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Roei, N.; Aydemir, M.; Kuryel, A.

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Introduction: Cultural Analysis, circa 2034

Noa Roei, Murat Aydemir, and Aylin Kuryel

Abstract: Cultural analysis gained its shape in the late 1990s. This introduction proposes to reassess its relevance to the immediate present as well as the near future. After a brief genealogical sketch, we address the current situation, alternating between successful institutionalization, slow scholarly attrition, and intensified threat, as well as reflect on a discussion in cultural studies at large on the field's methodological standardization versus its improvisational openness. Finally, we address the present historicity of the main aspects of cultural analysis as suggested by Mieke Bal—including object analysis, a heuristic use of concepts, interdisciplinarity, and social relevance—and introduce the volume's contributions under those headings.

Keywords: cultural studies, textual analysis, institutionalization, neoliberalism, method, social relevance

But unless theory is answerable, either through its successes or its failure, to the essential untidiness, the essential unmasterable presence that constitutes a large part of historical and social situation,... then theory becomes an ideological trap. It transfixes both its users and what it is used on. Criticism would no longer be possible.

—Edward Said ("Traveling Theory" 241)

Too often, as intellectuals, we are unwilling to start by assuming that we do not understand what is going on, that perhaps what worked yesterday over there will not work today over here. Instead, we carry with us so much theoretical and political baggage that we are rarely surprised, because we almost always find what

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we went looking for, and that what we already knew to be the explanation is, once again, proven to be true.
—Lawrence Grossberg ("Does Cultural Studies Have Futures?" 6)

At one point in my life as a scholar of queer culture and theory, I thought the point of queer was to be always ahead of actually existing social possibilities.... But this version of "queering" the social text strikes me as somewhat akin to Eve Sedgwick's notion of paranoid criticism: it's about having the problem solved ahead of time, about feeling more evolved than one's context.
—Elizabeth Freeman (*Time Binds* xiii)

"Cultural Analysis" is the name Mieke Bal has proposed for a humanities research practice, which combines the close reading of various objects of culture with the heuristic use of theoretical concepts in the service of sociopolitical critique. Clifford Geertz used the same term as a synonym for the interpretive ethnographic method, more commonly known as "thick description," eschewing explanations of phenomena according to a single cultural or theoretical key. In early cultural studies, "cultural analysis" is often used to describe the practice of the emerging field: what scholars in cultural studies do. For this volume, we have invited a group of scholars, ranging from recent graduates to emeriti, to reflect on the development of their practice of cultural analysis, however conceived, from the recent past to the present, as well as speculate what it may entail in the near future—let's say, by 2034. Contributors were asked to draw on their work in research, teaching, administration, institutional politics, activism, and the arts. Scholarly, didactically, institutionally, intellectually, creatively, and politically—What was cultural analysis back then, what is it right now, and what can it be by 2034?

In a programmatic video lecture, Bal characterizes cultural analysis as a conversation about "living" culture, that is, about culture before its products are archived to fit disciplinary classifications and genealogies.[1] The conversation admits multiple participants, provided they don't overrule each other nor the object that should remain at center stage. The disciplines contribute their knowledge but not their dogmatic genealogies and divisions.

1 Bal summarizes here a critical approach developed and put into practice in an extensive body of work. Key aspects are elaborated in the introductions of her *Double Exposures* (1996) and *Traveling Concepts* (2002). Through interviews with Bal, Lutters offers a comprehensive introduction (Lutters and Bal).

Theory is welcome but not as master discourse. History participates without bracketing the historical present from which we cannot dissociate ourselves anyway. In this dialogue, the object has the last say, and "everything in it, every aspect, every detail" matters. The actuality of cultural analysis as a conversation in the present, in the dialogic presence of the object of study, makes "now," Bal concludes, the "ultimate principle of cultural analysis" (Bal).

Following up on that proposition, this volume wishes to bring to bear the historical now or present conjuncture on our practices of cultural analysis. Should cultural analysis continue doing what it has done so far or adapt to changed and changing circumstances? This reconsideration might pertain as much to implicit habits, tendencies, resistances, foreclosures, and biases as it does to stated principles and priorities. Resisting the breathless announcement of the next "new," "post," or "turn," our joint reassessment hopefully offers a slow and situated account of relevant histories, genealogies, and futurities. We have attempted to curate a modest, above all life-sized, reflection from the vantage point of the immediate present, factoring in the recent past and near future. In the spirit of our combined epigraphs, we don't want to take for granted that our established forms and practices are able to rise to the occasion of current and imminent challenges. Nor do we put our faith in the newest academic update in the apparent belief that one will take care of everything. Instead, we wanted to hold space for a patient and precise reflection on and coming to terms with a concrete conjunctural situation in motion: once-common terms resonating differently, goalposts moving, relationships shifting.

The Histories of Cultural Analysis: A Brief Sketch

To be sure, there are different possible entry points to the emergence of cultural analysis. An initial one goes back to the large-scale redistribution of the humanities since the 1960s. Following several eventful "turns" in the field, various inter-, trans-, and multidisciplinary fields were developed, which were thought of as *studies* rather than disciplines. Within these fields, the self-explanatory understanding of expertise, method, and archive—basically, who does what and what goes with what—has lost its grip. While some disciplinary models remained rigid, many others loosened their understanding of the rudimentary what, how, and why of research. Cultural analysis, as a product of this history, aspired to locate the openness of method and archive at the center of its research practice, insisting on the possibility of exploring widely divergent objects and topics, but only insofar

as the burden of motivating and specifying anew the what, how, and why in relation to each other was taken seriously.

The genealogy of the term may be narrower in its historical and methodological scope, stretching from "textual analysis" on one end of the spectrum to "cultural studies" on the other. *Cultural analysis* can be read as the marked combination of *cultural* studies and textual *analysis*. Textual analysis can be traced back to the New Criticism of the 1940s and 1950s in the United States, marking, in its original and reactionary form, an internal, immanent, formalist style of dealing with (exclusively literary) objects, addressing those in minute detail while dismissing anything that was not on the page.

Cultural studies, nearly the opposite of this approach, emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in the United Kingdom and opened the study of culture to include objects from working-class, underclass, popular, and entertainment culture in tandem with economic, social, and political concerns. It allowed contextual, historical, and sociopolitical issues to inform the analysis, sometimes at the price of downplaying the object's particular aesthetics and poetics, relegating it to a mere instance or example of bigger concerns. The insistence of cultural analysis on what might be described as a politics of form attempts to straddle elements from both approaches, carefully leveling the object's precarious singularity against the social, historical, and political situations it informs and dialogues with.

This sketch of the histories of cultural analysis would remain incomplete if limited to the humanities exclusively. One of the more acknowledged earlier reiterations of the term can be found in the work of cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz. Geertz's main concern was to intervene in anthropology at a time when cultural phenomena were quickly reduced to determining and determinable contexts. His import of the textual turn into the social sciences aimed at destabilizing the certainty to contextualize and ascertain what instances of culture signified. In a practice that was sometimes referred to as "cultural analysis" but mostly known as "thick description," Geertz insisted on allowing multiple possible interpretations to surface through the details of his objects of analysis, resisting theoretical or contextual generalizations. The detailed analysis of the object, in turn, would allow for the development of specific, partial, interpretive, and situated modes of knowledge production.

As it was conceived in the Netherlands in the late 1990s by Mieke Bal, the research practice emphasized the conceptual work involved in interpretive analysis, engaging with theory for its reading of objects and understanding society and culture. In addition to the specifics of the object—its aesthetics, poetics, and the sociocultural contexts that inform it and are informed by

it—theoretical queries are central to how the practice has taken shape, accompanied by the intensified reflection on the researcher's choice and selection of approaches for a specific query. Cultural analysis is understood as interpretive and critical, probing layers of meaning within cultural objects to help unpack the broader sociocultural worlds in which they are made legible. Within this approach, concepts are not static but adaptable and evolving in response to the analysis; they are not "applied" but redefined in the process. The ensuing dialogue between analyst, concept, and object allows each to inform and reshape the understanding of the others. Theories and their academic prestige are balanced against concrete and specific object analyses, so a two-way illumination may occur. The triad of object, concept, and analyst in many of the contributions to this volume attests to the specific formulation of the Amsterdam approach to cultural studies at large.

Institutional and Other Contexts

The successful institutionalization of cultural analysis makes our reconsideration of the field's practices, methods, and lineages particularly urgent. With respect to the local context alone, where this volume is located and to which it answers, the University of Amsterdam hosts a research institute, the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA), a bachelor's program, and several master's programs; the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Analysis (NICA) is one of the national humanities research schools in the country. This successful presence implies that cultural analysis is no longer an intervention in an established order of things but part of it. Hence, questions and reflections about critique, co-optation, incorporation, inclusion, power, management, and complicity have become more prominent.

Existing scholarship offers contradictory evaluations. Drawing on Fredric Jameson, Paul Smith argues that the broader field of cultural studies has been marked by a double desire or aspiration from the start: to make a real political difference while *not* becoming another academic discipline. He sharply concludes that the former did not happen, but the latter did. For better or worse, cultural studies has become institutionalized and professionalized as an academic discipline in the USA and elsewhere. Hence, he argues, it should no longer fashion itself "a kind of unattached, floating field of endeavor run by academic libertarians and maverick geniuses" (3). Decrying an affected looseness he does not hesitate to describe as "libertarian," "pluralist," and "laissez-faire," Smith calls for the formalization of the definition, proper

objects, and established methods of the discipline, not least in the interest of graduates facing employers requiring clear qualifications (1–4).

Additionally, this formalization should help redress the "political error" Smith observes in the history of cultural studies, namely the "thematization" of the field that would reduce its remit to a series of identifiable themes, such as race, sexuality, gender, ethnicity, and so on (Ross and Smith 252). While we may disagree with the measures that need to be taken to respond to the move toward institutionalized disciplinarity, Smith's argument does bring up an uncomfortable question: Does our understanding of cultural analysis as an open, creative, and improvisational intellectual practice allow us to avoid the responsibilities and complicities of our institutionalization as an inter-discipline?

The other side of Smith's argument is offered by Lawrence Grossberg, who claims that institutional life is only the most immediate context of our work, which cannot be detached from "other proximate and concentric contexts of social, political, economic, and cultural life, that is, from the entirety of the social formation" (9). Hence, Grossberg returns to the two main questions Stuart Hall proposed: What is going on? What can we do? The field's aim to construe a "political history of the present," he goes on, cannot but make cultural studies contextually and conjuncturally oriented as a matter of principle. It must adapt epistemologically and politically to understand, criticize, and find purchase on a moving terrain. Therefore, it neither has established objects nor methods.

Too often, Grossberg writes, we are unwilling to start by assuming that "we do not understand what is going on, that perhaps what worked yesterday over there will not work today over here" (6). This intellectual ethos should confront even the centrality of culture for our field. Culture in general and popular culture in particular may have been especially relevant in post-WWII Britain, when mass culture and cultural studies emerged in dialogue. Still, it's far from certain that those matter in the same way and to the same extent today. Grossberg doubts whether culture is still the place in the present conjuncture, "where change is being organized and experienced" and "where resistance is viably organized" (17). Hence, he goes so far as to suggest a "post-cultural (or at least, post-culturalist) cultural studies" (24). If Smith challenges us to consider the instantiation of cultural analysis in institutional and disciplinary structures, Grossberg compels us to inquire whether our practices of cultural analysis still serve us to understand, in Hall's words, what is going on and what we can do.

Today, we ask these questions in the context of the neoliberal university that often privileges quantity over quality, outcomes over processes, and

market values over critical thinking. In *Dark Academia* (2021), Peter Fleming defines the university as a dying institution in the place of the higher public education once dreamt of, turned into a business enterprise obsessed with growth and output. In this context, knowledge is seen as measurable in terms of prestige and profit. Lauren Berlant also reflects on the pressures that accompany this neoliberal "crisis" within the field, addressing how "the urgency of responding to the institutional pressures of the present that have rendered so many of us bitter or angry or tired or cynical or perhaps simply confused about what to do in this moment of intellectual expansion and economic downsizing" ("Collegiality" 115). The question of what to do operates on various levels: within a pressing institutional context, in relation to the historical present, and in conversation with developing theoretical debates and political struggles.

Concerning the latter aspect, Hall, while taking a retrospective glance at the legacies of cultural studies, argued that cultural studies has always been an open-ended project. Whether it attended to this or that, what distinguished the project throughout was its political aspect: what is at stake in the analysis (263). The aim was to develop theoretical work from a political perspective rather than the ability to speak "theory" fluently and sophisticatedly. Social struggle and theoretical reflection provoke, require, and inform one another. In the context of the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the 1970s, among the forces that disrupted and contributed to the field were the struggles around feminism and race and, later, the AIDS crisis, which all created ruptures in how theory was understood and deployed at the time. As those struggles continued, the status of theory and its relation to politics was questioned repeatedly. These moments, for Hall, revealed the necessity to insist on the irreducibility of the insights that theory can bring to political practice without forgetting the necessary modesty of theory (273). What remains inspiring for today is Hall's perspective on what these ruptures can do: rather than undermining the field, they can help redefine theory, method, and practice in ways that contribute to the world unfolding differently. Can we similarly allow our practices of cultural analysis to be interrupted and redeveloped in relation to contemporary emergencies and necessities?

This Volume

In this volume, the main aspects of cultural analysis are taken as points of departure to reconsider and reorient the research practice. From different

angles, contributions establish shared concerns, criticize established protocols, and propose new angles and priorities. Granted, we have not covered all possible, and perhaps not even all prevalent, challenges to cultural analysis today. Indeed, this collection can only offer a momentary and incomplete compilation, mapping some of our current questions, doubts, concerns, obsessions, additions, worries, and alternatives. This is done in dialogue with both longer- and shorter-term companions: cultural materialism, postcolonial and decolonial theory, psychoanalysis, the environmental humanities, and many others. The essays assembled here form our attempt to live up to the promise of cultural analysis as a research practice that self-reflexively remains in touch with a living culture and society, with the "now." Taking cultural analysis as its very object, so to speak, the contributions engage it under the headings of the critical concerns Bal has established for the field: "speaking objects," "traveling concepts," interdisciplinarity, and social relevance. Some of the contributions you'll find below in a specific section could fit as well in others, and readers would find that other distributions, using altogether different headings, may well apply. We hope that the overlaps, resonances, and frictions among the essays offer a resource for the maintenance and reinvention of the field.

Part One: Speaking and Silenced Objects

Students and scholars are increasingly heedful of the works of art, literature, and entertainment they choose to engage with. Moreover, the liberal availability or readability of cultural objects is questioned in terms of provenance, modes of address, and the academic capitalization of minority experiences and knowledges. Cultural studies attended to unequal, exploitative networks of production, distribution, and consumption of cultural objects. From this perspective, the critical, ludic, subversive, and ironic uptake of cultural commodities in the academy has been decried as serving the culture industries. Lauren Berlant has expressed puzzlement at what they describe as "the persistent claim-case-case-conclusion-coda shape" of much scholarly work, querying the relationships between event, object, and case study, as well as the function of the case study as a device for "folding the singular into the general" ("On the Case" 671, 663). In a changing context, what is it that objects can and cannot do?

In the opening essay of the volume, "Cultural Analysis: Critical Encounters in Time, Space, and Thought," Mieke Bal revisits the key features of cultural analysis. What distinguishes the practice from others, she argues, is its emphasis on encounter. The features Bal maps can all be seen through the prism of encounter: interdisciplinarity (encounter between fields), a

theoretical framework (theory meets object), social relevance (analysis meets the living environment), the present as a vantage point (a temporal encounter between the past and the present), and, above all, interactive objects ("speaking back" to both concept and analyst). Bal puts these aspects into practice by close reading a novel by Azriel Bibliowicz, titled *Migas de Pan* (2013). For Bal, concepts are the primary tool of the trade: "traveling concepts" moving across disciplines, researchers, historical periods, and academic environments. The future of cultural analysis, Bal concludes, lies in its insistence on understanding object analysis as an encounter, defined by its liveness, relationality, and unpredictability.

In Chapter 2, "Cultural Analysis as Reading *for* the Object," Esther Peeren elaborates on the triangulated relationship of object, concept, and analyst, arguing it should prominently center the object. The centrality of the object protects the object from becoming just an object, treated as a mere example without the capacity to shape the analysis. Yet, while objects are invited to "speak back," they can only respond to our questions as we frame them as the objects of analysis. Peeren describes this framing as a twofold "reading *for* the object": a reading that establishes something as the object of analysis, and a reading in support of or on the side of the object. In a principled defense of close reading, Peeren argues that cultural analysis highlights what the reader can bring to a text and how certain aspects of that text may stand out in relation to what we read it for. What we want the object to reveal can be challenged by the reorientation that our reading process generates. Peeren proposes to think of the agency of objects as an oscillation between *thingness* and *objectness*. Rather than avoiding the idiom of objects, she brings in the notion of *thingness* to acknowledge the objectification that is unavoidably part of cultural analysis and to keep it accountable for that aspect.

Divya Nadkarni and Alex Thinius explore the challenges of the global imbalance of knowledge production for interpreting cultural objects in Chapter 3, "Notes toward a Decolonial Praxis of Cultural Analysis: Exemplarity and Listening as Other." What is required to understand objects on their own terms, as cultural analysis wishes to do, when the objects in question are located in experiential or conceptual paradigms far removed from privileged agents of knowledge from the Global North? To underscore the predicament of the coloniality of knowledge, Nadkarni and Thinius stage a dialogue between the notions of the *subaltern* who cannot speak and the object that "speaks back." Acknowledging that the foundations and legacies of cultural analysis are deeply embedded within Western modes of knowledge production serves as the ground on which Nadkarni and Thinius tentatively offer an alternate approach. This approach entails

a nuanced reworking of theory, object, and encounter, which includes the provincialization of Western theoretical perspectives, a radicalization of alterity so that the researcher is positioned as Other to their object of analysis, and the scaling down of the case study approach for objects that are not part of a shared conceptual world.

Considering the approach to objects in the adjacent, yet fundamentally different, context of higher arts education, in Chapter 4, "Objects in the Making: Cutting through Analysis in Art Education," Jules Sturm reflects on relevant challenges to close reading, theoretical inquiry, and readership. Objects are taken for granted in art schools, while their theoretical relevance, performative power, and definition can remain vague. What happens to cultural analysis when its tenets fall flat against the practice of actively creating objects, as the object is encountered time and again in its unfinished state, without temporal, spatial, or emotional detachment? Sturm suggests that allowing the production processes to inform cultural analysis can help us rethink the encounter between objects and concepts outside their usual academic home. Still in a state of becoming, the object may offer critical revisions and additions, reopening the question of what it means to engage with objects as such. Turning toward participatory art practices, Sturm reflects on the operations of *cutting* and *trailing* as ways to engage with objects whose external contours are not set.

Part Two: Traveling Concepts, Theories, Methods

While "theory" may once have indicated a generalized poststructuralism, its prevalence in the field is now challenged by other schools of thought. Additionally, the common heuristic or "toolkit" approach to theory is confronted by comprehensive, systematic, and ideological commitments to theoretical worldviews. Scholars and students disaffected with "high theory" prioritize lived experience, community work, and activism instead. What is the place of theory in cultural analysis and cultural studies now? What could, or should, it be in the near future?

Opening this section, in Chapter 5, "Cultural Analysis: A Global South Critical Approach," Paulina Aroch Fugellie argues for including the Global South as a site of knowing. If cultural analysis is to offer more than a sophisticated close reading of symbolic capital, it must factor in and account for a systemic totality as a function of which its objects of analysis operate. If not, she argues through her close reading of an episode of a BBC current affairs program, the blind spot is reproduced that installs Africa as an "outside," which is in fact situated at the core of our colonial and capitalist order in supplying labor and resources, as well as through its symbolic function as

that threatening "outside." If current hegemony erases the uneven totality in which objects are situated and function, then, for Aroch Fugellie, a politically relevant mode of cultural analysis can only aim to make the colonial political economy that acts as the background of our close readings visible again and hold it accountable.

In Chapter 6, "Traveling Concepts and Conjunctural Analysis: Concepts Gone Bad," Murat Aydemir reflects on the contemporary afterlives of the field's fundamental notion of "traveling concepts," which prioritizes the critical, heuristic, and interdisciplinary use of concepts over comprehensive theoretical systems or methods. He argues for the need to update and qualify the assumption that the mobility of concepts comes with intensified accountability, productivity, and criticality. As interdisciplinarity became commonplace, concepts have often "gone bad," expanding and hollowing out as they resonate with shifting forms of power. Rather than a continued focus on the travel of concepts as the critical edge of cultural analysis, he concludes, the focus should shift to a keen awareness of precisely where and how concepts register in terms of the historical present and its shapeshifting hegemony.

In Chapter 7, "Cultural Analysis as Reportage," Joost de Bloois offers a reflection on the place that "theory" currently occupies in cultural analysis. He proposes to reimagine the practice in more participatory terms, as a form of inquiry into what he describes as "the happening of the social," driven by participation and a sense of urgency. This reimagination is necessary in the face of increasing neoliberalization, commodification, and fragmentation of academic critique. Reportage, De Bloois suggests, can offer an alternative to introverted academic practice as well as to detached politics, enabling a close reading of the events in which culture is articulated, seizing ideas as they emerge, where they appear. Offering narrative sketches of social, political, and cultural practices, cultural-analysis-as-reportage may help to keep hold of the emancipatory impetus of the field, even as it might lead to the reshuffling of the field's central premises and methods, moving away from the objects and concepts perched at center stage as well as from established conceptual and political frameworks and academic concerns. Cultural analysis as reportage, situated midway between analysis and reporting, close reading and fieldwork, might be able to generate a "live" cultural analysis, which may withstand its commodification and co-optation into a brand, a malign caricature, or an arsenal for the far right.

Ernst van Alphen looks at the acts of framing and gathering that precede and inform analysis proper in Chapter 8, "Gathering, Framing, and the Temporality of Cultural Analysis." Reflecting on his recent work on the history

of sculpture, he elaborates a key distinction between historical and cultural analysis. The specificity of cultural analysis lies in its temporal orientation, as defined by a phenomenological understanding of history. The awareness of the present moment in which objects are selected, collected, addressed, and interpreted accommodates a temporality of contemporaneity central to the field, in which subjects and objects engage with different histories within their lived present. Distinct from chronological temporality, the contemporaneous temporality of cultural analysis fosters the convergence of historical moments, a confluence that informs analysis, emphasizing conceptual mappings over historical navigation.

Part Three: Interdisciplinary Spaces

Cultural studies emerged through and as a redistribution of the fundamental relationship between the social sciences and the humanities. Resituated within the humanities, cultural analysis, primarily a hermeneutic or semiotic approach, interprets objects from various media and disciplines. Current movements, from new materialism to the environmental humanities, in turn, expand interdisciplinarity even beyond the humanities and the social sciences. In the meantime, a weak version of interdisciplinarity has been incorporated into governmental and administrative reason, insisting on the expedient repackaging of equivalent units of knowledge and skill. Where has interdisciplinarity been, where is it now, and where will it go?

In Chapter 9, "Institutional Travels: Spaces for Cultural Analysis," Noa Roei traces the unacknowledged boundaries of interdisciplinary research, addressing the material, institutional, and administrative demands that curtail it. Departing from Clifford Geertz's notion of "thick description" and Lauren Berlant's call for "infrastructural analysis," Roei maps how a recent interfaculty project disrupted familiar intellectual and procedural underpinnings. What happens to cultural analysis when conducted outside of its institutional home? How can knowledge travel across the hierarchies of medical, social-scientific, and humanities research cultures, in which what counts as research differs fundamentally? Venturing out of one's comfort zone by moving across conceptual, disciplinary, affective, and institutional borders may help to unpack the implicit terms and conditions of one's participation in a particular research culture. In turn, this acknowledgment can lead to the observation of precisely the nondiscursive phases of research as key for a critical, relational, and reflexive form of interdisciplinarity. Roei concludes that the interdisciplinary potential of cultural analysis lies in its ability to shed light on the dynamic between text and its larger lifeworld, between discursive analysis and the many acts that precede and surround it.

The two remaining contributions in this section reassess the established interdisciplinarity of cultural analysis in relation to environmental and planetary emergencies. In Chapter 10, "From Situated Knowledge to Intensional Field Theory," Jeff Diamanti revisits the notion of "situated knowledge" to explore whether it may help us expand our scholarly focus. Drawing on environmental criticism and political ecology, he examines how anthropology and the humanities engage with the lived materiality of their grounded contexts. We should allow for the foregrounding of the *field* at the price of the object, Diamanti argues, to remain open to the unexpected but crucial information that can be encountered through fieldwork, allowing the field to interrupt and push the analysis. The shift from object to milieu may also help us question the centrality of the human in the humanities and social sciences at large and in cultural analysis in particular.

In Chapter 11, "Cultural Analysis at a Tipping Point," Seb Wigdel-Bowcott compares cultural analysis and cultural studies with respect to their capacity to face the climate crisis as a planetary and environmental event that does not fit easily within the social, the conjuncture, or the object. The usual way the climate crisis features in cultural analysis at present, he posits, is through limited, reductive thematizing readings of a cultural object or artifact, what he describes as an "ekphrasis of planetary themes." The problem here is not so much legibility but rather whether we can experience and encounter, let alone analyze, the object of climate change. On the one hand, it's too big, situated far outside the frame; on the other, it's already too familiar and close to us through the affected textures of our everyday life. Therefore, what's needed, he concludes, is a cultural analysis that can work at vastly different scales: the planetary in tension with the historicity of our everyday experience.

Part Four: Social Relevance and Intervention

While the relevance of critique is increasingly questioned within the academy, governments and funding agencies have instrumentalized the languages of social relevance, valorization, and knowledge utilization. Earlier optimism about popular culture's emancipatory or subversive promises no longer seems warranted; simultaneously, the canonical or "high" arts seem co-opted into heritage, memory, and tourism industries. The relationships between representation, emancipation, and material redistribution appear overdetermined and contradictory. While teaching programs and research institutes in cultural studies and cultural analysis are successfully institutionalized, the humanities at large have found themselves under protracted financial and political attack. Under

worsening political circumstances, the continued viability of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank memorably described as a "bipolar analytic framework adequately summarized as 'kinda subversive, kinda hegemonic'" may seem kinda moot. How can cultural analysis remain—or become—socially and politically relevant in the face of changing circumstances?

This section opens with two contributions reevaluating the social relevance of cultural analysis from a teaching perspective, resituating the classroom in relation to social space. In Chapter 12, "From Social Relevance to Public Intervention: Cultural Analysis in and out of the Classroom," Aylin Kuryel argues that the bearing of social relevance as one of the key principles of cultural analysis needs to be retested against contemporary institutional and political landscapes. While the humanities and the social sciences are increasingly forced to defend their relevance to the administrative and funding bodies that control resources, the knowledge produced in these fields simultaneously becomes germane for the right-wing in fabricating moral panics to replenish hegemonic discourses. Kuryel argues that the notion and practice of "intervention" may serve as a responsive pedagogical and epistemological framework. Unlike relevance, it doesn't imply prior knowability according to which cultural analysis's relative relevance or irrelevance can be confidently measured. Through a discussion of public interventions that were designed and carried out by students, transporting academic theory out of the classroom, she proposes a reconceptualized temporality as important for cultural analysis: not only taking the past as part of the present but also the present as part of a future. Pertinent objects are not merely found somewhere "out there," she concludes, but actively shaped through collective work.

Focusing on the role of theory in today's classroom, Chapter 13, "Toward a Decolonial Classroom: Resituating Cultural Analysis as Pedagogical Intervention," by Aslı Özgen, offers an encounter between cultural analysis and decolonial theory. As her case study, she takes a bachelor's elective she has codesigned, titled "Decolonizing Media Studies: From Theory to Practice." Özgen investigates how the coloniality of the university may be tackled epistemologically and pedagogically beyond the reductive formulas of diversity and through merely teaching decolonial theory. What can concepts do when they turn toward lived experience? How do social struggles situated both within and outside the university—such as the Rhodes Must Fall movement at the University of Capetown in 2015 and the Maagdenhuis Occupation at the University of Amsterdam of that same year—inform knowledge production in the classroom? Mapping the intersections between

decolonial critique and cultural analysis with regard to situated and dialogical relationships between knower and object, self-reflexivity, and a hands-on and present-based approach, Özgen calls for more embodied and localized modes of engagement with theory.

In Chapter 14, "Crises, Social Relevance, and Critical Discomfort: Shooting Ourselves in the Foot," Alvaro Lopez argues that a reckoning with social relevance is overdue for cultural analysis. Lopez advocates a move away from the comfortable ground founded on ideas and objects taken for granted within the field but no longer as groundbreaking as they were in the recent past. As once radical ideas are steadily depoliticized, and popular culture becomes increasingly mainstream, as in the case of the horror genre in cinema going flat in the 1990s and 2000s, a form of inquiry relevant to social contestation can only be generated by actively seeking out our discomfort. For Lopez, relevance cannot be assumed; it can only be attained through seeking out new and different objects, unfashionable theories, and redistributing our established interdisciplinary boundaries and connections.

Finally, in Chapter 15, "Parochialism as Method: Pejorative, *Partage*, Pastoral," Niall Martin closes the section as well as the volume by arguing that the eclecticism and ecumenicalism of cultural analysis may betray something of its emergence in Amsterdam and the Netherlands as hubs of capitalism, liberalism, and colonialism. When under pressure, this cosmopolitanism can quickly revert to extreme forms of nationalism and nativism, as indicated by the steep rise of Islamophobia in the country. In agreement with Divya Nadkarni and Alex Thinius's contribution above, Martin offers essential caveats to the notion that the object always "speaks back." The idea may bracket the fact that the reader needs to be willing and able to hear what is offered; an uneven burden of translation may well apply (some voices and idioms translate easier than others); and some objects harbor a fundamental opacity that resists articulation. Martin offers the notion of the *parochial* as a productive critique of the supposed open-mindedness of cultural analysis, arguing that the present conjuncture, leaving behind the heydays of globalization, is characterized by increasing forms of enclosure and constriction: algorithmic niche marketing fastening people to target groups, as well as rising forms of spatial separation and segregation. Nonetheless, he concludes that precisely the local, provincial, and parochial practice of cultural analysis, as a particular incarnation of the international field of cultural studies, may offer a relevant common language, allowing for both continuities and ruptures, commonalities and differences.

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