DAVID MORLEY INTERVIEW - 3 JUNE 2011


Hudson Vincent: I was hoping that we could begin with a conversation on the Centre itself. What brought you there to begin with?


David Morley: I had done a sociology degree at the London School of Economics (LSE), and I wanted to do a Ph. D. on media news coverage of industrial conflict. This was in 1972. LSE has always been a very highly traditionalist institution. At that point, it was so conservative that they just laughed and said the media wasn't a proper subject for a Ph. D. at a serious place like LSE. I was committed to the topic, but I was also committed to living in London, as I was very involved in community politics in the bit of the city where I lived, so I looked for somewhere else in London where I could study. I applied to Goldsmiths sociology department, but they weren't interested in me, because I wasn't interested in ethno-methodology and at the time. That approach had quite entranced the sociology department here. The nearest place to London I could find to do my Ph. D. was the University of Kent. There was a guy called Krishan Kumar there, who I wanted to work with, but just when I arrived there, he'd just got a secondment that he had been chasing after for ages, and he went off into an ethnographic study of BBC production. So my supervisor disappeared, and they sent me to this sociologist called Frank Parkin. He said two things. He said 'well I can't imagine why they've sent you to me, because I don't know anything about the media'. And anyway, he said 'I think your topic (which was on news coverage of industrial conflict) is completely pointless, unless you're also going to do an audience study which demonstrates that this coverage does have some effect'. I was furious with him. To me, the point was the coverage, and at that time, I wasn't interested in doing audience work - though, as you know, I subsequently spent about 20 years doing exactly what he had suggested! However, by chance, at that point, a friend of mine, called Ken Worpole, who worked on community literature in London, happened to mention that he'd done a talk at this place in Birmingham where they'd done some interesting stuff on working-class writing, and he said, there's this guy there called Stuart Hall... And so I got Stuart's phone number, and I rang him up and I said 'look, I'm registered at Kent to do a Ph. D., but they haven't got anybody there that can supervise me - I hear you've got something

called the Media Group, what's the chances of me joining that? ' If someone rang me up today, and said 'look I'm a student registered somewhere else, I'm not going to pay any fees or anything, but I'd like you to let me come and take some courses ... ' I'd just say, what are you talking about?!? (laughs). And Stuart just said, 'Fine - come along, see if it works... ' I'm sure that if they hadn't felt I had something interesting to say to them, it wouldn't have worked out - but it was all totally informal. So, anyway, I drifted to CCCS through that route. The crucial thing for me though, was that I had grown up in Birmingham. All my teenage years were spent dreaming of 'how the hell do I get out of this dump? ' So the last thing I was ever going to do was move back to live there - and I never did. I commuted there the whole time that I was involved with CCCS, from 1972 through to when I finished the Ph. D. and then went on to become a Research Fellow during the Nationwide Audience project, in the late 1970s. I never went back, I couldn't. I mean, I'd spent years trying to get out of the place. So, going to CCCS was no kind of straightforward gravitational pull - it was more a case of having a project I wanted to do that no one else could accommodate. It turned out that here was a place where it did fit in, and so I went there, and it turned out that it was the right place to be.

Hudson Vincent: Was the media group the only group you were involved with?

David Morley: Yeah, it used to meet on Wednesday morning, and I used to take the early train up and spend the day there. Later on, when I was doing the Nationwide stuff, I'd sometimes spend a couple of days up there, but I never got involved in the ongoing, overall life of the Centre and its various debates and conflicts. I was just involved in the Media Group, that was what I wanted and that's what I did.

Hudson Vincent: How did the media group arrange itself? How did you decide what was going to be read, who was going to present, etc.? Was Stuart involved?

David Morley: Well he was always an influence, but he was involved in so many of the subgroups that he couldn't possibly be at all of them, every week! He'd come whenever he could and give things a steer in one direction or another. But we had to make our own minds up what to do, you know? It was a matter of internal debate. And you've got to remember, this was the 1970s, I mean I was personally living in a commune at the time; this was a period, in the libertarian cultures of the time, when you didn't have leaders, you had groups who thrashed things out until they came to some kind of consensus. That was just how things worked.

Hudson Vincent: Did you find that same type of collaboration at Kent?

David Morley: (laughs) No, it didn't exist anywhere else. This was a bunch of graduate students supervising themselves. We were making it up as we went along. It was great when Stuart came, I mean he was always terribly helpful, and he was incredibly hospitable to me personally, as someone who just 'turned up' as a kind of visitor - but basically, the group had to find its own momentum and run itself.

Hudson Vincent: Do you think anything like that collaboration exists anywhere today?

David Morley: Well, I think it's a practice that became more widespread in different places, partly modelled on what happened at the Centre. But, unsympathetic as Birmingham University management might have been to CCCS at various points in its history, there was just more slack in the whole University system at that point. You could get away with doing stuff like that in those days. You just couldn't do it today. I mean, the space for that kind of intellectual creativity is so reduced now - because it's a whole performance management culture, in which every time you turn around you've got to fill in form to demonstrate your 'productivity' as measured by the number of grants you got last year or the number of conferences you attended, or something. The truly incredible thing is that this 'Research Assessment' culture in which British Academia is now steeped, and which was brought in by people who think of themselves

as liberal market capitalists, is unknowingly modelled on Stalinist pedagogy. What we now have in the UK university system is an astonishing mixture of an ideology which worships crude market forces, combined with the clumsiest control mechanisms of a planned 'command economy'. If you talk to people who knew the education systems in the old Soviet Block, they can immediately recognize all this target-setting, performance-monitoring, micro-management stuff as the basic trappings of the USSR's educational system. I mean it's got everything - including meaningless targets which don't necessarily measure the right things at all and severe punishments (the academic equivalent of being sent to the Siberian Gulags) for those who fail to meet them, or more importantly, who fail to learn to speak the correct ideological discourse in which to 'prove' that they have met them. The truly corrosive thing is that in this 'system of licensed boasting', it is the ability to boast effectively, in the approved formats, which ultimately counts more than anyone's genuine intellectual accomplishments. Of course, just like in the USSR, it inevitably inculcates a perversion of the intended effects, because the people who are being measured gradually learn what they've got to do to manipulate things so they can appear to hit the targets they've been given - but we still all then have to spend our time jumping through these administrative hoops, rather than doing the work. So we drown in this nonsense language of all around 'excellence', in which everything is supposedly becoming even more excellent. It is insane. And at a day-to-day level, which is why it impinges so severely on intellectual creativity, there's always some target which you've got to demonstrate that you've hit - usually by filling in a 'Quality Assessment' monitoring form. I find myself saying to my students 'Well, I'm sorry I can't sit around here talking to you about ideas, but I've got forms to fill in ... '. That's the simple truth of the bureaucratic pressure of the system as it now exists. To return to the discourse of the discipline of economics, with which I began my academic education, the 'opportunity cost' of this huge and cumbersome monitoring system, supposedly designed to improve the quality of academic work is that it soaks up an enormous amount of time and energy that could have actually gone into doing the work, rather than desperately proving to the next highest level of management that it is being done. It's also squeezed the time that people used to put into doing things that don't produce a career-enhancing academic output. Because nowadays, everybody's got to be sure that they've produced this many articles in peer-reviewed journals, and that many books in any given period. So I've heard people say that they've been invited to such and such a conference, but that if, when they asked if it was going

to result in a publication that they'd be able to list on their CV, the answer was 'no', then they'd refuse the invitation. Under those kind of pressures, everybody's driven towards a much more careerist outlook. When you think of the way in which the Centre prioritized collective work, of the number of people who produced wonderful work through the subgroups, but never got their Ph. D.s, or who only did their Ph. D.s 20 years later, that just couldn't happen now - it just wouldn't be allowed. I'm the Head of the Ph. D. programme here. If I see anybody who's not looking like they're going to get their Ph. D. in the maximum of five years now allowed by the system, I've got to get on their case, because somebody higher up is going to be getting on my case. So there is an extraordinary amount of bureaucratic 'squeezing' in the system.

Hudson Vincent: Could you speak on how the work done at the Centre might be viewed as political? And how political engagement was attached to the Centre, if at all?

David Morley: Well, yeah, I think it was one of the key institutions that changed the definition of politics. At the beginning of that period, in the late 1960s early 1970s, you had social movements, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), etc., but people still thought of politics as party politics. It was to do with strikes, it was to do with revolutions, it was to do with institutional control. The invention of cultural politics, the fact that these days it's only commonsensical to think of the cultural dimension of politics, was a form of the remaking of common sense to which the Centre contributed enormously. To give a personal example, I think my own two daughters have, in many ways, grown up as post-feminists, but that's only because they grew up being able to take for granted all the things that the feminists were fighting for at the Centre. All those ideas are now just as 'obvious' as eating toast for breakfast, so far as my daughters' generation is concerned. Neither of them would probably call themselves feminists, but anybody who tries to give them a hard time just because of their gender can just forget it, you know? I think the contribution the Centre made in relation to politics is most legible and significant around the re-definition of the political and the development of specifically cultural politics. There were people who were very involved in more traditional forms of politics. Robin Rusher, for instance, was heavily involved in Irish politics in Birmingham, at a point in time when that was a dangerous

business. There was a famous case where a group of Birmingham Irish guys got stuck in prison for a bombing in the city centre which they had nothing to do with - but they were framed by the police for it. It was a very tough and nasty business, and for someone like Robin to get involved in the politics of all that was astonishing. But that's the kind of exceptional case, in my mind, to the main political contribution that the Centre made, which was much more in the field of transforming people's sense of what politics is, and what range of issues need to be treated as political. However, as a result of the baleful influence of the conservative pressures I was talking about earlier, there has definitely been an unfortunate regression in this respect, in recent years, in the field of media and communication studies. For a variety of reasons, partly to do with the success of people closely identified with the conventional sociology of mass communications in influencing the crucial institutional positions in the field (such as the composition of the Research Assessment panels that I was speaking of before) there has been a creeping pressure on people to work on more conventionally recognized areas of the media, which fit more readily into a traditional definition of what is political and of what is 'important' - and indeed of what is worth studying, to go back to the debates initiated by Hoggart and Williams at the very beginnings of cultural studies. Of course, it was precisely the rejection of these assumptions which led the media group at the Centre to choose to study a low-status popular media form such as Nationwide, rather than established/prestigious current affairs programmes. But these days, in the UK at least, a lot of the ground which was won in that earlier period, when cultural studies scholars successfully argued for the importance of studying media forms such as soap operas or westerns or other low-status fictional modalities, has really been lost - with the odd exception, such as a few repetitive excursions into the realms of 'fan studies' and reality television. So, as the influence of cultural studies on the development of media and communication studies has lessened here in recent years, increasingly, the field has returned to its more traditional emphasis on presentation of conventional politics and the 'important' genres of news and current affairs television, to the neglect of the serious study of popular fiction and popular culture. Increasingly, one can also see signs of a regrettable methodological regression. Thus in the field of 'new media' studies, I have been a rather bemused to attend two different conferences on this topic in different countries in the last six months, where the one thing that almost all the papers shared was an unquestioned assumption that 'uses and gratifications' provided the must appropriate model for the study of digital media. I was

bemused by this because that whole approach fell into disuse, to some extent, as a result of the substantial critiques which we produced of it at CCCS in the 1970s. It's not that these scholars have now produced answers to our criticisms - it was rather as if our criticisms have never been made! The only explanation I can think of is that the asocial nature of uses and gratifications psychological models of the individual making their media choices fits beautifully, at an ideological level, with the individualist consumer culture within which contemporary forms of digital media are normally marketed. But evidently, that ideological homology cannot possibly provide a secure analytical foundation for the studying the media - whether new or old: rather, it is something which itself needs to be analysed.

Hudson Vincent: A lot of literature I've read tries to situate cultural studies in the 'in-between'. I'm wondering if you agree with this suggestion? And if so, how Cultural Studies might demand interdisciplinarity, and might even be seen as anti-disciplinary or transdisciplinary?

David Morley: To give you a personalized answer, it was how I discovered other disciplines. I had initially planned to do economics at university. That's what I had majored in at school. Then I decided that sociology was more interesting, so I switched to that. Then I came to the view that sociology didn't have all the answers either. So, going to the Centre was where I came across things like anthropology and linguistics and all these other disciplines, and for me, that was the making of my intellectual career. Sometimes anthropologists will say that their discipline is ethnography or it is nothing. My equivalent 'credo' would be to say that cultural studies is interdisciplinarity or it is nothing. I'm not much exercised by the distinction between interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary or anti-disciplinary, as I've never come across anybody who could really do much with those distinctions. But looking at things from the perspective of different disciplines is the name of the game, as far as I'm concerned. That's exactly what matters about cultural studies. Without that I don't think cultural studies has much to offer. I think there's a lot of would-be cultural studies work that's done today that is not in fact interdisciplinary, but is more like a kind of sociology of culture. Indeed, about every 10 years, it seems that you get the same intellectual intervention

around that issue, where some group of people get the idea that it's time to abandon all this 'old-fashioned', messy, interdisciplinary stuff and get things re-organized around a more systematically theorized sociology of culture - as if that was the answer to the meaning of life! Ten years ago, that was the move that people like Simon Frith were arguing for here, along with Jeffrey Alexander in the USA. Interestingly enough, I see Paul Smith (and Jeff Alexander again) beginning to make all the same noises all over again now in the USA - especially if you look at Smith's edited collection The Renewal of Cultural Studies. To be fair, there are some good essays in there, but the overall editorial direction, with its paean to the advantages of a 'proper codification' of the field and its dismissal of what Smith calls the 'old libertarian ideologies' is woefully overdone - not least in the specious claims made as to how original the approaches advocated would be. What is actually offered there is a smorgasbord of the need for a 'return to Marxism' (type unspecified, though the fundamentalist ghost of Fred Jameson is invoked early on as the 'guarantor' who first 'saw through' the supposed bankruptcy of CCCS) and some fairly wild claims about the potential benefits of 'proper theory' - just because we never thought that High Theory should always be the Trump Card in the pack! For me, to go in the direction that Smith et al. point towards would be the death, rather than any kind of 'renewal' of what I think cultural studies ought to be. The bizarre assumption seems to be that authors such as Derrida, Deleuze, Hardt and Negri or Agamben are somehow more 'theoretical' than the kind of (non? -) theoretical authors like Saussure, Volosinov, Barthes, Althsusser, Gramsci, and Geertrz whose work we grappled with at CCCS in the 1970s. I'm certainly not saying that there's nothing wrong with cultural studies work or that we should just all steer a steady course in the same direction as before: I sympathize very much with Graeme Turner's criticisms of the state of the field in his What's Become of Cultural Studies book, and I can certainly empathize with his wry verdict on the experience of going to cultural studies conferences where, as he puts it, you can sometimes see the 'same old (fashionably customized) theoretical vehicles' being driven in ever-decreasing circles around depressingly familiar terrain. However, the key problem is that, if you go the way that Frith/Smith/Alexander point towards, at best, you end up with a kind of high theoretical/philosophical form of abstracted and de-contextualized cultural speculation (e. g. about Globalization/Risk Society/The New Media), but that's got nothing to do with cultural studies, so far as I'm concerned. One of the things that does concern me is that the invocation of 'newness' as itself a marvellous thing - and something

constructed as all the more positive by virtue of the dismissal of previous work as old-fashioned, out of date, etc. To take one example, it's relatively common these days to come across people arguing that CCCS-style theories of hegemony are now 'tired' and should be replaced by something more appropriate to our contemporary era. For me, the crucial thing is that in the UK the concept of hegemony still has much more to offer than any alternative approach thus far proposed. The fact that it is now 30 years since Stuart came up with the idea of Thatcherism as a specific mode of authoritarian populist hegemony constitutes no problem with the model, so long as it still works. To my mind, what we're living in today in the UK, 30 years later, is in fact perfectly recognizable as a third stage of that same hegemonic project (first Mrs Thatcher herself; then New Labour; now the Coalition), in which while the balance between the constituent elements of the hegemonic block has varied, the project itself remains remarkably consistent. Until someone comes up with a better way of understanding how politics is constituted, it seems to me to make very good sense to carry on using the concept of hegemony. To return, by this roundabout route, to your original question about interdisciplinarity, I have a rather conservative view on that, because I don't think cultural studies is good when taught as an undergraduate discipline. I think that for people to go straight to interdisciplinarity often just doesn't work. I think you need to know one discipline really well and then climb your way out of. It's the Wittgenstein thing about the ladder - once you've climbed up it, you can throw it away, but you've got to have climbed up the ladder first. When I see some of our undergraduates, they know a bit of Foucault and a variety of other theorists, but they haven't got the rigour of a disciplinary grounding. When you spoke of your own little period of doing analytic philosophy, I think that kind of intellectual experience is really important. I think the way in which cultural studies became popularized in a lot of places and became a thing that was taught to undergraduates who weren't ready for interdisciplinarity, that doesn't work so well, in my view. I was interested to hear a lecture by the Scandinavian media scholar Kaarle Nordenstreng recently, in which he addressed the weaknesses of the kind of interdisciplinarity presently practised in the fields of communications and cultural studies, and usefully reminded us that this was exactly Thomas Kuhn's point - about the need to fully master a given disciplinary perspective, before moving into the interdisciplinary. In that context, Kaarle concludes that an ideal scholar should be both a dutiful conserver of intellectual traditions and at

the same time, when necessary, an iconoclast (and crucially, should know in which contexts to occupy which role!) - a position which I find very sympathetic.

Hudson Vincent: Can you explain the importance of the 'conjuncture' and the specificity of concrete life practices in cultural studies work?

David Morley: Cultural studies as developed in Birmingham took for granted that it was about a specific time, a specific place. It was, self-evidently a national perspective, addressing the specific problems of British society - not least because, in the early 1970s, a national framework made much more sense than it would do nowadays. But think about all the debates that have gone on subsequently about the export of cultural studies, globally. It took a long time for people to begin to think seriously about the extent to which the kind of work developed at CCCS was itself formed by a local history, and how you would have to 'translate' it, if you were to apply that perspective anywhere else. I mean, in my own case, my Ph. D. was about a specific conjuncture in the early 1970s when England was going through a protracted series of industrial and political conflicts, and when the importance of the role of the media in the reporting of those issues was beginning to be recognized for the first time. It was completely to do with the specific conjuncture, and that's why it made sense to do that particular kind of work at that time. But I don't want to give my example only that kind of political edge, I mean it also in a kind of deeply theoretical sense. There's an excellent paper, Stuart's commentary on Marx's 1857 Introduction to the Grundrisse, the original version of it, the long version. He talks beautifully about Marx's own way of abstracting, but then, of course, always returning to the concrete - and that's the move that gets lost in too much of cultural studies work today, which in my view, goes into that abstraction and then never comes back down. However, this perspective is not entirely specific to Birmingham-style cultural studies. For instance, the French philosopher, Michel Serres, has a lovely bit where he talks about how he doesn't like lazy forms of what he calls 'pass-key' theory, where people assume that one key will open all doors (whether it's a Freudian key or an Althusserian key or a Foucauldian key or whatever else). He says that if you want to open the door properly, you have to forge a particular key for that particular lock, and I think that's crucial. One of the things I have spent quite a lot of

time thinking about in the recent period has been whether it would be possible, or helpful, to develop this kind of 'contextualist' approach by rethinking the now much discredited field of Area Studies. That field of expertise is often dismissed because of the dismal history of how it can be seen as having been set up by the CIA to run the Third World, with the complicity of the British empire and the imperial civil service, etc. That history is undeniable and indeed, beyond that unhappy political legacy, there are also serious theoretical problems with the conception of 'regions' and 'areas', and with how you can operationalize such a perspective without falling back into geographical essentialism. But the thing about Area Studies is that it does insist on the specificity of expertise to particular conjunctures and the on the limits of the applicability of theory to particular cases - so it is a potentially valuable route out of the dead end of Generalized Global Theory. But, of course, such a contextualized perspective has all the odds stacked against it. As we know, book publishing is on its last legs, anyway. But what do publishers want? They want a book of abstract global theory, because that's the thing that they can make the most profit on - because you can sell it in the most places (quite literally, in terms of the economies of scale). In a period of intense scrutiny and bureaucratic monitoring of academic output, what's the thing you get most brownie-points for? The answer, of course, is High Theory. So the combination of academic institutional scrutiny and publishing pressure, which leads people towards the endless production of 'global theory', is to my mind, one of the biggest disasters that we've suffered in recent years. Sometimes I think that if I go into another bookshop and see yet another book about The Theory of Globalization in General, I might just die of boredom on the spot. So it's crucial to me that cultural studies holds on to that impulse to return to the concrete. Of course you need abstraction: you don't get anywhere if you just study endless empirical bits and pieces, in the particular. You need abstraction in order to see the patterns, but abstraction is like a power saw: it's great for doing some things, but if you don't use it carefully you can cut your leg off. I think too often, people use abstraction, without posing to themselves the question, at each stage, is the loss of significant detail involved in this particular abstraction outweighed by the gain in analytic clarity, for my particular analytical purposes? It's a very specific question you have to pose at each stage of the work. I think, too often, there's a kind of upward gravitational pull into the theoretical stratosphere - and there's a lot of work which now calls itself cultural studies in Britain which does exactly that ... .

Hudson Vincent: Does cultural studies, in the way it existed at the Centre, exist anywhere today?

David Morley: I think there's good and interesting work going on in lots of places, but it doesn't necessarily call itself cultural studies. If I think about the journals I read, good stuff might appear in journals dealing with cultural geography, or it might be in anthropology, or sometimes it's sociology, though not so often. I think there's a lot of good and interesting work going on, but it's housed in lots of different disciplines. I was just reviewing the Ph. D. work of a student of one of my colleagues who's doing a kind of techno-agricultural thing about Mexican identity and the way in which the production of maize has come to symbolize a particular kind of national identity. This involves a set of discourses about the peasantry and whether or not they are part of modernity. I was able to link it to some of the debates in India - not so much Ranajit Guha-style Subaltern Studies, but people like Dipesh Chakrabarty, who talk about non-Western forms of modernity, and those are rich connections to explore. If you consider East Asia, the journal run by Kuan-Hsing Chen and his colleagues, InterAsia is terrific. The stuff that's happening in that particular East Asian network, for various political reasons, will hang on tightly to the words 'cultural studies' because it serves a valuable purpose, in that particular context, to mobilize those terms. Personally I'm not much interested in the kind of institutional politics I would have to deal with if I wanted to run a cultural studies Centre here in the UK - it would be a nightmare of defending it against budget cuts, keeping it afloat financially, etc. At this stage of my own career, I feel I've served my time doing that (having been involved in running plenty of different things, over the twenty years I've been here) - now I just want to get on with my own research. Of course, those kind of institutional battles are critical. Stuart gave so much of his life to keeping the institution of CCCS afloat, creating a space in which valuable work was done. Indeed, I think that was, arguably, a greater intellectual contribution than the sum total of all the essays he's ever written, wonderful as the essays are.

But to go back to the Area Studies thing I mentioned before, I'm about to go to a conference in Sweden about cultural studies. There's a group of Scandinavian people involved with cultural studies, some of them involved in the European Journal of Cultural Studies. They've got a conference going on where they're having a series of panels on British cultural studies, and Iberian cultural studies, Scandinavian cultural studies, German cultural studies, etc. and I think that reflects an interesting recognition of what the local specificities of the work are, even within Europe, before we think about what interesting things are happening in places like Turkey or wherever else. I think that recognition of specificity and context is important: I haven't come across anyone organizing a conference in that way for some time, and I think it's a potentially valuable model for the future.

Hudson Vincent: Where do you see education emerging today in relation to the current crises and struggles that are so visible: the managerial, bureau- cratic, and functionalist ethos, a careerist concentration on the part of the students, etc.? Are there any spaces in education today where students can learn and work in a way that students at the Centre did?

David Morley: I don't really have anything very good to tell you. The spaces are very, very difficult to find and they've been getting harder to find for quite a long time. The first wave of university cuts, when Mrs. Thatcher came to power in the UK in the early 1980s was the moment when a whole generation of British academics, including people like John Hartley and John Fiske, all went off to Australia - effectively saying 'we're out of here, let's go, this is over ... '. So, the first point is that the British universities have been in crisis for a long time. However, the good news was that in one way, Mrs. Thatcher shot herself in the foot. Her notion was that it was good to turn education over to the market, so you had to have student choice. What she hadn't banked on was that, given the choice, what students wanted to do was things like media studies and cultural studies! So contradictory things did emerge - who would've thought that Mrs. Thatcher would be partly responsible for the booming success of those departments? But as it's gone on, the endless cutting of public funding has only got worse. As I said earlier, it's now a panoptical culture of scrutiny and of performance

management. In that kind of context it's very difficult to maintain spaces for creative work. For instance, there was a moment in the mid-1990s when we had a set-up called the Pacific Asia Cultural Studies Forum that met here at Goldsmiths. It involved students with an interest in Pacific Asian research, anywhere in South-east England - they came from London University, Essex, Sussex, wherever. We housed it at Goldsmiths for 5- 10 years. We had brilliant events, and the students ran it all themselves, it was fabulous. But as the new pressure to complete their Ph. D.s came on students, then getting volunteers to run the project became more and more difficult - so it passed back to being something that a member of staff like me, or a colleague, had to run. As soon as that happened, it started to die a little - it still exists and it runs occasional events within London University, but it hasn't got the buzz and the energy that it had when it really was just the students doing their Ph. D.'s who were in charge. They were really 'in there' intellectually and politically, with all the energy in the world to do what was necessary. You find that sometimes, now, there will still be the occasional conference or project group that sets itself up and works well for a while, but there's not that so much in Britain of that sort which is ongoing. People are so pressed for time, so pressed for resources. I suppose the 'space' that's easier for people to operate within, in terms of being less resource-intensive is the virtual - so that you now get 'virtual' versions of projects. Like my colleague Joanna Zylinska, along with her partner Gary Hall and others, they run a thing called 'Culture Machine', which is an electronic journal. They define themselves substantively, as a new generation of cultural studies, post- Birmingham, and we have had lively debates about our differences, in that respect! But for the purposes of my point here, the key thing is that it mainly exists virtually. People can all be at home, or wherever they are, late at night, typing a bit at the computer and make stuff happen. It's valuable. It's interesting. There are projects like that. But it's not the same. There's only a certain amount that you can do virtually.

Hudson Vincent: Do you think these problems are best struggled against within education? Or are these bigger problems that need to be thought about and approached at different levels of society?

David Morley: You can't just fight within the university. It has to do with fundamental concepts of politics and what a university is for, and what the state is and what taxation should be used for. To take an example, we used to have an established budget for a particular network of ongoing collaborative activities between this department and culture and communications at NYU. That budget is now under threat. I could go and give my Heads of Department a hard time about that, but what for? It's not their fault. They would've gone and complained to the Pro-Warden. He would've gone to a higher level of management.... But it's not a thing that's soluble within University structures. You can only solve it either by moving into a virtual mode - in which case you don't need much resources, you don't need any plane fares for international collaboration, because you do it all via Skype, so you just need an internet link. Or you solve it at another level, in terms of the better defence of the public funding to the universities. But that's just not happening, so it's not looking good. Here in Goldsmiths, like other institutions in the UK, this place now depends very heavily on the fee money from overseas students. I have an MA course which is 50% Chinese. In this situation, you got a whole new notion of the British postgraduate student, as being an extraordinarily rare creature.

British students can't get any grants. The funding for our postgraduate education is gone. There is a pretence that there is still funding, but it's so super-competitive that you'd be better off buying a ticket for the National Lottery, as you've got a much better chance of winning the lottery than getting a grant to do a Ph. D. So you've got a weird set-up, which is kind of OK in one way - because I'm teaching a bunch of people who go back to all kinds of places and do really good things and who are really great students, even if their stay in London is geographically incidental to them. Yes, many of them are interested in cultural studies, but they're on an international trajectory, working in a network where whatever develops will only bear fruit when they go back to Mexico City or wherever their trajectory takes them. That makes the notion of any longer-term projects more difficult. These are people who are here for relatively short times and then they'll be somewhere else. They might work intensively on projects with other students while they're here, but there's much more 'passing through' than there used to be. What there isn't is the kind of continuity of an ongoing intellectual community which is provided by a local base. Stuart always said that if the Centre had

been in London it wouldn't have worked. It had to be in Birmingham, in a place where not much else was going on at the time, so it existed in a kind of hyper-intense bubble of commitment and locality. I mean, almost all the CCCS people (apart from me!) lived in the same few streets of the same area of the city - it wasn't that they all just lived in Birmingham: they lived in a few streets of Moseley or Kings Heath, just down the road from each other. However, as you well know, we do all now live in an age of diaspora and the friendships and loyalties developed in Birmingham live on - for instance, to this day, I'm still part of a group of people who first met in and around the Centre, but who are now mostly based in London, and we still meet for dinner once a month… .