, for example). It provided a way of focusing attention on the complexity and contingency of the current moment in economic, social, political and cultural terms. It underpinned much of Stuart's work and formed a key element for how the triumvirate of Stuart, Doreen and Michael Rustin approached the work of *Soundings* and the *Kilburn Manifesto*. Doreen, Michael and I were also involved in organizing a couple of workshop events on the theme of the 'current conjuncture' in the vibrantly dusty setting of the Marx Memorial Library in London. They were stimulating and frustrating in equal measure but acted like refueling stops for longer conversational journeys about what it meant to think conjuncturally, and how to do it. Doreen and I last talked about these things on a panel at a Goldsmiths College conference to celebrate Stuart's life and work (Henriques et al, 2017). Our conversation included a promise to meet again and talk more about how time and space were configured in a conjuncture – and to record the conversation as a part of this book. Doreen died before we could make it happen and my gesture towards that conversation is now published in a collection of essays for and about Doreen, appropriately titled *Critical Dialogues* (Werner et al., 2018).

There can be no doubt that this book would be different if Stuart and Doreen were two of the conversations available here. Both of them thought in wonderfully conversational ways and were committed to thinking as a dialogic practice. But they are not here and we have to

continue to think without them, though they have gifted us wonderful resources with which to do our thinking. That includes giving us models for how to do thinking, critically, collaboratively, creatively and focused on the social and political challenges of the present. For those reasons, as well as the remembered pleasures of their wonderful voices, they remain active as voices in my head.

7. Listening to voices: Or, how to use this book.

And so, to the substance of the book itself. The chapters are highly edited versions of much longer conversations recorded between 2013 and 2017. Each of the conversations is exactly that – a conversation, rather than an interview with a structured format. My aim was to explore the issues that the specific person and I had in common and how we went about thinking about them. As a consequence, although there are overlaps and intersections, each dialogue develops in its own unique direction. This makes their transformation into 'chapters' a somewhat strange process. They do not look or read like the finished pieces of academic work that we normally see in print. On the contrary, they are full of overlaps, interruptions, hesitations and, especially, shortcuts that emerge because the person speaking and I already share some common points of reference. The editing process has involved addressing some of the dilemmas of turning 'talk' into 'text', involving exchanges between me and the dialogists. All of them have expressed frustrations that the transcribed conversations do not catch them at their best: they are less fluent, coherent, explicit or systematic than they would wish (I should note that it's even worse for me, as I keep reappearing…). I think this is intrinsic to the format – conversations between people who know each other are less structured or systematic than a formalized interview, and certainly less so than a polished and revised written piece of work.

So, the following chapters are the edited highlights from much longer conversations that lasted between one hour and three hours. I made the original selections from the transcribed conversations, aiming at chapters of around 6,000 words, and sent them to the dialogists. Some accepted my selections, others suggested alternatives which now form part of the chapters. People have taken slightly different approaches to 'tidying up' the edited

texts, ranging from the minimalist to more developed polishing aimed at overcoming some of the difference between talk and text. I have allowed them to make their own judgements, and the editing is marked in the chapters by ellipses …. that mark segments taken out and the use of square brackets to identify clarifying or contextualizing additions. I have also edited them for what might best be called verbal tics… those little devices such as 'yes', 'indeed', 'mmm', 'I mean', 'I think' and 'you know' that act as spacers, connectors and acknowledgements during conversations but take up a lot of space on the page. They are of interest to conversational analysts but don't help with making the chapters readable. I have also added some clarifying footnotes about people, topics or issues that pass thought the conversations Nonetheless, despite these efforts of housekeeping, they are a strange read!

I have left some time markers in the chapters to give a rough guide to where they appear in the sound recordings. The full versions of these dialogues – only edited to tidy them up sonically and remove the occasional embarrassments that can occur in relaxed conversation – are available as audio files (at XXXX). I was meeting with a group of Larry Grossberg's graduate students in Chapel Hill when this project was just beginning and told them about my plans. One of them, Chris Dahlie, who also worked as a sound engineer, was appalled that I was planning to record these conversations in order to merely produce much briefer textual versions of them. His first suggestion was that I should video them all but given that I share my mother's reluctance to being either photographed or videoed (both of us on the basis of very strong evidence), I declined this suggestion – on technical as well as personal grounds. But the more I thought about the potential uses of a series of audio recordings with interesting intellectual figures, the more it became clear that we should work out a way of making them available. I am grateful to both the dialogists and to the publishers for making this possible.

The characteristic of dialogic thinking – that it is emergent and open-ended – gave rise to discussions with the publishers about how best to present the conversations. I have resisted suggestions that the dialogues might be cut up and arranged thematically because I fear that would lose the point of them being conversations. My aim has been to give the reader/listener the chance to see/hear the process of thinking together. As a result, the chapters are arranged in nothing more complicated than the order in which they were

recorded, beginning with Tania Li and ending with Janet Newman. I cannot think of a 'principle' that would take precedence over sequence, but, of course, that does not mean that the chapters should be read in that sequence. Each reader has the possibility to bring their own interests and orientations to the selection and ordering of the material. Fascinated by feminist political theory, then start with Wendy Brown. Excited by the prospect of cultural studies 'old lags' in conversation, then start with Larry Grossberg. Different routes can be plotted across this landscape: ones that follow existing connections (anthropologists first?) or bring new juxtapositions into being (try Wendy Larner alongside Anu Sharma for different geo-political displacements). If you are seeking a thematic way through the dialogues, then we have tried hard to construct an index that enables such thematic tracing.

In his comments on the first version of the book, Richard Freeman rightly pointed to the way in which key ideas and concepts slip and slide through the chapters without being explicitly discussed. This too is a feature of conversation: such terms work as points of reference, connection and, occasionally, disagreement, rather than being the fpocus of sustained explanation or development. To redress this a little, I have added a section – called *Keywords* (after Raymond Williams, 1976) – at the end of the book. It is not a glossary, in the sense that it does not provide a singular or clear definition of any of the terms included. Rather it offers a reflection of the significance and potential (and shifting) meanings of some of the words that make a significant appearance in the conversations.

I have gained great pleasure from this project. Talking with each of these people reminded me about why I value them and of the ways in which they help me to think. I hope they do some of those things for you.

Recording and editing: a technical note.

For technically minded readers, the recordings were made using an Edirol (Roland) R-09HR recording device, in 16bit .wav format. They were professionally transcribed by Page Six Services, then edited by me and subsequently reviewed with the interlocutor. The sound recordings were edited using Audacity software and are stored in 16bit .wav format.