A ‘low budget slow motion soundtrack song for the leaving scene.’ (A farewell editorial)

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This is the last issue of *Cultural Studies* that will bear my name as editor. I have had that privilege and responsibility for over 28 years. I was honoured when Australian colleagues invited me to join their collective in 1986, as they began to transform the *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies* into a more international forum. I was grateful that Routledge was willing to risk supporting what was then an emerging field. Editing the journal has been a vital part of my life, labours, and education.

I hope that *Cultural Studies* has become an invaluable resource for the intellectual community of cultural studies, while the field itself has expanded and established itself within the academy. I admit to ‘policing the boundaries’ of cultural studies, defending its specificity and multiplicity, embodying its unity-in-difference. I looked for essays that take context seriously, that see themselves as part of the larger conversations of the field, that sought to better understand what’s going on.

My efforts raised new challenges, which I have only partly succeeded in addressing. The dominance of Anglo-American academic institutions makes it all too easy to turn forms of parochialism into taken-for-granted assumptions, practices, and norms. It can also blind us to the different roles that such institutions, their logics and values, are called upon to play in different parts of the world. How do we recognise and respect the different ways cultural studies is and perhaps needs to be practiced – for intellectual, political and institutional reasons, without abandoning the commitment to trans-local and trans-national conversations?

Many people have helped me over the decades. I want to express my profound gratitude to my occasional co-editors (Jan Radway, Della Pollock and Ted Striphas), assistant/managing editors (Greg Wise, Steve Wiley, Mark Olson, Ted Striphas, Robyn Remke, Rachel Hall, Gwen Blue, Greg Siegel, Mark Hayward, Josh Smicker, Rivka Eisner, Sindhu Zagoren, Bryan Behrenhausen and Blake Hallinan), book review editors (Jennifer Slack, John Frow, Tim O’Sullivan, Graeme Turner, Gil Rodman, Ian Ang, Álvaro Pina, Stuart Price, Mark Davis, Ted Striphas, Janneke Adema), editorial board members, authors, reviewers, special issue editors, and artists – for all their work and support. I thank the many people at Taylor and Frances who have been responsible for the actual work of producing the journal. While there are too many to name, I am especially grateful to Tracy Roberts, Jane Thurgood and Katherine Burton. Of course, I thank those who have read, used, cited and disseminated the work we publish. I thank friends, students and interlocutors for their encouragement and honest criticism. I especially
want to thank Stuart Hall, Meaghan Morris and John Clarke, who helped me to both understand cultural studies in its multiple and global contexts, and to hold on to whatever threads of optimism there were to be found. Finally, I thank Ted Striphas for agreeing to lead Cultural Studies into its as yet unwritten future.

I am leaving the journal at a decisive historical moment. So much has changed and continues to change. I am not always comfortable with these changes, nor confident that I know how to navigate them. New technologies and economies of creativity and communication have radically reconstructed the cultural field, transforming not only the empirical realities but also the concept of ‘culture.’ We have to avoid responding by allowing ourselves to be seduced by the grand claims of theoretical revolutions, or by falling back into the empirical details of some isolated set of relations.

The changing political economy of the academy, with its emphasis on discipline and professionalisation, and its omnipresent metrics of individual productivity and impact, make it more difficult to be the sort of risky, experimental intellectual and institution-builder that cultural studies demands. Yet I am encouraged by the fact that people, in many different places, continue to try.

The politics of culture is changing as well. Intellectual freedoms are under attack, and political intellectuals are increasingly threatened with economic precarity, quasi-legal repression, and even violence; and while such risks are neither historically nor geographically new, they appear to be rapidly spreading and gaining popular support. This is reinforced no doubt by attacks on the possibility of truth, and the value of knowledge and ideas. The cultural studies community needs to reaffirm its faith that what we do matters, and increase our efforts to produce better knowledges and to tell better stories. But we must also reflect on what it means to be a political intellectual in our own institutional and political contexts, both nationally and globally. It is to these questions that I turn in the accompanying essay.

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