Interview with Tony Bennett, November 22, 2012
Interview conducted by James Hay
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James Hay: Tony, your relation to “cultural studies” is complicated, and has changed since the 1970s. It might be helpful, for readers who do not know much about the trajectory of your research interests, for us to begin with a brief conversation about your training and your relation to cultural studies in Britain during the 1970s.

Tony Bennett: Thanks James. Many people have assumed that I have a disciplinary background in English or in Literary Studies, because these were the fields of my first publications, particularly my first book, Formalism and Marxism. But my training was in the social sciences. While my work has, at different times, explored the disciplinary intersections between cultural studies, literary studies, media studies and, of course, sociology, I would see the intersections between cultural studies and cultural sociology as being the most consistent and most important of these. My undergraduate training was in Politics, Philosophy, and Economics at Oxford and then I went on to do a Masters and a PhD in Sociology at the University of Sussex. I specialized in the sociology of literature and in class theory, translating these interests into a PhD focused on the relations between the concepts of realism and class consciousness in the work of Georg Luckács.

This was in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a time when the project of cultural studies was just beginning to take a recognizable shape, albeit one that did not immediately register on my intellectual horizons. This happened when I subsequently moved to the University Bristol to take up my first position as the Staff Tutor in Sociology in the University’s Department of Extra-Mural Studies. One of the more memorable things I...
did at Bristol was to organize a residential weekend on Marxism and Literature, with Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson as the two speakers. It was a wonderful weekend, and, apart from their stunning presentations, Williams and Thompson both suggested that, given my interests, I should get connected to the people and work at the Birmingham Centre. But I did not do this, at least not in any systematic way, until quite some time later when I had moved to the Open University. I was involved there initially in producing a course, led by Michael Gurevitch and Janet Woollacott, on Mass Communications and Society, and then went on to chair the production of a course on Popular Culture. It was only then, toward the end of the 1970s, that I began to develop significant connections with Birmingham and the tradition of cultural studies that was arising out of the work going on there. These connections became much stronger when Stuart Hall came to the Open University in the late 1970s.

JH: Would you elaborate a bit more how you came to produce a course on Popular Culture at the Open University. Was that from a Sociology department?

TB: That is a complicated question. I was appointed to the Sociology Department of the Open University, but the course on Popular Culture was an inter-faculty course. As such, it needed inputs from academics across the University's different faculties. I was therefore seconded to a position in the Arts faculty during the period that the course was made to help me build out from my social science connections, so as to develop relationships with people from history, literary studies, music, and other arts disciplines. But your question is a very good one because in some senses the decision of whether to wear a cultural studies or a sociology hat depends on the context in which one is working. I think that cultural studies in Britain in the late 1970s was a tremendously exciting project, really innovative, and it was making the running in all sorts of political and intellectual debates that were important then. It was, for me, more enticing, more invigorating, than a good deal of the work that was being conducted in Britain under the heading of sociology at that time. This was also true when I moved to Griffith University in Australia in 1983. The more invigorating debates that were taking place then about the relations between culture and society—debates about post-colonialism, about the vibrant new nationalism in Australia, the rapidly changing multicultural complexion of its population and the debates around land rights and Indigenous culture—were more actively engaged in by those working in cultural studies than by Australian sociology. This is now less true in both contexts. The kinds of interdisciplinary concerns that were originally addressed under the heading of "cultural studies" are now quite commonplace as a part of the regular intellectual diet of sociology in both Britain and Australia, much more so than in the United States. And so, from an institutional point of view, it really doesn't matter too much now which department you work in. But it is also the case that the tables have turned somewhat on these questions. When I returned to Britain to take up the Chair of Sociology at the Open University in 1998, and particularly when, in the five years or so before I came back to Australia in 2009, my work was mainly tied up with the ESRC Centre for Research on Socio-cultural Change (CRESC)—a center that had a strong
sociological and social science orientation—I was more attracted to the work that was being conducted under the auspices of sociology than I was to cultural studies. It was sharper and a good deal more exacting methodologically, and more open-minded theoretically. The conception of cultural studies as an inherently interdisciplinary project that will always be at the leading edge of interdisciplinary inquiry in the humanities and social sciences is, I think, unconvincing. It is one among many such projects and its relative capacity for innovative work both has and will continue to vary. So I would prefer to be open to innovative interdisciplinary work wherever it is taking place than to worry too much about what label to attach to it.

JH: One more question about the course on Popular Culture that you chaired at the Open University during the early 1980s. I’ve been thinking recently about how “cultural studies” in Britain developed through efforts during the 1960s, by a generation including Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, Richard Hoggart, and Paddy Whannel, to introduce the study of “popular culture” into the curriculum of public education. Was the course on Popular Culture that you taught during the early 1980s still relatively new for a curriculum in Sociology—or the Arts—at the Open University?

TB: It was relatively new but not particularly difficult to push forward. The Popular Culture course involved a team of about 25 academics, writing quite lengthy teaching documents, editing three text books, and producing 16 television programs and 32 radio programs for the BBC, for (over its 10-year run) over 10,000 students. It wasn’t difficult at the Open University then, in terms of the intellectual climate prevailing in the Arts and Social Sciences faculties, to be responsive to the arguments that Hall, Williams, and Hoggart had made in the 1950s and 1960s—that university curricula ought to be opened up to the study of “popular culture,” broadly defined. In the course we defined “popular culture” as the texts of media industries and apparatuses as well as “ways of life”—a rather conventional definition but one that worked well for that moment. It wasn’t difficult to find ready support for expanding the curriculum in this way from my sociology colleagues at the Open University, many of whom had pioneered OU teaching in this area by producing a course on Mass Communications and Society, which included, among other things, an OU BBC television series on the making of the James Bond film The Spy Who Loved Me. And it wasn’t difficult to gather support from colleagues in the Arts faculty, many of whom, such as Graham Martin, were closely linked to Hall and to Williams. Many of the foundational professors at the Open University had been shaped by similar educational and career experiences to those of Hoggart and Williams and—like myself—had joined the OU seeing it as offering an unparalleled opportunity not only for opening up higher education to people previously excluded from it but also for expanding the range of its curriculum. This was true of Arnold Kettle, the OU’s Foundation Professor of English but also the Chair of the so-called U-Area—a clutch of interdisciplinary University-wide (hence “U”) courses—a position in which he played a key role in winning support for the Popular Culture course from the University’s senior management. Although some of these professors and
administrators needed a little persuading at first that the course would be academically demanding—and it certainly was—they really got behind us and lent the course every support imaginable. And we had no difficulty in attracting student interest or the enthusiastic support of the part-time staff who actually taught the course. It was, indeed, very pleasing that—long after I had left the OU for Griffith University—the part-time staff launched a feisty, albeit unsuccessful, campaign to stop the course being withdrawn at the end of its scheduled 10-year life. I was also very pleased when I was later interviewed for the Chair of Sociology at the OU and the OU Vice Chancellor told me that when, on joining the OU, he had asked which course best symbolized what the OU was about, the Popular Culture course came out at the top of the list.

JH: You mentioned briefly the TV series on the making of a James Bond film, so I want to ask you about your study of the “Bond phenomenon,” and particularly about its reception and influence during the 1980s. I remember how influential that book was in the 1980s in discussions about media audiences and about agency in a media culture. The most widely discussed chapters in that book, rightly or wrongly, were the ones about “reading formations”—about the Bond franchise as a framework for shaping reading formations. Was that something that surprised you? Do you think people were asking the right questions from that book?

TB: Well personally, I was pleased by the way in which it was taken up. It wasn’t just the flow of the arguments in the book that allowed that to happen; it was the flow of debates at the time. So let me back-track a little bit to put that remark into context. I think the book had two or three main orientations. It rolled out of the work that Janet Woollacott and I had done over a number of years on the Bond films, the Bond novels, and the Bond phenomenon generally. We had done this work initially as parts of the OU’s Mass Communications and Society and Popular Culture courses, but working on the book presented an opportunity to connect these concerns to a number of theoretical and political debates that were current at the time. Its concerns were significantly shaped by the rendezvous between British cultural studies and the work of Antonio Gramsci around the role of popular culture in the production and organization of forms of hegemony—a vein of Gramsci’s thought that distinguished the Birmingham School’s response to the political crises of the 1970s. Our political analysis of the texts of Bond thus approached these ideas in terms of the role those texts had played in organizing consent to the shifting forms of hegemony in postwar Britain. The book also engaged with post-structuralist debates about textuality, but we wanted to push beyond those debates—toward a way of engaging with the social lives of texts and the social organization of reading practices that would avoid post-structuralist constructions of “intertextuality” as merely an expanded set of formal relations.

In this regard, the distinctive constitution of what we called the “Bond phenomenon”—that is, the whole set of industrial and promotional forms, not just the novels and the films, through which the figure of Bond was produced and circulated—was a critical starting point for our inquiries. This was something that we tried to think through by drawing on Michel Foucault’s “What is an Author?”, where
he problematizes the relations between authors and the texts bearing their name. We were intrigued by the fact that the Bond novels, while originally circulating under the name of Ian Fleming, later became part of a much larger textual set—the "texts of Bond"—in which the name of the author was eclipsed by that of their hero. So our project came to be concerned with this distinctively constituted set of texts, attached to Bond, and the way in which the relations between them were reorganized as they were taken over by the film industry, and how the films themselves needed to be interpreted in relation to a wider set of secondary texts on Bond that conditioned the ways in which the figures of Bond and of "the Bond girl" were put into broader public circulation. So, the key argument of the book (an argument that the notion of reading formations tried to capture, although I had initially developed this elsewhere, is that you can't deal with questions of reception if you assume that what is being received, across different historical circumstances, is the same text. You have to look at the social processes that bear on the organization of texts to be read. This was a much more sociological conception of the interface between reader and text than was available at the time from most of the approaches to audiences and from reception studies. It is really quite pleasing that the concept was taken up in ways that recognized this as it became a part of what Graeme Turner referred to as the social text approach in film and media studies. It also had an influence on approaches to the reception of texts within literary studies. The key point, which I still think valid, is that you can't ever assume that the text is a constant in different relations of reception. Analysis has to engage with the variant forms in which texts are produced for reception as well as with the social and cultural forces affecting the interpretive frames of readers, viewers, or whatever.

JH: And I know the trajectory of your research interest has moved in slightly different ways, which we will talk about in a second, but I'm wondering whether you are still staying abreast of Bond films—and the "Bond phenomenon"?

TB: With a bit of luck! The new James Bond film Skyfall had its premiere in Australia yesterday, and if we can get tickets we—that is Sue, my wife and I—are going to see it tonight at our local cinema. I have seen them all so far and I am very curious to see what adjustments to the formula Skyfall makes.

JH: We both are subjects of the marketing apparatus for the 50th anniversary "celebration" of the Bond film franchise. The "Bond phenomenon" is still with us, still going strong. So, I am prompted to ask you whether you think that there are dimensions to your project about Bond that still are useful and/or in need of revisiting or rethinking. I'm not asking whether you have plans to dust off that project, but...

TB: Actually, we did talk about doing just that at one point in time. When I went back to work in the UK in the late 1990s, Janet Woollacott and I met with Toby Miller and had a serious discussion about whether we should collaborate on an updated version of Bond and Beyond. I forget the exact details, but it would have been a good project because of the connections that could have been made to Toby's work on The
Avengers. However it did not come to pass for a variety of reasons. Bond and Beyond concludes with a section in which Janet and I muse about what would be needed for Bond to be reconfigured as a political icon for a leftist politics. Needless to say, none of this has come to pass as the adjustments of the figures of Bond and “the Bond girl” to changing ideological and political coordinates have had few surprises. We didn’t anticipate that M might ever become a woman, however; although, with her death in Skyfall, that moment is now clearly passed.

JH: You mentioned a moment ago that one of the points of reference shaping Bond and Beyond was Foucault’s “What is an Author?” You and I didn’t know one another really until you came to the University of Illinois in 1994 to teach that wonderful, well-attended seminar that rolled out your project on the birth of the museum (just before the book was published). It was clear from that seminar, and from the title of the book, that you were in the midst of a serious and sustained engagement with Foucault’s thought. Your book’s title, The Birth of the Museum, resonates with his histories of the birth of the asylum, the clinic, the prison, even as your history of museums underscores his relative silence about “cultural” institutions and technologies of social control. I probably am not alone in thinking that there was something about your passage to Australia that made Foucault more central to your understanding of the link between culture and society. And although you mention Foucault’s “What is an Author?” to explain the kinds of questions that you wanted to pose through Bond and Beyond, Foucault's thought does not figure prominently into that project’s account of Bond’s “political career.” And the dates of your “turn” toward Foucault roughly are the dates of your passage to Australia—in 1983. Were you already interested in Foucault’s work before you moved to Australia? Am I correct to say that your interest in Foucault deepened once you moved to Australia?

TB: Yes, it did. It had its beginnings in Britain, but it really didn’t crystallize until I moved to Australia. And these things are as much about who you are working with, who you are interacting with, as about how the general climate of intellectual debate is changing. In Britain, the Popular Culture course occupied most of my attention from 1979 to 1983. And the architecture of that course was, for very good reasons, organized around debates about Gramsci, hegemony, and popular culture. Not everyone in the course was “signed up” along those lines—to the contrary, it was a bone of real contention—but everyone was signed up to the idea that the concept of hegemony offered a good way of orchestrating a set of debates about the historical changes in which popular cultural practices were implicated across the long trajectories of British cultural history. At the same time, however, I was reading Foucault on the side, so to speak, and could see how his work would provide a different optic, a different perspective on questions of culture and society from the Gramscian model.

JH: What work by Foucault were you reading then? I ask because some of his most influential ideas since the 1990s have come from his lectures, interviews, and writings that were not translated into English until the 1990s and thereafter.
TB: To be honest I can’t remember in too much detail which works I had read before I moved to Australia. It would have been reasonably predictable and what was available in English at the time—Discipline and Punish, “What is an Author?”, Madness and Civilization come to mind. But it wasn’t just a question of which of Foucault’s works I was reading at the time. I was also quite deeply immersed in the literatures exploring the history of cultural practices in Britain, and it was clear that many historians were beginning to pick up on Foucault in ways that I found suggestive. But you really had to look outside the Birmingham inflection of cultural studies for suggestive openings into Foucault’s work.

Foucault at that time was not embraced into the Birmingham cultural studies project. His work was, of course, engaged with, but not in a particularly productive way. This is in some ways understandable. The definition of the cultural studies project as it was being shaped in Stuart Hall’s adaptation of Gramsci was not one that could easily accommodate Foucault’s work, particularly Foucault’s criticisms of the Marxist heritage as a hangover from an outdated episteme. Stuart Hall’s “Two Paradigms” essay was therefore really quite keen to massage Foucault out of the picture, if I can put it that way. You couldn’t assimilate Foucault within the kind of Marxist project that Birmingham cultural studies was developing, and the engagement with his work then—it has changed since—was never really open to the kinds of challenges or opportunities that it represented.

The interesting debates about Foucault in Britain were taking place elsewhere, around the journal Ideology and Consciousness (that Nikolas Rose was involved in), for example, as well as around Paul Hirst’s and Barry Hindess’s uses of Foucault as a point of critical leverage in relation to many aspects of Marx’s work. British cultural studies was simply not well disposed to identifying what Foucault’s work might have to offer for cultural analysis. When I went to work in Australia I was very lucky going to Griffith University where a number of people—Beverley Brown, Ian Hunter, Jeffrey Minson, David Saunders—had opened up more productive lines of engagement with Foucault’s work, bringing it to bear on questions of cultural history and analysis in ways I found very enabling and productive. Mark Finnane and Stephen Garton were also pioneering new traditions in Australian historiography drawing on Foucault. And, of course, Meaghan Morris had already introduced Australian cultural studies to an influential feminist engagement with Foucault. My exposure to these new influences opened up a space in which I reviewed aspects of my earlier formation within cultural studies, making me a little hesitant about some of the positions that I had earlier embraced enthusiastically, particularly as it became clear that the Gramscian turn—given its most sophisticated rendering in Hall’s theory of ideological articulation—was unsustainable.

JH: Your interest in Foucaultian accounts of power, and your formulation of the relation between culture and power, clearly informed your response to a lot of work during the 1990s conducted under the banner of “criticism” or even “cultural studies” that was preoccupied with the politics of representation—a focus on representation as a way of explaining social and power relations. In Outside Literature and Culture: A Reformer’s Science, you question Gramsci’s emphasis on the
"rhetorical" mechanisms of hegemonic formation. So is it fair to say that your interest in Foucault involved rethinking, suggesting an alternative to, the politics of representation practiced by literary criticism, film criticism, and cultural criticism. Actually your early work, *Formalism and Marxism* and *Bond and Beyond*, was interested in rethinking formalist accounts of culture. But by the 1990s, your questioning of cultural criticism or literary criticism as political projects seems more informed by your engagement with Foucault’s thought.

**TB:** Well certainly that’s so, but let me go back to the beginning of your question which addressed my interest in Foucault and questions of power and how that related to questions of representation. Because it’s certainly true that one of the things I found attractive about Foucault’s work was the way he allowed you—indeed, prodded and required you—to add a great deal more *institutional* specificity to anything you might want to say about the operation of cultural practices. Foucault posed a different set of questions from those posed by Althusserian concepts of ideology and ideological state apparatuses, or Gramsci’s formulations concerning the ethical state. Foucault’s examples were in a different field from my interests in cultural analysis (the fields of psychology and medicine, for example), but the value of the attention he paid not just to representations, not just to discourses as ideas, but to their institutional embeddedness was evident.

**JH:** In *Archeology of Knowledge*, he emphasizes the “extra-discursive” features of “discursive formation”—the “exteriority” of the discursive.

**TB:** Exactly. He engaged with questions of the extra-discursive in his writing about *dispositifs* and “assemblages,” and so on, but in ways which loaded them into the constitution of the discursive. This opened up ways of dealing with questions of cultural materiality on a significantly different analytical terrain from that provided by Marxist accounts of cultural materialism. So at that level, I had a great interest in Foucault’s approach to knowledge practices and particularly his insistence on the need to ground their operations within specific institutional apparatuses.

I knew quite soon after I got to Australia that the museum would be a very good site for exploring how the questions in the field of cultural analysis. There were numerous historical parallels between the museum and the development of many of the institutions of discipline that Foucault was talking about. The museum was a site for the congregation of a fairly rich range of knowledge practices. The museum also had, if you like, its “inmates,” like prisons and asylums do, although they—the visitors—are free to come and go more-or-less as they please. So the birth of the museum offered a particularly good context to begin to think about culture in different ways from the Marxist tradition and the forms of cultural analysis it had generated, however productive they had been.

**JH:** As the editor of a journal representing the relation of “critical and cultural studies” to *Communication and Media Studies*, I vet a lot of submissions that
collectively attest to the continuing (vibrant and energetic) production of media criticism, ideological criticism, rhetorical criticism, cultural criticism. And as I suggested a moment ago, Outside Literature is a project that harnesses Foucault to thinking about the institutional underpinnings of criticism, and about the tendency of academic cultural criticism to imagine that its political project occurs from a counter-public sphere—that is posed against, and itself somehow lacks, moorings to State and commercial institutions. Not surprisingly, institutions therefore are not the primary considerations of cultural criticism.

So I feel compelled to return to this question and topic (about cultural criticism and a politics of representation) because the intervention that you made in the late 1980s and early 1990s about criticism is still salient. I am not suggesting that the intersection of cultural studies and communication/media studies is dominated by that kind of intellectual and political project, but still there is lots of energy expended in explaining or diagnosing social relations and relations of power through reading texts—perhaps reading an ideology that way. This may be an enduring legacy of institutions such as the Humanities and Liberal Arts, that have reproduced themselves—disciplined knowledge about culture and society—through the lively production and consumption of criticism. Certainly Toby Miller’s new book, Blow Up the Humanities, makes some of these points.

TB: My short response to your remarks about criticism is that one always needs to ask, “Who speaks as the critic?” Where does the voice of the critic come from? What enables and produces that voice?

JH: … or the question that Foucault raises in “What is an Author?”: What authorizes authorship?

TB: More particularly, its Foucault’s point about the “specific intellectual,” as opposed to what he termed the “universal intellectual.” His conception of the “specific intellectual” questions the institutional grounding from which various forms of general cultural criticism proceed.

After I moved to Australia, Ian Hunter’s work helped me think about this. His critical genealogy of the concept of culture played a crucial role in undercutting the claims of cultural studies to be working with a concept of culture that had been freed from its moorings in the tradition that runs from the Romantics to Matthew Arnold. This served to place the project of British cultural studies as a late echo of the Arnoldian project—not a break from Arnold, but a project still in the same conceptual territory. British cultural studies—a very productive set of intellectual practices, which has been very enabling and was particularly energizing during the 1960s and 1970s—initially, in Williams’s work, developed out of and continued to be inscribed in a set of post-Kantian apparatuses so far as its deployments of the concept of culture were concerned. It didn’t come from anywhere else, it came from and was profoundly affected by that earlier history from which it did not disentangle itself in anything like a fully fledged epistemological break. The voice that is produced by this
particular institutional and discursive inscription of “culture” is, no matter how radically, left its articulations might seem to be, one that we should be wary of. And I have felt the same about a good many of the critical voices that were current in the late 1980s and 1990s: [Fredric] Jameson, [Edward] Said, and so on. These are all produced from, and warranted by, a particular historical-discursive space that needs to be interrogated. One of the virtues of the Foucaultian intellectual apparatus is that of encouraging us to be wary of critical voices that don’t interrogate where they speak from, and that don’t look too hard at the conditions that enable their own intellectual practice.

In one way or another, I have been provoked by the various “voices” of criticism that have dominated the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century—Jameson, [Jürgen] Habermas, [Terry] Eagleton, Said, [Frank] Lentricchia—and have, mainly in Outside Literature, given my reasons for dissenting from the styles of intellectual practice they represent in some detail. And in fact I’ve returned to these questions in a book I have just completed, Making Culture, Changing Society, that will be published in early 2013. I engage with them through the work of Jacques Rancière, whose version of meta-politics seems to me to be an entirely unreflective way of retrieving a speaking space and practice that is entirely lodged within a post-Kantian intellectual apparatus, with little regard for the radically changing intellectual orientations of both humanities and social science scholarship in the twenty-first century or, more importantly, of the limited social purchase of the aesthetic ethos he has sought so assiduously to refurbish.

JH: In your essay, “Culture and Government” (first published in Foucault, Cultural Studies, Governmentality, 2003), you suggest a new perspective about the relation between culture and society—a perspective that is engaged with, but calls into question and is situated between, on one side, a Gramscian cultural studies that you associate with Hall and to a certain extent Williams, and, on the other side, studies in governmentality that you associate with Nikolas Rose. Is that perspective still useful for you, and for thinking about the present?

TB: At that point in my intellectual biography, if you like to call it that, I felt that it was quite important to explain my relationship to the earlier traditions represented by Hall and Williams, traditions in which I had been deeply immersed, from which I had learned a good deal, and which merit the greatest respect. But at the same time these were not traditions that provided the kind of conceptual resources I needed to do the work that interested me—and which I felt to be a lacuna within cultural studies—focused on the relations between culture and modern forms of governmentality. It was useful then for me to be drawing upon the work of people outside cultural studies, people like Rose and Foucault, neither of whom had a great deal to say about culture, but whose concepts and procedures—particularly their concern with, and approach to knowledge practices—nonetheless suggested new points of entry into the analysis of the relations between culture and the social.
There are two or three things I have taken from Foucault’s work, and from the Foucaultian tradition more generally, in developing these points of entry into the operation of social/cultural relations. The first is concerned with practices of truth and knowledge—and the work of their authorities. Culture is, for me, best understood as a historically specific network of practices of the truth that are validated and put into circulation by a distinctive set of authorities. This is not just a question of those forms of knowledge tied up with legitimate forms of culture in [Pierre] Bourdieu’s sense, although it includes these. As you’ve shown in your work with Laurie Ouellette, there are distinctive intellectual and cultural authorities that operate in the domain of reality television. The challenge is to broach culture as a set of practices of the truth and to examine how these operate—through the media, through cultural institutions, whether they are galleries or museums or what have you—in ways that are calculated to produce points of leverage into the conduct of conduct. So the question of conduct is always at issue. The question of how we live, this is always the concrete political question in the field of cultural analysis, but it is never a question which can be posed independently of the ways in which particular kinds of expertise, competing and contradictory of course, intervene within the field of culture—directing, changing, regulating, organizing, or radicalizing conduct in one way or another.

JH: This is a point that you make in *Outside Literature*, when you discuss the critic as a kind of moral exemplar, right?

TB: It is. And undoubtedly, the field of cultural studies was defined by, and I mean this in a good way, intellectuals whose work and demeanor function as ethical exemplars. How such intellectuals say what they say matters as much as what they say. For, and like it or not, they—we—are parts of an ethical machinery. You have to look at how these ethical machineries operate to decide at the end of the day whether you want to be part of them, and a key matter I think—to put it in Brechtian terms—is whether one accepts such ethical machineries as they are or works to transform them, to put them into question. I have chosen the latter path.

JH: You mean, that the institutional rationality works through those forms of expertise and authority, requiring something of those who work from and within it, and that criticism and critique (you call out literary criticism but this applies to all sorts of “critical” work) always must grapple with its implication in a machinery that is “disciplinary”—shaping the habits and conduct of academic workers/intellectuals and what they produce?

TB: Yes, and especially for those critics who imagine that they occupy some ground outside of such machineries. The more general point, though, is better conveyed by [Bruno] Latour’s contention that critique, understood as a particular kind of moral practice enunciated from a position of putative transcendence in relation to its object, has run out of steam. I take his purpose in this as being to say that there is no
position of a pure outside from which such a critical practices can be enunciated. So, yes, our work is always produced within and shaped by particular disciplinary or interdisciplinary machineries. These are not endlessly durable; they mutate, have multiple and complex effects; and they can lose their purchase. [Luc] Boltanski and his colleagues have taught us to think about why many of the forms of criticism that shaped intellectual projects in the social and artistic spheres in France in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s took the form that they did, and to ask: where do they come from? what is it they think they are doing? who they think they are speaking to? and what kinds of historical and institutional conditions enabled their practice? I see my critical probings into the historical affiliations between cultural studies and post-Kantian aesthetic discourses of culture as similar kind of work.

**JH:** In "Culture and Government" you invoke Foucaultian accounts of "governmentality" to question, and more or less to reject, British cultural studies' rationales about "culture and society," suggesting that more attention should be given to the relation between "culture and the social"—the "social" presumably as an object of government administration, but also in the sense of the embeddedness of the term "culture" and particular definitions of "culture" in social practice. In that sense, you seem most interested in the multiple uses of "culture," in how the term is made "useful" and deployed.

Let me clarify. "Culture and Government" points out that Williams and Hall tended to cast "culture" as "communication" and/or a "system of representation" instead of considering the various ways that the term gets deployed instrumentally and governmentally. During the 1990s, particularly in *Culture: A Reformer's Science*, you made a similar point about the "utility of culture" and about studies that would turn attention to how "culture" is made useful, how it is put to work and operationalized, how programs of social control occur under the banner of "culture." And it is not difficult to understand how that position of yours was related to your understanding of the administration of culture, and of the relation between culture and the political as "administrative."

**TB:** There is no question that Raymond [Williams] and Stuart [Hall] were practically involved in a whole series of activities that were produced by, and engaged with, cultural policies, discourses, instruments, institutions, and so on. They were very actively involved in that area, particularly in their contributions to debates about questions of arts policy (Williams was actively involved in the Arts Council) or the role of cultural policy more broadly. But such questions did not occupy the center of their theoretical attention, and there is no reason why it should have. You are perfectly right to say that I do emphasize the "culture–utility" nexus a good deal. I do so as a way of trying to take the ground away from the historical legacy of nineteenth-century discourses in which culture and utility function as contraries. I have been most particularly concerned with those definitions of culture that rely on and arise from its association with the aesthetic disciplines, in particular the post-Kantian trajectory of aesthetic thought. I mentioned earlier in our interview my forthcoming
book, *Making Culture, Changing Society*, in which I have a chapter called the “The Uses of Uselessness” where I try to show how it was precisely through Kant's work that the “uselessness” of aesthetics could be made *useful* in new and expanded ways. My analysis disputes the possibility of constructing the aesthetic as a ground that is outside the sphere of the useful, or that is outside the sphere of something that is deployed governmentally for instrumental purposes. I've tried to refute that ground by showing how it was precisely Kant's work which, in autonomizing the aesthetic, thereby transformed those practices that were brought under its definition into forces that could then be variably mobilized governmentally—by the state, by moral and benevolent associations, by educational institutions, and so on. The contention that the aesthetic can serve as an outside to the sphere of the instrumental and the useful, and then in a more particular form, of the governmental understood as the field of practices concerned with the shaping of conduct, strikes me as being completely against the historical record, and completely against an appropriate historical understanding of Kant's work on the aesthetic. We should no longer remain enthralled in the twenty-first century with the terms of the opposition that have been constructed between Romanticism and Utilitarianism at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It is the historical space produced by that opposition that really needs critical interrogation. That is a part of what I've been trying to do in my current work, looking at the historical conditions for the emergence of a contemporary conception of culture and the forms of its deployment.

**JH:** It also seems that you are interested in the ways that *definitions* of “culture” get harnessed to political and governmental projects. Right? I mean in part that’s what we were discussing earlier in the interview, the contradiction of literary criticism as a kind of political intervention—sometimes a Marxist project—that assumes literature to be an aesthetic or a “cultural form,” and culture to be a discrete system of representation, with its own distinct and/or *distinctive* history. In fact, one might argue that something similar happened to critical “film studies” or to “TV criticism” as “cultural studies” during the 1980s, both of which attempted to explain what was distinct (if not distinctive) about those “media” as “languages,” “sign-systems,” or “cultural forms.” You want to say that there is a deep philosophical and theoretical history through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that, in seeing aesthetics and culture as discrete, and even in offering generalized and generalizable definitions of culture, never begins the work of figuring out how various definitions of culture are deployed and instrumentalized—how the uses of “culture” matter politically in *that* sense.

**TB:** That's absolutely right. That is a compelling interest for me. I'm very strongly interested in the emergence of the idea of culture as a whole way of life. Raymond Williams at one point in *Keywords* and maybe in another of his texts, attributes this concept to the late nineteenth-century anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor. But this doesn't really hold water except for the standard reference to a couple of sentences in Tylor's work which are at odds with the more general fabric of his thought.
And people who have a more intimate knowledge of the history of anthropology, such as George Stocking, have shown clearly how much Tylor's work remains caught up within nineteenth-century hierarchical conceptions of culture. A much more interesting and plausible genealogy for the concept would focus on its elaboration in the early twentieth-century tradition of Americanist anthropology associated with Franz Boas and his students, like Robert Lowie, Alfred Kroeber, and Ruth Benedict. While ritually referring to Tylor's couple of sentences elaborating the concept of culture as a whole way of life, they do something different with it—and it is their reworking of the concept that informs the early trajectories of cultural studies as the work it generated was fed back into the early formation of British cultural studies. Williams, for example, draws on Ruth Benedict's work in defining his concept of "structure of feeling," while the Birmingham school drew on the tradition of "anthropology at home" through which Boasian anthropology informed American sociological studies, like those of Robert Lynd and W. Lloyd Warner. It's a coincidence, but last night I just got the book *Culture and Ethnology*, by Robert Lowie. The book is comprised of a number of lectures that he gave at the American Museum of Natural History, I think. The book was published in 1917 and I'll just read you a couple of sentences from it: "The fact that your boy plays 'button, button, who has the button' is just as much an element of our culture as the fact that a room is lighted by electricity. So is the baseball enthusiasm of our grown-up population, so are moving picture shows, *thedsansants*, Thanksgiving Day masquerades, bar-rooms, Ziegfield Midnight Follies, evening schools, the Hearst papers, women's suffrage clubs, the single tax movement, Riker drug stores, touring sedans, and Tammany Hall" (6–7). It's a pretty remarkable text for 1917. But what particularly interests me about it are the ways in which the conception of culture as "a whole way of life" that was developed by Americanist anthropology was informed by the programs, schemes, dreams, and ideas about governing populations that were developed in the early decades of the American century. The concept had its genesis in a particularly complex set of relations in which culture was shaped as an object and mechanism of governance that was differentiated from race. It was born governmentally.

**JH:** There is another, related dimension of your essay, "Culture and Government," that grows out of your interest in public policy—in, to use your well-known expression, putting policy into cultural studies.

So it might be helpful for some readers of this interview to revisit briefly the genesis of your interest in "cultural policy studies," and your role in the formation of the Institute for Cultural Policy Studies at Griffith University. It is possible to explain the Institute's formation through the research and theory questions about culture and government that we've been addressing, but it's clear that the Institute's formation can't be reduced to a set of polemics about "cultural studies."

And, at the risk of adding too many questions, would you mind commenting on the project's relation to the Australian context? The study of cultural policy in some respects seems anathema to, and really has never gained traction in, the US.
TB: That’s really important. But I need to separate an interest in culture and government as a set of historical and theoretical questions concerning the relations between culture and processes of social governance that are not reducible to questions of cultural policy from the more specific impetus that was responsible for setting up an Institute for Cultural Policy Studies at Griffith University in the late 1980s. The latter had much more to do with the specificity of the Australian context at that time. This was period in which, for most of the 1980s and 1990s, Australia was under a progressive Labor government. This followed a period in the 1970s of the new nationalism, a period characterized by a sense of Australia’s becoming a post-colonial society, of cutting ties with Britain, and of a marked change in the multicultural composition of its population, with large numbers of migrants from East Asia who followed earlier periods of migrants from southern Europe in the immediate post-War years. It also followed a remarkable resurgence of interest in indigenous Australians, and the need for their culture and cultural rights to be more strongly and clearly recognized. All of these things made questions of cultural policy in Australia, at that point in time, a complete no-brainer for intellectuals with any idea of what was going on around them—to engage with enthusiastically and wholeheartedly.

There were some who registered predictably negative attitudes, urging that to engage with policy meant having truck with the state, sacrificing critical autonomy, and so on. But these were political agendas that most people working in Australian cultural studies embraced with alacrity as representing social and cultural changes that opened up spaces for productive intellectual and political engagement. The argument as to whether one should or should not engage with policy questions, practices, and processes was really over quite quickly and such work is now quite routine in Australian cultural studies. I do recall though that, at the time we were beginning to develop this work, there was a significant Australian contingency at the Urbana-Champaign Cultural Studies conference [1990], and I recall being quite nervous presenting my paper “Putting Policy Into Cultural Studies.” Its intellectual and political disposition was really quite different from most other presentations. My sense of what was going on at this conference are still a little unsettled. But there were certainly many different currents in play: announcing a new and distinct intellectual project to a largely American constituency overlapped, to my mind uncomfortably, with a sense of also establishing a new social movement with quasi-religious overtones. Given this, to be speaking about “putting policy into cultural studies” was more than a little out of tune with the main ethos of the conference. I was, though, greatly cheered by the number of people who sought me out later to say how much they appreciated the fact that I had put such questions on the agenda, particularly from intellectuals working in the cultural sector who were looking for ways to connect cultural studies to their situations.

It’s obviously true, as you say, that cultural policy studies has not taken off in the US. It’s sometimes argued that this is because cultural policies themselves are less important in the US than in Australia or Europe in the sense that it doesn’t have the same State budgets, that it has a lot more neoliberal rhetoric about anti-state funding,
or that the extreme Right has much more influence than in Australia and Britain. But I think this lets a lot of historical and political issues off the hook. I’m currently reading a book about [John] Dewey’s role in the debates over civic-ness and museums in America in the “Progressive-era,” and these governmental issues in the broader sense were extremely current then as they are now. They might not have been pursued through the same institutional apparatuses and they might not have been pursued through formalized relationships with state organizations; and such organizations might have been hesitant about having explicit arts or cultural policy statements. But this doesn’t mean to say that the issues around the relations between culture and the governance of populations weren’t taken up and engaged with, albeit in different kinds of ways. Current work on the early cinema in America by people like Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson makes the same point very convincingly.

**JH:** Your argument for putting policy into cultural studies (and for a “cultural policy” studies) was certainly an exotic intervention at the Illinois conference, but it also was an exotic perspective for a lot of people in the United States who, in 1990, were not at the conference but who were engaged with forms of cultural criticism or who considered themselves to be doing “cultural studies.” That disposition has to do partially with the currency, the higher visibility, of the term “cultural policy” in Australia (and for that matter, the rest of the world), compared to the US context.

**TB:** Yes, I agree with that.

**JH:** You also are right that there are plenty of examples of “cultural policy” throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the US, and I take your point about the need for histories that examine the complexity of “cultural administration” in the US. In a general way, critical “political economic” analysis of communication/media is interested in the State and commercial institutions of popular culture, but their arguments about “culture” tend to be simplistic and often focus on a single “medium,” and their analysis seldom is about how policy forms around the problem of “culture” or how the term culture is instrumentalized politically and governmentally.

But our conversation about cultural administration and the utility of culture prompts me to ask you about how the conditions for cultural policy studies have changed in Australia since the Illinois conference and since you directed the Institute at Griffith University. In part, I’m wondering about your reaction to what some voices in Australia (Graeme Turner, for instance) have described as the move away from “cultural studies” and toward a curriculum that is developed under the banner of “creative industries.” Did your advancement of cultural policy studies contribute to the latter curriculum? What is the posture toward the “creative industries” curriculum at the Institute for Culture and Society at the University of Western Sydney, where you now work? It is also worth noting that curricula in creative industries and creative economies (certainly those terms) have had as much difficulty gaining traction at US universities as have studies in cultural policy.
TB: These are very complicated questions and I am not sure I can give them an adequate answer. There is a lot of continuity at the research level between what we did in the Institute for Cultural Policy Studies at Griffith University and the two other universities in Brisbane—the University of Queensland and the Queensland University of Technology (QUT). The key cultural studies researchers at these three universities collaborated in the subsequent Key Center for Cultural and Media Policy that I directed. The Key Center was funded nationally by the Australian Research Council. And all of the people who are implied in your question were once a part of the Key Center. Stuart Cunningham was affiliated with it, and subsequently developed the momentum from the Key Center to establish the ARC-funded Center of Excellence for the Creative Industries and Innovation that he currently directs at QUT. Graeme Turner was also a part of the Key Center [and went on to direct the Centre for Critical and Cultural Studies at the University of Queensland]. I don’t think that the impetus for developing “creative industry research” in Australia has been at the expense of cultural studies, which has always been concerned with the cultural and creative industries in one way or another, and which has been a component of cultural studies curricula at most Australian universities for quite some time. What happened at QUT was slightly different—and this is something that John Hartley was primarily responsible for in establishing a Faculty whose remit and teaching program was organized primarily around the cultural and creative industries. So, while this was a Faculty whose conception was interdisciplinary in setting up the cultural and creative industries as a curriculum that would draw on a range of humanities and social science disciplines, it is not a model that has been too widely adopted. The most common criticism that has been raised is that doing away with discipline-specific courses deprives students of the portable intellectual skills that are acquired through trainings in the methodological or theoretical concerns of particular disciplines.

As you know, there has been some debate in Australia about whether the focus upon industry connections, which has been a part of the development of both the teaching program and the research program at QUT, has occurred at the expense of a public good/public value orientation—the sorts of more traditional concerns associated with the earlier formations of cultural studies. These are the questions that Graeme Turner raises in his recent book What’s Become of Cultural Studies? I’m not quite sure what I think about this exchange. There has undoubtedly been some intellectual tension between the different versions of cultural studies that QUT and the University of Queensland have represented, and this tension has been a part of the intellectual ambiance of debate here in Australia in the early twenty-first century. I’m not sure that either position stakes out the kinds of intellectual engagement which are likely to prove most crucial for cultural studies if it is to remain a vibrant project within, or in connection with, the new intellectual and political challenges of the time.

One of the central arguments about cultural studies in the 1970s and 1980s was that it was interdisciplinary—that, indeed, it was the inter-discipline that would challenge the conceptions of other disciplinary formations, and to bring them into
interdisciplinary dialogues that would help to reshape their problematics; that it would be a space for constructing or synthesizing a new, interdisciplinary problematic. But if you ask where the new interdisciplinary challenges and provocations are now coming from that engage with our radically changed political context—dominate by the GFC, questions of climate change, sustainable ecologies, etc.—it’s not blindly obvious that these are coming from cultural studies. I’ll give one example. I think the debates around the post-human are very important. These have a number of different inflections, some of which have to do with the limits of human exceptionalism, and some of which have to do with the role of non-human actors in social life. These issues clearly have become a point of engagement for a variety of scholars within contemporary cultural studies. This is a welcome development. The theme of next month’s 2012 conference of the Cultural Studies Association of Australia is “Materialities: Economies, Empiricism, and Things.” Its conception is informed by a sense of the need for cultural studies to engage with intellectual challenges and provocations that have their primary provenance elsewhere—that have come from the ecological humanities, from actor-network theory (ANT), from science studies, or from Science and Technology Studies (STS). And in quite a number of these areas, cultural studies is having to learn how to keep in step with intellectual challenges from other regions of debate. This strikes me not as a problem, but as something which is inevitable. Cultural studies is no longer the only intellectual agent provocateur in town. I’m exaggerating of course. It never was, and no-one said it was. But I do think that there has been a significant shift in where one looks to and expects significant new work to come from.

JH: Since you mention STS and ANT, it also is worth noting briefly that British cultural studies did not form through a debate about the relation between culture and science. The divide between, and debate about, science and culture was more generative of the intervention that James Carey made during the 1970s and 1980s when he described the features of (and the importance of distinguishing) an “American cultural studies,” which he located specifically in relation to US Communication Studies. Although his idea of a “cultural approach” for Communication Studies riffed on the views of Williams and Hall, he was much more interested than they were in developing a response and alternative to the dominance in the US of social scientific and behavioralist paradigms of communication research—paradigms that still dominate. However inadvertently, his work grappled with the distinction between culture and science that (as you might point out) was post-Kantian but that had been described famously by C.P. Snow in the 1950s and 1960s—culture and science as two separate spheres of knowledge work. I take your point about the need to pull science and technology studies into a conversation with cultural studies, and your work (particularly over the last 10 years, wouldn’t you say?) has been interested in the lessons of STS and actor-network theory—to a certain extent as lessons for cultural studies.
TB: Yes, in a general way, but my interests lean more toward “science studies” than the tradition of STS, though that’s a bit of a quibble. It is, however, Latour’s approach to science practices, particularly his emphasis on the importance of studying the detailed material processes through which such practices make, assemble, and act on worlds that I have found productive and very suggestive in its implications for how the operations of cultural knowledge practices might be examined in similar terms.

But I think that I am right in saying that the work of Carey was, in some ways, in the same territory as that mapped out by the Canadian communication theorist, [Harold] Innis. They were both concerned with the operation of communication systems as parts of material infrastructures, a topic that is now receiving a good deal of renewed attention. It is clear across a number of disciplines that a good deal of challenging work is being done on the operation of infrastructures—logistical infrastructures, infrastructures of food management, the infrastructures of transport and energy systems, and so on—bringing those traditions of communication theory and analysis right back into center stage. A number of people who are working these interfaces between contemporary materialities and actor-networks are revisiting the concerns that were earlier aired in the Carey/Innis tradition of communication studies.

But there are other questions, relatively little probed within cultural studies, that have emerged out of the “post-human” debates—for instance, the role that conceptions of culture have played in distinguishing human agency from all other kinds of agency. Good work about this is now not hard to find—about the absolute dividing line between the human and the animal world that has been produced by post-Kantian conceptions of culture as the expression of that capacity for free agency that uniquely distinguishes the human from other forms of life. These questions about the relations between culture and human exceptionalism rarely entered into cultural studies during the 1970s and 1980s (and I don’t mean just other people’s work, but my own too). Many of the debates around culture and identity that concerned us then did not undertake that radical interrogation of post-Kantian conceptions of culture that has since emerged out of post-human debates. This seems to me to be a very powerful challenge to many intellectual coordinates that cultural studies shares with the humanities more generally.

JH: Since we are talking about new materialities, I want to move our discussion to your recent book Material Powers, and to the book which is forthcoming, where your engagement with Latour and science studies is pronounced. However, I think that the interview would be deficient if I didn’t ask you to comment briefly on how Bourdieu’s writing has influenced your projects, because his writing has informed some of your work, and over a long time. I’m curious how you now think about that vein of your work, because I see how you find something useful in the work of science studies and actor-network theory from your interest in Foucault, who arguably was writing histories of various kinds of sciences—police sciences, medical sciences, etc.—and whose work Latour, Michel Callon, and John Law reference in the Introduction to their early collaboration, Power, Action, and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge
(1984). It is more difficult to understand how you get from that trajectory of your work to Bourdieu. Do you see a connection?

**TB:** It’s a complicated question. On one level, they occupy slightly different compartments of existence for me. That’s not an entirely satisfactory answer, though, for I recognize the point you are making, that you cannot easily square the positions of Foucault and Bourdieu on culture and power. I have indeed made precisely this point, and at some length, in an article I published a couple of years ago, called “Culture, Power, Knowledge: Between Foucault and Bourdieu,” in which I tried to work through, for myself and for others who are interested in these questions, what are the real points of tension between Foucault and Bourdieu while also acknowledging that their perspectives can be brought together in useful and interesting ways. The argument is developed by taking issue with Bourdieu who, in an essay he once wrote, claimed that his work and Foucault’s could easily be aligned with one another. I take issue with that claim because, if you take each of their key concepts—what Bourdieu has to say about “field” and what Foucault has to say about “discourse,” for example—they do not easily map onto one another. What Bourdieu says about the “space of possibilities” and what Foucault says about “fields of strategic possibilities” also don’t map onto one another in the way Bourdieu suggested they might. There are sharp contrasts between what Bourdieu has to say about “distinctions” and what Foucault has to say about “governance,” and so on. But I also suggest that there are ways in which one could bring Bourdieu’s concern with “cultural capital” into alignment with the concerns that Foucault references in his work on governmentality. I won’t try to do that now, but my sense that this might be done derives from a remark of Foucault’s where he says that it is only in contemporary forms of capitalism, from the late nineteenth century onward, that you have emerging the conception of the person as a site of what he calls various “capital-abilities,” abilities that can be transferred and marketed, where the person becomes the locus of a series of economically exploitable capacities, that resonates well with—and provides a historical framing for—Bourdieu’s account of cultural capital. There are very significant differences between their overall intellectual frameworks, but I think there are places where they can come together productively. But they are also interesting and challenging in their differences. While Foucault’s intellectual apparatus is very powerful, and allows you to do many, many things that are not perceptible within a Bourdieusian framework, it would be absurd to say that it allows you to do everything that might be interesting and important in the field of cultural analysis.

**JH:** And, Foucault’s references to art and culture are scant, so it’s not beyond the pale or unfair to think about the usefulness of other theorists such as Bourdieu, who was trying to think about the relation of cultural capital to pedagogies and institutions that shape a subject who bears this kind of cultural capital.

**TB:** Bourdieu’s work certainly has a lot more to teach us directly about cultural institutions and processes than anything you’ll find in Foucault’s work. The same is
true of the very powerful traditions of analysis that have been developed in the wake of Bourdieu’s work. Subsequent work regarding the nature of “cultural fields” and how they operate has developed in extremely interesting directions. I am, indeed, currently in the process of convening an application for funding with colleagues at the University of Western Sydney and the University of Queensland which, if successful, will allow us to investigate the changing dynamics of cultural production and consumption in Australian cultural fields over the past 20 or 30 years. Foucault’s work simply doesn’t give you a handle on such questions. My general point again, then, is that it is absurd to think that Foucault would allow you to do everything that it is important to do. No one body of theory does. One should, I think, have a flexible and strategic relationship to different theoretical traditions, looking at them as sources of intellectual equipment or tools that allow you to do certain kinds of work and not others. The limitations of some of Bourdieu’s key theoretical concepts—particularly that of habitus—are becoming increasingly apparent, but he still allows and enables certain kinds of critical work that you can’t do from a Foucaultian or, indeed, any other perspective. Foucault would allow you to engage with the role that censuses, social surveys and the like have played in the construction and management of populations, but there’s nothing in his work that would tell you how to design a questionnaire or even have a space for such a research instrument. And there is really nothing I can think of that Foucault’s work directly, or in much of the subsequent work it has generated, that gives any direct purchase on the distributional issues—that is, issues concerned with how the opportunities for participation in different kind of cultural activity and expression are distributed across classes, genders, and ethnicities—that Bourdieu’s work addresses. Foucault’s work has allowed us to see how the operations of educational systems have involved particular sorts of technologies of teaching that operate on citizens and endow them with particular kinds of capacities, and so forth. And you can make some connections between those concerns and those that come into view when you look at education systems through a Bourdieusian perspective. You can look at connections with how people of different capacities get distributed across different parts of the occupational class structure. You can’t do that so easily with Foucault. You can do it with Bourdieu. And it’s tremendously powerful when you do.

JH: A peril of using a particular historian or theorists (whether its Foucault or Latour or Gramsci or Bourdieu) in order to frame the analysis is that it always runs the risk of having in mind the answers to questions before you do the analysis. What I have found to be useful about the ways that you have brought for instance Bourdieu and Foucault, or Foucault and Latour together, is that there are certain kinds of questions that pop up that neither of them raise or answer. And again that is what I find useful about the essay on culture and government, where you are thinking about Hall and Williams on one side and Rose on the other. So, I’m agreeing with you, but elaborating this point for the reader, a bit more,

Let’s move toward two of your recent projects—one that already is published, Material Powers, and the other, Making Culture, Changing Society, that likely will be published by the time this interview appears. I’ll ask you a question first about
Material Powers, which you've co-edited with Patrick Joyce. In part, the book is interested in how culture's authorization of human agency involves non-human forms of agency, so many of the contributions to the book are engaged with actor-network theory and science studies. The book's Introduction also claims that the book is interested in outlining or demonstrating an alternative to cultural studies' predilection for explaining power and the political through the study of cultural representations. So, thinking about materialities leads you into what is often referred to as a "post-representational" turn in studies of power. But what is less highlighted in your book's Introduction is your rationale's relation to a Marxist intellectual tradition, which your use of the term "material power" and your claim to "material" conceptions of power conjure, however obliquely, particularly to the extent that Marxist critique has been referred to (or refers to itself) as "historical materialist." To what extent does the book seek an analytic pathway and perspective between the vein of cultural studies that sees itself as a politics of representation and the "historical materialism" of a Marxist intellectual tradition?

TB: Let me give a little background to the book first. It derives from work that Patrick Joyce and I conducted together over a five-year period, in the Center for Research on Socio-Cultural Change in the UK, a collaboration I valued a lot and learned a lot from. Patrick is a socio-cultural historian whose work has been engaged in rethinking questions of culture and the social through various perspectives, including Foucauldian perspectives on liberal government and science studies. I became familiar, through working with him, with the work of many other historians who are working on various kinds of interesting materialities, and whose theoretical influences include the work of people such as Latour. These historians are using these perspectives to rewrite socio-cultural history, returning to [Fernand] Braudel's position but extending it by demonstrating the significance of the world of material actors and forces—ranging from canals to postal systems to roads—in economic, social, political, and administrative life.

There are differences between these concerns and those of the historical and cultural materialisms that shaped the early development of cultural studies and a good deal of socio-cultural debate in the 1960s and 1970s. I won't go into any details on this. That question about the difference between the new languages of materialities compared to the concerns of historical and cultural materialisms—particularly Raymond Williams' version—is addressed in an extremely interesting essay at the start of the book by John Frow ("Matter and Materialism: A Brief History of the Present"). But the rest of the book is more concerned to exemplify the significance of the "material turn" and (as you mention) the interest in "post-representationalism," by signaling that we are concerned with the fact that material actors act as material actors even when they also may be representational ones. We draw on work by the anthropologist Christopher Pinney, one of the contributors to the book, who along with many historians of photography, suggests that we should not look only in the photograph but also, so to speak, at the photograph as a material actor in the world, an actor that has operated independently, in some respects, of its representational
currency. I don’t think this means that the questions of representation, i.e., what is depicted within the frame of the photograph and to what effect, have been eclipsed. But—although this is another argument—it’s quite clear now that such questions cannot be addressed if posed in the form of the relation between the real and how it is represented. Representations are folded into the constitution of the real through the ways in which they are mobilized within social and material practices. These are the concerns that I seek to address in the chapter that I contribute to the volume, which focuses on relationships between anthropology, field work, museums, and colonial governance in early twentieth-century Australia. I look at the ways in which these intersect within the practices of a particular anthropologist, Baldwin Spencer, a very important figure in the history of anthropology in Australia and the world more generally. It is his work that is more-or-less cribbed by Durkheim, in Durkheim’s Elementary Forms of Religious Life. So back to my point, I look at the ways in which Spencer’s fieldwork, collecting, and exhibition practices at the National Museum of Victoria aligned with his administrative practices in constituting the conceptual and governmental templates through which Aboriginal people in twentieth-century Australia were to have been managed into extinction.

JH: Making Culture, Changing Society begins by asking, as a starting question, “whether we might now need to relocate the concerns that have previously been addressed under the heading of culture on an analytical terrain that is after culture. Although I [Bennett] answer this question in the negative, my reasons for posing it are not solely rhetorical. It’s only through probing its limits that the concept of culture can be brought into a productive alignment with a theoretical landscape that is now significantly at odds with many of the intellectual coordinates that shaped its history.” Would you mind clarifying this statement a bit in relation to the book’s objectives?

TB: My answer returns to some of the ground that we’ve already covered, but I will add a few thoughts. This book re-examines some of the definitions of culture that we are familiar with, that have informed the development of cultural studies and other cultural disciplines—for example the Durkheimian concept of culture as symbolic, which is by and large the concept that Bourdieu draws on, sometimes with qualifications while at other times, lifting it straight from Durkheim. I have tried to do three things in the book. One is to consider culture from a Foucaultian perspective by drawing on a passage in which Foucault says that if he were to interest himself seriously in the question of culture (he never did), and that if he were to offer a definition of it, he would define it as a practice of the truth of a particular kind. So one aim of the book is to explore what it means to think about culture as a particular set of practices of truth, as a cluster of knowledge practices. By and large—although without attempting to provide anything like a comprehensive history of the relations between anthropology and aesthetics—I explore these questions by taking key moments in the intellectual and institutional development of anthropology and aesthetics to illustrate the insights that might be produced by following Foucault’s
suggestion of treating these as particular kinds of truth practices and examining their interfaces with practices of governance.

Secondly, I take from Foucault an argument of his about the need to historicize universals. He develops this argument at the start of *The Birth of Biopolitics* where he is quite insistent on the need for forms of historical analysis to take those concepts that seem to be universal and put them through the grid of historical analysis—to explore their histories as categories. Many definitions of culture take it to be universal—culture as a set of values, as the domain of meaning-making practices, as ways of life, and so on—with the consequence that these are not usually given any historical specification. So I propose, in the book, a definition of culture that interprets it as a particular set of practices of truth that are grounded in, produced through and circulated by, a historically particular set of institutional apparatuses.

And the third thing I do in the book is to take the notion of *habit* as a route into some of the issues that are currently raised by “post-human” debates. And the reason I do so is because of the position that habit has occupied in Western social, cultural, and political theory in organizing fluctuating boundaries between the natural world and those traits which are said to specifically distinguish the human: usually the cultural constitution of Man as a (putative) subject of free agency. Let me try to put that a different way. Habit has operated like a hinge in that it is both what connects human conduct to nature in the sense that the repetitions of habit are seen as having a certain kinship with repetitive behaviors in the animal world; and it is what separates humans from nature inasmuch as habit provides the foundations for the acquisition of new capacities through which the human is progressively differentiated from other animals. The concept has thus operated as a key connecting/disconnecting zone between the human and the animal. But it has also operated as a differentiating zone within the human according to the ways in which some humans are said to be more animal-like than others. This was particularly true of post-Kantian conceptions of habit which counter-posed those whose conduct seemed to be too habit-bound to those who exemplified the dynamics of free self-shaping tied up with the Kantian concept of culture. In this and other ways habit has operated as a key term in the organization of liberal government, particularly in drawing the lines which separate groups whose behavior is subject too much to the rigor of habit to entitle them to a share in the processes of governing themselves from those who exemplify liberal conceptions of the human as having a capacity for self-shaping and self-government. I try to show in the book how such conceptions of habit informed the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth [century] histories of anthropology, particularly its role in separating off the government of indigenous populations from liberal democratic forms of governance—something which still happens. The Northern Territory Intervention—which imposes quite stringent regimes on the inhabitants of remote Aboriginal communities, regimes that are not applied to other Australian citizens—is a case in point, and an especially complicated one in view of the support it has received from many prominent Aboriginal intellectuals and community leaders as a necessary step to curb Aboriginal drunkenness, violence toward women, and so on. These longer histories are still with us.
JH: I think of and have described Foucault’s histories as lateral, indirect histories of liberalism. Even in the History of Madness, he enfolds his account of the “birth of the asylum” into an account of the birth of liberal government. His account of liberalism became more pronounced by the late 1970s in his lectures at the Collège du France, particularly The Birth of Biopolitics. So, I want to conclude by noting that there are ways in which your current project, though it’s not just a current interest, involves thinking about the relation between culture and liberal government through a new, alternative history of anthropology as a truth-practice and domain of authority. Foucault, by the 1970s, was prone to describe himself as a historian rather than a theorist, and as a historian seeking to introduce “counter-histories” that disturbed the historical accounts on which universalist knowledge rested in the present. The expression “historian of the present” is used sometimes too casually to refer to Foucault. I’m wondering to what extent you think about your history of the museum, your history of anthropology and liberal government, and for that matter your efforts to disturb cultural studies by (radically?) historicizing its definitions of culture, all as histories of the present.

TB: Well, this is not an issue that I have addressed directly or written about programmatically. A good deal of my work does have a historical focus, but always with an eye to the present. Not in the sense of trying to draw specific parallels between the lessons of the history of liberal government and the contemporary forms of “neo-liberalism.” I haven’t made that kind of direct historical connection, although I think that this would be useful work, particularly as questions concerning the relations of culture and governance are concerned. I don’t think of myself as a historian, though. I don’t have the professional training—which I greatly admire—of historians to count myself among their number. Perhaps the best way to answer your question is to say that I have a strong interest in contemporary cultural analysis, but believe that this benefits from—indeed, requires—a strong historical framing. A part of that historical framing is “genealogical” [in the Foucaultian sense], and some aspects of my work on the history of museums have been conducted in a “history of the present” mode. My arguments concerning the ways in which the museum emerged as a site for the exercise of a series of knowledges that were deployed governmental in relation to the populations of the emerging mass democracies of Europe and America are meant to also provide levers—analytical, methodological, and theoretical—which can be applied to the analysis of cultural institutions in the present. Indeed, my contention that we should view culture as a “reformer’s science” was meant to have precisely such a pointed pertinence to the present for I think that, although obviously their politics are different, our contemporary cultural disciplines—including cultural studies, post-colonial studies, and so on—exhibit a similar governmental and reforming disposition. There are quite strong parallels between the role that cultural disciplines like anthropology and aesthetics played in the development of nineteenth-century practices of liberal governance and the role that cultural disciplines in the present play in practices of liberal governance through, for example, the lens of tolerance (i.e., the ways in which cultural disciplines now are
entangled, institutionally and discursively, with strategies for the promotion of various kinds of cross-cultural tolerance). If that isn’t a governmentality I don’t know what is. There are particular issues around specific forms of tolerance that need to be critically questioned, and Wendy Brown has taught us how to do this. But it is impossible to imagine a circumstance in which societies like ours, with complex relations between different cultures as a result of different histories (of colonialism, slavery, globalization), in which specifically cultural knowledges and forms of expertise would not be tied into governmental activities and processes—activities, of course, which are not limited to, and which do not proceed exclusively from, the state—I can’t imagine such a circumstance. But I’m not sure that I’ve answered your last question!

**JH:** That may be, but I’ll leave it to the reader of the interview to decide. Many thanks, Tony. This interview does offer a history of your present thinking and of some of the ways that your reasons for and commitments in conducting historical studies are (genealogically, so to speak) implicated in earlier institutions and formations of knowledge. In this interview, and through your writing, I appreciate that you have helped a lot of us reflect on the importance of recognizing our individual and collective implications in the institutional rationalities of knowledge production, and the importance of understanding the political uptake of critical and cultural studies that way.