Introduction:
Blurring lines and challenging hierarchies

Emma Buchanan

This collection of essays is united in the aim of challenging the binary of 'high' and 'low' which continues to pervade Cultural Studies and academia. On a basic level, it does so in the sense that every contributor was still engaged in postgraduate research at the time of writing. As students and early career researchers, we are aware we occupy the bottom of a professional hierarchy. As such, our voices as researchers are more heavily edited and we have less opportunity to communicate our ideas than those higher up that hierarchy. Sometimes, the advice and limitations we experience are welcome and invaluable, helping us grow and improve. Sometimes, the weight of the 'high' above us is a hindrance. In the first instance, therefore, this collection aims to give space and opportunity for us to develop our research and writing with each other, as a peer project, free from the sometimes intimidating knowledge that we are writing alongside others with far more experience. This is the first challenge to a 'high' and 'low' binary we present here.

However, the major challenge we present is to cultural hierarchy. All of us are engaged in research that deals with subject matter often considered unworthy of academic enquiry: that which falls into the complex category of 'low' culture. It is usual for a work to begin by defining its key concepts, which for us are 'culture', 'high' and 'low'. However, as MacCabe (1986) has shown, any definition relying on the high/low distinction, the elite/mass dichotomy where the top imposes and something emerges from below, is too simplistic because it implies the high is not affected by the low, when the reality is actually a complex interplay between the two (pp. 4–8). As will become clear throughout this book, our challenge of the high/low binary has, at its foundation, a desire to blur lines and therefore recognise the complex interplay, not only between those two concepts but also between others, especially the scholarly and the personal.

In the spirit of blurring, therefore, this introduction will try to blur the line between defining and not defining. This is because the complex, blurred line between 'high' and 'low' becomes an issue as soon as one even attempts a definition, for the simple reason that each only exists as an 'other' to the other. We construct high as that which is not low, and vice versa. The very idea of one implies another, different type of culture, and the difference is what creates the meaning (Williamson, 1986, pp. 99–100). Moreover, 'low culture' is more commonly referred to as 'popular culture' or 'mass culture'. Although there is potential to argue a subtle difference between the terms, such an undertaking is beyond the scope of this work, which accepts them as essentially inter-

changeable. However, we have chosen to use 'low' in our title rather than 'popular' or 'mass' in order to emphasise the hierarchical system which we consciously challenge. Storey (2012) suggests that popular, or low, culture constitutes 'the culture that is left over after we have decided what is high culture' (p. 5), and 'texts and practices that fail to meet the required standards to qualify as high culture' (pp. 5–6). Storey further proposes that it is synonymous with 'inferior culture', a notion 'supported by claims that popular culture is mass-produced commercial culture, whereas high culture is the result of an individual act of creation' (p. 6). As Storey himself points out, these seem obviously flawed definitions and claims: consider that Shakespeare was deemed popular in his time but is now seen as culturally high (p. 6). Consider too the commercial success of the opera singer Luciano Pavarotti, whose free concert in Hyde Park in 1991 further blurred the boundaries between high and low by opening up opera to the masses (pp. 6–7).

If we wanted to satisfy the scholarly need to define our concepts, we could say that, in its most reductive form, we take high culture to be that which is generally enjoyed by an elite class and welcomed as a legitimate line of academic inquiry by those who set the bar for such inquiries: institutes of higher education. Conversely, we take low culture to be that which is enjoyed by a majority class and is generally not accepted as a legitimate line of academic inquiry (though that is slowly changing). However, something that will also become clear throughout this book is that this field necessitates some degree of subjective engagement and understanding, an inclusion of personal expertise and experience; we are unapologetic and firm on that issue. Culture is art and ways of living, not science, and is thus bound up into a relationship with people and their feelings and experiences. As such, it is questionable not only whether a definition is possible, but even if it desirable. This book agrees with Bennett's (1980) point of view that defining 'popular' as it pertains to culture is reductivist and unsatisfactory since it entails lumping together anything which is not considered traditional or which is created as 'mass' art by capitalist society or which can be seen as the creative impulses of the people in opposition to dominant bourgeois culture. Everyone will have varied experiences, low and high depending on their background, and this book does not aim to define one experience as authentic as that would mean placing itself at the top of another hierarchy, claiming to be an authority on what is high and low. Instead, the reader is asked to engage with and understand the issue on their own terms, using the brief and generalised definitions above merely as a guide. It would be useful to ask yourself some questions before going further: what do your personal experience and gut feeling tell you high and low mean? Do you think you have you been working within, maintaining or challenging a cultural hierarchy?

There is also the issue of defining the complex term 'culture' as it interacts with these already subjective concepts. Although many of these chapters deal with specific cultural texts, such as films and television shows, some approach low culture as a much broader term bound up with heritage and local practices. Culture here means

something which blurs the lines between Williams' three categories in the definition of culture, which proves his point that they all reference and interact with each other and that any definition is inadequate if it does not include all three (Willliams, 2009, pp. 33–34). Stanton's chapter on the issue of reclaiming national identity through language at the Welsh National Eisteddfod, for instance, links strongly to the first category, 'the ideal', 'in which culture is a state or process of human perfection, in terms of certain absolute or universal values' (ibid., p. 32). Those chapters which entail a critical analysis of particular cultural texts or practices, such as my own, link strongly to the second category, in which culture constitutes a 'body of intellectual and imaginative work' (ibid.). The third category, where cultural meaning is expressed socially as a particular way of life (ibid.), is brought into play again by Stanton, as well as by others, such as Cui, who enhances existing models to further describe behaviour in film-related tourism. Once again, the reader will need to add their own notion of culture to this basic definition to create meaning that speaks to them: we will not presume to authoritatively dictate such a human concept.

Whilst recognising that the high/low dichotomy is blurred and complex, it would be impossible (and morally wrong) to address it without acknowledging that it exists in conjunction with a dominant-subordinate gender relationship, which is another hierarchy we must challenge. First, the construction of one as an 'other' to the other is precisely how gendered images are constructed: the image of feminine means home, love and sex, whereas the image of masculine means work and politics, for example (Williamson, 1986, p. 103). Second, the very notion of high and low culture emerged against the socio-political backdrop of first-wave feminism and was inexorably bound to it. In fact, women were historically excluded from the realm of high art, and 19th and early 20th century discourse 'obsessively genders' high culture as masculine and mass culture as feminine (Huyssen, 1986, p. 191). Mass culture and the masses were explicitly equated with femininity and women by those who theorised it as meaningless and commercial, even apocalyptic, such as Adorno and Nietzsche (ibid. pp. 191–195), demonstrating that '[m]ale fears of an engulfing femininity are [...] projected onto the metropolitan masses' reflecting the 'persistent gendering of feminine of that which is devalued' (ibid. p. 196).

Modleskli (1986) reiterates that the issue of gender within mass culture as a concept is huge: mass culture has been historically condemned as feminised culture with no apparent awareness of the socio-political context of women's oppression or of the bias inherent in sources written about women; women as producers and consumers of mass culture have been blamed for a decline in standards since the Victorian Age; and the image of women lounging around, lazily wasting their time consuming bland cultural texts with no depth requiring them to think, has been constantly backed up by academic works and key thinkers, even those whose discourse at first seems to be liberatory. Indeed, the difference between high art and mass culture is often 'understood by means of a "natural" opposition of activity and passivity' often accompanied

with metaphors of 'masculine' and 'feminine' values, mass culture being constructed as an 'other' (Petro, 1986, p. 6). This is not restricted to old discourse between scholars of traditionally 'high' art. Some film scholars 'assign a place to television outside the domain of legitimate culture, outside the arena of academic respectability' despite that being the precise place to which film was (sometimes still is) consigned by intellectuals and artists of other art forms (ibid.) due to its negatively connotated 'values' of consumerism, distraction, vulgarity and passivity associated with mass culture and, by extension, women, as illustrated by Petro's (1986) entire article.

The concealed, gendered fears of thinkers such as Adorno and Nietzsche, mentioned above, were articulated as the linked fears that mass culture stripped culture of its potential to be radical and that mass culture was passively consumed. This book actively works to disprove those ideas. For instance, Macleod's chapter on fanfiction written by female fans online demonstrates that that practice has the radical potential to transform subject/object relations, to model a non-commercial way of 'doing' mass culture and to allow a space for women to simultaneously challenge and take pleasure from the gendered dominant-subordinate relationship. With regard to passivity, it is seriously debateable whether it even exists. Baker Miller has convincingly argued that that which is deemed 'passive' is simply the absence of activity males consider worthwhile, namely activity in direct pursuit of one's own goals (1986, pp. 52–55). Even if one accepts that passivity does exist, the works in this book demonstrate that it is far too simplistic to consider low culture as passively consumed. Cui's chapter, for example, shows how people actively seek out post-film viewing experiences as a response to screen culture.

Perhaps the most cited of all anti-low culture rhetoricians, Adorno and Horkheimer (1979, pp. 120–125) feared that mass cultural productions' uniformity and predictability were aimed at achieving social conformity – it is obvious how it will end and who will be rewarded and punished. If that was ever true, it is not now: in its first few seasons, AMC's *The Walking Dead*, analysed in the final chapter, became popular precisely because characters died unexpectedly all the time. Characters who most certainly were constructed as 'good' people often died and still do die, sudden, horrific deaths. Moreover, the setting is a post-apocalyptic world: we cannot imagine at all how it will end; we do not even know how it started. Furthermore, as Macleod raises in her chapter, the line between hero and villain has become blurred. It is not always clear who is the 'good guy', or even if anybody is. Female fans, as Macleod notes, have a particular tendency to resist the 'good guy' narrative surrounding the protagonist, sympathising with the alternative points of view of antagonists such as Loki (Tom Hiddleston – various films in the *Marvel Cinematic Universe*) or Kylo Ren (Adam Driver – the final *Star Wars* triology). *The Walking Dead* also enjoys this blurring: the biggest villain the show has ever known, Negan (Jeffrey Dean Morgan), is immensely popular and remains in the show hovering somewhere between protagonist and antagonist even seasons after his initial story-arc. This demonstrates that mass culture, here, is not aimed at achiev-

ing social conformity. We can see from this that the scholarship we rely upon most heavily is too simplistic to be used alone in research into low culture: although made by the 'culture industry', some texts retain the power to shock and subvert. Indeed, on the relevance of major theorists' accepted ideas, such as Mulvey's famous assertion that a radical avant-garde cinema is necessary for feminist cultural texts, Gamman and Marshment (1988, p. 1) rightly state that low culture has long been dismissed as serving 'the complementary systems of capitalism and patriarchy, peddling "false consciousness" to the duped masses' but the fact is that it has become clear that it can 'also be seen as a site where meanings are contested and where dominant ideologies can be disturbed'.

This book also seeks to challenge the dominant-subordinate relationships of cultural and academic hierarchy by its sheer heterogeneity. As Collins (1989, p. 2) points out, culture is now decentred and fragmented; it 'does not have one center or no center, but multiple, simultaneous centers' (ibid., p. 27). Further, 'the heterogeneity of cultural production does itself destabilise the category of "the dominant" since it engenders "multiple, competing hierarchies"' (ibid., p. 25). He gives as an example 'television aesthetic' as academic subject: it ranks extremely low within academia as a whole but is cutting edge within the discipline of Cultural Studies (ibid.). Moreover, television itself interacts with this complex interplay of hierarchies: in some emissions, it ranks academic discourse highly, yet in others it mocks it; this makes it impossible to discern a monolithic, homogeneous dominant hierarchy (ibid.). Therefore, this book actively presents a heterogeneous collection of papers: they are connected by the themes that emerge from them but their subject matters are consciously diverse and cannot be grouped under any clearer label than 'culture'.

In fact, recognising the heterogeneity of culture in our globalised, technologised, multicultural world is one of the key factors in academic resistance to research into low culture, and a parallel may be drawn between that resistance and the resistance in conservative circles to widening literacy amongst the working-classes and the linked rise of popular literature in the 18th century, and the more liberal desire to accept it but control how it is read (Collins, 1989, pp. 8–9). That is, some institutions are reluctant to accept it at all; others will but continue to insist on standardised, defined methodologies which are part of what we might call an academic canon or a high academic culture. We will discuss that more shortly.

First, we must consider how universities try to maintain their position as the dominant party in a hierarchy which, as we established above, is problematic and cannot be maintained. The indisputable academic reluctance to consider low culture to be a valid line of scholarly inquiry reflects its role as a perpetuator of dominant ideology: deciding for the masses what counts as worthy, valued and civilised. It also enables it to perpetuate itself in that it excludes the 'other' and creates an initiated elite, who go on to take over the role as cultural gatekeepers. Even amongst those who *are* conducting academic research into low cultural topics, the preference for using the words

'mass' or 'popular' to describe the other to 'high' culture, rather than 'low', betrays a desire to conceal dominant-subordinate dynamics whilst simultaneously situating the 'masses' or the 'populace' in the subordinate position. As mentioned earlier, this book uses 'low' consciously to reject that position.

In constructing its dominant position, academia either creates or ignores the class conditions which give low culture the very traits it claims to dislike. Take television as an example. Television is often certainly an escape from thinking – it needs to be. The working day is tiring, exploitative and oppressive, leaving people needing to unwind and escape, and with little energy or mental space for the kind of abstract personal development or broadening of the mind, that supposedly comes with 'high' culture and not 'low'. That is obviously not to say that the working-class are unable to broaden their minds or that mass culture cannot serve that purpose. However, what is crucial to see is that the notion of difference upon which this prejudice by 'high' against 'low' is based completely ignores the reality of people's everyday lives and, therefore, the power relations which govern them. To claim that mass culture hinders activity because people passively consume it (even though that is not the case) illustrates the position of privilege enjoyed by those who make the claims. To critique the consumption of mass culture without also critiquing the socio-political and economic context within which it exists serves to support the very capitalist system those who attack mass culture (such as Adorno) often lament. Thus, academic resistance to mass culture confirms one or both of these statements to be true: (1) Scholars dismiss the tiring reality of many people's lives and expect them to be capable or desiring of the same level of cognitive engagement with culture as an intellectual, or 'professional thinker', thereby acting as though class does not exist. (2) Scholars are so privileged that they are genuinely unaware that most people's everyday lives leave them with too little energy or mental space for that level of cognitive engagement.

The fact that mass culture *can* be a 'switch-off' does not mean it is *only* that. The line between 'mindless' and 'mind-expanding' is blurred: that which one can consume retains the potential to be radical. To exemplify, like many researchers into culture, I have been told at times, with a patronising air, that my desired subject matter is not acceptable for scholarly research. In one particular instance, I was told I 'should steer clear of' comedy television in my research. While I was writing my contributions to this book, I was relaxing in the evenings by binge-watching the British comedy series *The Vicar of Dibley* (BBC, 1994–2015). It has never been my intention or wish to write about that particular show, but re-watching it confirmed how short-sighted it would be to dismiss a comedy series on the basis of its 'low' cultural status. That is, the overarching theme of the show is how a society, especially privileged white men, can be made better and happier through the introduction of talented women into a sphere from which they have previously been excluded. That one simple theme shows unequivocally that the potential of *The Vicar of Dibley* to subvert power relations is radical. Moreover, its reach to a mass audience is instrumental is realising that potential.

Indeed, the very fact that academia resists the inclusion of low culture such as television comedy in itself demonstrates its radical potential since it amounts to a clash with a threatened hegemonic elite. I was especially pleased to include Iglesias' chapter on television comedy in this collection, as the reader can imagine. Incidentally, if the reader's personal experience has been lucky enough to protect them from institutional resistance to grant low culture academic worth, perhaps because of where they have studied or worked, they might be feeling sceptical at this point and asking themselves if this resistance really is so undoubted. If I may share another personal experience, it ought to shed light for you: in 2011, it was made to known to myself and some fellow undergraduates that a Professor in our School did not consider Film Studies legitimately academic. Not television or screen studies, but the now long-established academic discipline of Film Studies, which seems frankly incredible.

Furthermore, this book contests that so-called low culture retains a radical potential that high culture, by the fact that it has been absorbed into the academy, standardised and turned into a dominant ideology, has lost. This raises a serious contradiction which we do not shy away from or deny: if academisation serves to make culture part of an elite, homogeneous, codified system, are we correct to make the case for its academic potential and, by extension, its inclusion in that system? We do not claim to have a definitive answer. However, it is clear that the status of low culture as less academically valid is wrong. One solution might be that, as part of raising the status of low culture, the academic system itself must, can and will change. Tentatively, I would like to open a dialogue to that effect.

First, since low culture is so heterogeneous and so affected by complex interactions and blurred lines between concepts of artists and fans, and online factors, that it is not unreasonable to believe it has the potential radical enough to change the system. Making research into low culture fully accepted in academia would entail, not absorption into one ideological pillar, as has happened to high, and formerly radical, art, but acceptance of diversity. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to merge the diverse array of things which constitute low culture into a standardised system or one unified discipline. Research into low culture allows for 'the construction of everyday life' to be examined, meaning by its very nature it has the power to politicise in the sense that it may illuminate and affect power relations (Turner, 2003, p. 6). Collins (1989) sums it up perfectly: '[w]ithin decentered cultures, no *Zeitgeist* can emerge as a dominant; nor can any one institution [be] responsible for establishing aesthetic ideological standards' (p. 141). In fact, the practice of trying to discern a hierarchy or dominant ideology from the study of cultural texts, be they considered high or low, is itself inherently flawed. That is, the very word 'text' is related to 'texture', 'textured' and 'weave', showing that any text is woven into a patterned, multi-layered fabric; it is not simply a sheet with a clear image upon it, but rather an intricate combination of threads, some of which go in different directions and serve different functions from others (Berry, 1974, p. 63). Low culture's complexity and diversity compound these

already textured objects of inquiry. Screen texts, for instance, are arguably even more complex than other cultural texts, since they constitute:

> web within web of signification: complex and interlocking systems, as meaning that ties narrative (if it exists) to the visual complexities of *mise-en-scène*, to sound textures, to the speed and rhythm of camera work and editing. It is a multiplicious kaleidoscope of signification. (Miller, 2018, p. 11)

Coupled with and resulting from this, there is a need to accept that standard frameworks and defined methodologies for analysis, in the way we have traditionally known them, are obsolete. Low culture is post-modern: it is an eclectic juxtaposition of conflicting discourses (Collins, 1989, pp. 136–137). It is not possible, therefore, to investigate a text from only one or a few angles, or to analyse a text in isolation from a multitude of other texts. Trying to restrict students' work, and indeed the work of more seasoned writers, to one or a few accepted frameworks or methodologies is precisely what homogenises them. Low culture is too diverse and interacting to be restricted in this way, and therefore, it is predisposed to resist homogenisation. Research into low culture simply cannot be empiricism as we know it: we must approach it openly; we must see and present it from many angles, fragmenting it for a complete view (rather like a Cubist artist); and we must accept differing ways of looking and knowing based on differing frameworks of reference. Since texts have a multiplicity of meanings, origins and links to other texts, a multiplicity of approaches is required to explore the meaning in them. The days of insisting on a one-dimensional Lacanian/Marxist/Post-Structuralist (we could go on for some time) reading of subject matter must be over.

Research into low culture must be interdisciplinary, and even undisciplined. It must, and this is crucial, blur the line between scholarly discussions and subjective explorations of personal expertise. The rationality and logic of analysis structured strictly around a theoretical framework hinders the analytical process since it negates affective response, reifying the text and the methodology rather than exploring the relationship between the text and those who react to it. In short, it behaves as though culture exists in isolation from the people who create and consume it. Many of the major thinkers we draw upon to perform analyses through a defined theoretical framework do themselves suggest in their work that meaning is created in a gap between two interacting things and that we do not, perhaps cannot, understand that gap. And yet we still try to squeeze our analyses into one established framework based upon their ideas at the expense of our own ideas. Our own ideas stem from engagement as a fan with our object of inquiry. Being a fan has always engendered personal expertise of a certain text or practice. However, in the last thirty years, catalysed especially by the widespread availability of home video, which Iglesias discusses later, fandom has brought about a skill at understanding and analysing which competes with traditional methods. Like the content created by fans online discussed by Pinsent and Macleod in this volume,

academic fan research can no longer be dismissed as amateur. It is different from traditional academic analysis but it is not less valid.

Using theory and methodology to make research 'professional' rather than amateur stems partly from a legitimate concern over rigour: this book absolutely agrees that academic writing must put forward quality thought, which must be well-argued and structured and lead to new knowledge. However, if we consider the key meanings of the complex word 'rigour', we can see how we are perhaps mistaken to reify it. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'rigour' as '[r]igidity of [...] interpretation', 'harsh inflexibility', 'severity, sternness; cruelty', '[g]reat hardship or distress', '[a]ustere quality, state, or condition', '[e]xtreme strictness or stringency (of standards, conduct, etc.)', 'scrupulousness or rigidity in the application of rules, principles, or precepts' and '[s]trict sense or interpretation; precision, exactness; [...] the quality or condition of being highly detailed, accurate, and thorough'. Only a few of the words in these definitions are qualities we ought to be seeking from our scholarship. In a work truly aimed at uncovering new ideas and existing inside a body of other, related works, which it ought to challenge and/or complement, the rest of the definition is self-evidently undesirable. Therefore, either we are using it questionably, as an excuse to exclude personal, subjective expertise, or we do not have a clear grasp of what it is we mean by 'rigour'. To help us as a community evaluate this, this book hopes to show that academic works can be cogent, thorough, accurate and detailed, and yet also allow meaning to be formed in that mysterious gap between the interaction of two things: the established expertise and the personal expertise.

Beyond this book, how might all this be practically applied? Students (and all writers) must be allowed to present their interpretations and analyses by dipping into a wide range of existing scholarship and citing their own expertise and experiences. Universities (and linked institutions such as journals and publishers) must focus on whether the research constitutes an engaging analysis with clear links between the writers' conclusions and evidence for them, rather than limiting writers by insisting on adherence to a small set of privileged 'absolute truths': accepted, standardised methodologies, or metanarratives and their proponents. To illustrate from my own experience again, I was once told I could not write an essay exploring contemporary apocalypse fiction using the ideas of the German philosopher Günther Anders (whose theories pertinently relate to our increasing disability to imagine our own destructive potential) because 'there is no accepted Andersian reading', which is utterly preposterous. This kind of selectivity is not about organising essays coherently and encouraging rigour, as it might seem, but rather about policing knowledge. It is about restricting *parole* (the voice of an individual researcher) through *langue* (the codified academic empiricism).

This reveals yet another high/low dichotomy: the accepted, establish, codified theories of exalted thinkers versus the 'outsiders' who are not as well known. In the above example that was Anders but unless we, as researchers into low culture, challenge that dichotomy by being open to ways of presenting research which draw upon less exalted

literature and the writers' own subjective experiences and personal expertise, we will also be confined to the 'outsider', since we will never be able to change the system which raises an elite group of thinkers (unlikely to ever include us) to a position of dominance. That is not to say that this book does not have enormous respect for those thinkers – there will always be a place for them in our work. It is they who first 'get you thinking' as a student of culture. My own academic journey has been hugely and positively inspired by the works of Adorno, for instance, despite the critical stance I take here. Who does not remember the first time they encountered the ideas of the major thinkers of their undergraduate subjects? Some of those ideas changed your thinking and even your life, catalysing your own ideas and interpretations. In other words, they started your intellectual journey. They should be the starting point, then, not the conclusion. When you come to write for yourself, their ideas should be a guide, not a dogma.

The organisational structure of universities is a closely linked problem. Raymond Williams, arguably the main contributor to the field of Cultural Studies and whose categories of culture were mentioned earlier, wrote of his disappointment in his 1965 text *The Long Revolution* that 'there is no academic subject within which the questions I am interested in can be followed through' (p. 10), and indeed, it still feels like that today. Change is long overdue: we must re-evaluate the very way we separate researchers into departments and schools based on broad disciplines. My own PhD, on the topic of gender representation in AMC's *The Walking Dead* with a focus on Jungian depth psychology, is squeezed uneasily into the course 'Philosophy and Religion', to which it bears little to no resemblance.

Interdisciplinary teaching, learning and research is inevitable, then. This has the capacity to effect a systemic change, starting with the complete restructuring of universities at faculty level. I would like to make a serious, but radical suggestion which might allow low culture equal status within academia and also use its diversity to change the system. That is, restructure all undergraduate arts and humanities programmes so that, in the first year, everybody does the same large interdisciplinary module, which counts for at least three quarters of their required points and covers a wide range of key ideas and thinkers from classics to modern intellectual history to gender studies to physics and so on. Such a module would necessarily draw upon the expertise of a diverse body of staff from across the institution. It might be thought of as an intensive 'taught' year, which allows students to access a multitude of ideas which might guide their own ideas. The remaining required points would be made up of small modules directly related to a broad discipline they envisage being the named subject on their degree.

The second and third years would not be interdisciplinary, but undisciplined, in the sense that the vast majority of the learning would be student-led and research based. The students would complete a series of essays and a portfolio of other research projects which related to their own cultural interests, in which the key assessment crite-

ria would be the radical potential of their argument and how cogently they presented it. The second year might entail a greater dependency on the traditional theories and thinkers than the third year, which would encourage development of their own theories and also provide dedicated time for reading works by thinkers beyond the canon from the first year, especially those less well known in the English-speaking world. There would also be a module which would enable students to meta-consider their own participation in their developing expertise. In this model, staff time for second- and third-year students would be dedicated to individual or small group sessions based around agreed common foci, during which staff would serve as an experienced mentor to allow the students to discuss and refine their emerging ideas. They would also agree upon the types of writing the students would submit, as well as their titles and key research questions (which would not be restricted by adherence to dogmatic methodologies). Second- and third-year teaching and learning would, therefore, resemble current postgraduate research teaching and learning. There would be no lectures beyond the first year. This would also serve the purpose of freeing staff from the limits of pre-planned, rehearsed, approved discourse. Closer interactions with students and their interests would help staff to develop their own expertise and interests. The knock-on effect by the time students reach postgraduate level, at which point they can also act as mentors for undergraduates, is that they have already developed in some detail the ideas they will work into major dissertations and the methods they will use to frame them. There would be a natural restructuring at faculty and school level: because the broad disciplines would not be so important, there would be no need for division into them. It is questionable whether there would be a need for any type of top–down structure at all beyond a system that allowed degree certificates to show the students' specialisms.

The systemic change described above is one which entails *raising* low culture by granting it legitimacy, worth and a voice. However, it also necessitates *rethinking* high culture. As stated, high culture can mean more than high art: academic codification by way of forcing a strict adherence to established theorists and methodologies constitutes high culture too. Reducing over-reliance on presenting work around an accepted framework by welcoming subjective experience, personal expertise and inter-disciplinary and undisciplined approaches into research will allow us to *rethink* this high culture which dominates academic discourse. In fact, there was some debate over the title of this publication. Some of the contributors and I (ever incendiary) felt that 'raise low, demean high', the title chosen by Harry Perry for his contribution to this volume, would have made a bolder title. In the end, democracy prevailed and the eminently suitable although less seditious 'raise low, rethink high' triumphed. However, the debate over the word *demean* is relevant. The original inspiration to use that word came from the late, great blurrer of lines and challenger of hierarchies David Bowie, who declared during an interview in 1995 that: