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Intellectual practices: an interview with Philip Schlesinger

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Abstract

What are the relations between an academic trajectory and the research field, and how do they change over time? This interview with the cultural and media sociologist, Philip Schlesinger, is part of my ongoing reflections on media research history. The role of British media research and cultural sociology is particularly interesting and important and Philip Schlesinger is one among several of his generation who, since the 1970s, has played a significant role in the formation of the field, internationally. The interview covers part of his academic trajectory to date: his ethnographic work on the BBC and recurrent focus on media, state and national identities are discussed along with his writing on Latin American cultural theory and on the European public sphere. The interview closes with a discussion of Schlesinger's most recent research on cultural intermediaries as well as his public engagements and longstanding academic institution building.

Keywords

BBC; creativity; ethnography; Europe; field theory; intellectuals; journalism; media and cultural research; Scotland; state; nation

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Introduction

Tore Slaatta (TS): Given my interest in media research history,¹ we will focus on your career as taking a particular trajectory in the academic field of media and cultural

¹ See Slaatta (2015a).

sociology that has developed in the UK since the 1970s.² What is broadly understood as media research has changed over the years, both in the way it is managed as a teaching area, and how it has turned towards new research agendas. We will loosely follow a timeline, from your entry into academic life and the formative years of British cultural sociology and media research. So, let's start with your work on BBC, which was for your PhD wasn't it?³

Ethnography and the BBC

Philip Schlesinger (PS): Yes. I was in the LSE Graduate School, in the Sociology Department, where I was supervised by Ernest Gellner and Michael Burrage.

TS: And compared to PhDs today, it made quite a stir, didn't it? Both in the UK, and internationally, in the proliferating media research community?

PS: A stir is putting it too strongly. It did gain some recognition, as the book I wrote subsequently was quite widely reviewed. My PhD was researched at a particular moment in the early to mid 1970s. Coverage of the conflict in Northern Ireland was a really key issue. When, a little later, I wrote *Putting 'Reality' Together*, this became an important part of my analysis. I also contributed to a pamphlet at the time, and gave many talks, and it was the first time I got involved in public debate.

TS: *Putting 'Reality' Together* is read as an early ethnographic work in the cultural production tradition. Is that how you perceive too?

PS: Yes, as sociology of journalism — one of the early ones of its kind, but by no means the first. It was a very thinly populated field compared to how it is now, but it was certainly one of the ethnographies of that time.⁴

TS: You must have been one of the first to use the words 'social construction' in media sociology?

² The interview took place in Glasgow on 18 April 2013. Follow-up exchanges have been incorporated into the text.

³ Schlesinger (1977), Schlesinger (1978).

⁴ For recent reflections on production studies, see Schlesinger (2015c).

PS: Probably. [Both laugh.] There was this famous book, *The Social Construction of Reality* by Berger and Luckmann,⁵ which was hugely influential. Social constructionism can be taken, in extremis, to mean that there is no material reality out there, so you move in the direction of idealism. For me, though, the approach offered a way into the analysis of the social organizations and belief systems geared to the production of accounts of reality. In the conduct of that kind of research, there's a tension between what you encounter in the world of theory and what you do in the world of practice. Trying to deal with this inclines you to give more and more respect to how you understand practice on the ground, and then to try and figure out how it relates to theory, rather than the other way around.

TS: That's the ethnographic approach [...]

PS: Yes, and I've been using it ever since, no question, even when my work has not been fully-fledged ethnography, which is mostly the case.

The field in the 1970s

TS: What was your relationship to Birmingham and the CCCS?⁶

PS: When I ran out of money for doing my PhD I went to live in Birmingham for a year and stayed with my brother and I saw Stuart Hall, whom I'd met once before. I discussed my PhD with Stuart, who was good enough to read a draft – quite something, as he was incredibly busy. I was certainly reading the work that was coming out of CCCS at that time with great interest. And I particularly appreciated Stuart's writing. But I didn't feel CCCS was my academic home. I maintained a stronger connection with CMCR⁷ in Leicester at that time, which was not exactly around the corner, whereas CCCS was. It was a complicated period for me because I was trying to survive without a grant. I had a thesis to write and I found some bits of research work, teaching, and freelance journalism.

⁵ Berger and Luckmann (1971).

⁶ The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, then directed by Stuart Hall.

⁷ The Centre for Mass Communication Research at the University of Leicester, then directed by James Halloran.

For a year, then, I was living in Birmingham and loosely affiliated to Leicester, where I worked for some months as a visiting researcher on a project that saved me from complete penury.

TS: There was no opening in Leicester for you?

PS: I was offered a short-term research assistant job to help an interesting man called Henry Cassirer write a book. He'd been a TV editor and also a UNESCO official. But there was nothing longer-term on offer.

TS: What did the field look like at the time?

PS: It's doubtless very hard for the present generation to reconstruct what the field looked like at that time. Nothing much has been written about that period aside from what went on at CCCS, which is a pity if you want a more rounded view. The field in the UK was incredibly limited compared to today's scene. You had the Polytechnic of Central London (PCL) - now the University of Westminster - where Nick Garnham, James Curran, and Paddy Scannell were the emerging figures at the time. You had Jeremy Tunstall at the Open University, a key figure in the formation of the field, and not properly recognized as such today. He initiated the important seminar run under the auspices of the Mass Communications Group of the British Sociological Association, which met at PCL, and which I convened for a few years. I had a London nexus that involved these and other people rather than the LSE, where I was a research student.

Then you had CMCR at Leicester, for which I had greatest empathy because some of its leading lights - Philip Elliott, Peter Golding and Graham Murdock - were doing critical empirical sociology, and that's what I was doing. There was also the Television Research Centre at Leeds where Jay Blumler and colleagues worked on empirical studies of political communication and news. Birmingham was then forging cultural studies. There was also the Glasgow Media Group focused on 'bad news'. The Broadcasting Research Unit was set up in the early 1980s to conduct policy-relevant empirical research. There were other mostly film-focused activities around

the British Film Institute but these only really converged with media research somewhat later, with the invention of ‘television studies’ in the mid 1980s.

Well, that was the universe of media research most relevant to me in the UK at that time. It was small enough to get to know almost everyone and there was an output that you could actually keep up with. It was a very inventive time and that wider, multifold history would be worth reconstructing.

TS: Where did your academic career begin?

PS: In 1974, I was appointed to a lectureship at Thames Polytechnic – later the University of Greenwich - in the sociology division headed by John Downing, who has made an important contribution to media research over many years. I was plunged into teaching a wide range of courses in sociology and tried to finish my PhD, which I did within a year of getting that job. I was stuck there for a long time and didn’t think it was the best place for me to be. When John left for the States I ended up heading that group. I became the head of sociology, and did that for nine years.

TS: A considerable time to be running something?

PS: Luckily, I succeeded in getting a couple of fellowships. I had a social science research fellowship with the Nuffield Foundation in 1982-83, when I worked on *Televising ‘Terrorism’* with Philip Elliott and Graham Murdock.⁸ And then I was appointed to a Jean Monnet fellowship at the European University Institute (EUI) in 1985-86. So those saved me, as it were, from just running things.

Media, state and nation

TS: I would like to dwell a little on what I think is your most comprehensive book, *Media State and Nation*, published in 1991. Did you work on that for a long period?

PS: It’s a collection of pieces that went back to the late seventies, and I wish I could do that again, because it has coherence and range. Despite the fact the chapters were

⁸ Schlesinger, Murdock and Elliott (1983).

all written at different times, it worked as a book. At the time, I'd collaborated very closely with Philip Elliott on Cold War discourse and its supporting intellectual substructure. We became great friends and his early death in 1983 was a terrible blow to me and a huge loss to the field.⁹ Our project on Eurocommunism made me very interested in Italy.

TS: And then you got the fellowship at the EUI in Florence?

PS: Yes, my best-ever academic year. It worked incredibly well for me because it just allowed me to explore some things, which is a luxury.

TS: You must have read widely, as always probably, but also in Italian. You picked up Fredrik Barth's work through a reference in Paolo Pistoï and brought his ethnographic work into a discussion about national identity formation.

PS: Yes, the boundary question. [...] At that time, the invention of the 'Italians' seemed so much more obviously tenuous than the invention of 'the Norwegians' or 'the British'. Now, 'Britishness' is in increasingly serious trouble. In Florence, I got really quite interested in reading a number of things around that theme. The key thing I did was to write a really long article, which was republished a few times, and translated, on the state, nation and identity issue.¹⁰ There was something about going to Italy, which made me very aware of the construction of nationality. It's so very apparent there. And then you're actually living it.

Then I came back to London. There were no professorships then in polytechnics, but they decided to create them at Thames, as elsewhere, and they appointed me to the first professorship in sociology there. Given the way the institution worked, it didn't change anything - it just gave you a title. But I think that was useful when the job came up at the University of Stirling: it was the first established film and media chair

⁹ On intellectuals, Eurocommunism and the Cold War, see Elliott and Schlesinger (1979a, 1979b, 1980). For a homage to their late friend Philip Elliott, see Golding, et al. (eds) (1986).

¹⁰ Schlesinger (1987).

at a university in the UK at the time. Moving to Scotland in 1989 also had a very important impact on my thinking about state and nation.

TS: Can I pick up on your insistence on the role of the state? When I read *Media, State and Nation* in the 1990s, I thought it was an extremely timely and original piece of work, bringing to light the role that Gramsci played in your thinking at the time.

PS: It is perhaps unfashionable to talk so much about Gramsci today, but when I think about the struggles within states, Gramsci's views on the war of position remain incredibly pertinent. The precise form of class struggle has mutated, but hasn't ceased, by any means.

TS: In your reflection on the role of the state, was there also a link to your interest and work on Latin America?

PS: Yes, I think working on Latin American cultural theory got me thinking differently about questions of 'development' and the role of the state as well as appreciating that there were different ways of thinking about relationships between institutionalized national culture and popular culture.

Perhaps the most important thing I did on Latin America, apart from editing a special issue of this journal and writing the introduction to Martín Barbero's book,¹¹ was to organize an 'encounter' at Stirling, which brought in Jesús Martín Barbero, Néstor García Canclini and Stuart Hall, plus a number of other people who've been important to the field.¹² The contributions were translated into Spanish by *Telos*, and by another journal in Mexico, and have circulated ever since. The introductory piece for that encounter on Latin America, which I wrote together with Nancy Morris,¹³ my colleague at that time, was also published in French, and recently has twice been revised for republication.

¹¹ *Media, Culture & Society* (1988); Schlesinger (1993).

¹² *Media Development* (1997) (The World Association of Christian Communication) for the proceedings.

¹³ Schlesinger and Morris (1998).

Europe

TS: Working with you on related issues on the European stage made me think that you had a quite realistic approach to European integration.¹⁴

PS: I hope so. One of the last serious things I wrote on this issue was about the ‘cosmopolitan temptation’.¹⁵

TS: Also ‘The Babel of Europe’?

PS: That came a bit earlier.¹⁶ When I was working with you and other colleagues – notably John Erik Fossum - at the ARENA Center in Oslo, I was conscious of how people arguing for a public sphere in Europe often overstated the case, and also underestimated the continuing importance of the state and the continued resilience of national identity. The process of ‘Europeanization’ has never had massive buy-in at a popular level. I am a cosmopolitan at heart: I would like to see a virtuous Europe and I would like to see it as a cosmopolitan space in a better world. But my reason tells me this is not going to happen, and many forces are working against it. I objected to the illusions of some intellectuals on this question.

TS: I think you positioned yourself very subtly criticizing Habermas for exaggerated optimism, and also criticizing those who simplistically thought about identity in that period. Like Karl Deutsch, and later Benedict Anderson, you were emphasizing the role of social communication and language, and it wasn’t always easy to place that card on the table. So I thought you were very important in nuancing the debate. Your work was perhaps best picked up and acknowledged by David Morley and Kevin Robbins in their book *Spaces of Identity* in 1995.¹⁷

PS: In that book, they were exceptionally alive to the contradictory nature of European space. Sadly, it is the potential for fractures in a possible common space

¹⁴ In the latter half of the 1990s, Tore Slaatta and Philip Schlesinger collaborated on projects on ‘Europeanisation’ and the media within the ARENA Programme at the University of Oslo.

¹⁵ Schlesinger (2007b); Schlesinger (2007c).

¹⁶ Schlesinger (2007a).

¹⁷ Morley and Robins (1995).

they identified that have been most evident of late. It's just so evident today that statehood and national identity show no signs of waning.

The sociology of journalism

TS: Your other very important work from the early 1990s is your book chapter on the sociology of journalism, which must be one of your most cited works?¹⁸

PS: Yes, it has been, although time and fashionable displacement have rather obliterated it of late. It came out of empirical work: nearly all my theoretical development comes out of empirical work, really, because doing it provokes me to consider the adequacy of theoretical accounting and how I might rethink some of these relationships.¹⁹

TS: Did Stuart Hall ever respond to your criticism of his 'primary definers' concept?

PS: No, he never did and never mentioned it to me. My criticism was picked up and for a while a body of work was influenced by that piece.

TS: You also brought back in some American classics on the source-journalist relationship?

PS: That was most evident in a reworking of the argument in *Reporting Crime*, which I wrote with Howard Tumber.²⁰ I had read a lot of this work earlier and thought I should look at it again and see where that took us. Previously, I had thought about these questions, but not theorized them in the same way. You can go back twenty, thirty years and find that people have been thinking about the same questions, but then you re-read them in the context of your own more recent work. And you see that on the one hand, the top-down nature of ideological transmission is being overstated and, on the other hand, agency is being understated. So, that was an attempt to offer a corrective to those two positions. I'm putting this much more clearly now than I probably could ever articulate at the time.

¹⁸ Schlesinger (1990).

¹⁹ For current work see Schlesinger and Doyle (2015) and Schlesinger (2015c).

²⁰ Schlesinger and Tumber (1994).

TS: Your argument makes a very clear theoretical and methodological statement about the imperative to include sources in the study of production of news.

PS: Indeed. If you look at the way various academic fields have developed since then - work on public relations and news management, for instance - they are quite congruent with what Howard and I were arguing at the time. One of the challenges now is how you deal with blogging, social media, and so-called user-generated content generally. There are bloggers, for instance, who achieve status and recognition and sometimes convert this into mainstream journalism. So, in some respects the lines between institutional and non-institutional journalism are quite permeable. Significant access to the public domain depends on cultural capital and recognition, which allow a source to get above a certain threshold and therefore have, if not a determining effect, at least a potentially significant effect in constructing agendas, or in disrupting them. Sustainability of presence, though, is another matter, and here institutional journalism still has the whip hand.

The question of source-media relations directly came out of the work I did with Howard on crime reporting, the authorities, and criminal justice lobbies. We were trying to understand how not only the police, but also criminologists and prison reform lobby groups, were all attempting in active ways to affect the agenda — and, to some extent, succeeding. Having read Bourdieu, not as closely as you, of course,²¹ but nonetheless with an understanding of how fields are structured and that strategies are pursued within fields, you can devise a conception of a space where not every thing is prescribed by any means, where there is scope for action and for conflict over outcomes.

Bourdieu and field theory

²¹ In several research projects, Slaatta has worked within a field theoretical framework and has translated two books by Pierre Bourdieu into Norwegian (Slaatta 2002 and 2007). For his most recent reflections on field theory in media and cultural production research, see Slaatta (2015b).

TS: I'm glad you mentioned Bourdieu, because I think your essay is one of the first attempts to bring Bourdieu's work into serious dialogue with the sociology of journalism.

PS: I don't know of anything else that did it at that time. I'd used Bourdieu's conception of the 'intellectual field' a few years earlier in a book chapter I wrote with Bob Lumley, comparing debates on media and political violence in Britain and Italy.²² I wrote the 'rethinking' piece in 1988 for an excellent workshop that another late friend, Marjorie Ferguson, had organized. She is also greatly missed and made her own important contribution.

TS: There's a very optimistic tone in your piece, actually: it's almost like a suggestion for further work. Did that ever happen?

PS: Well, it did and it didn't. The co-writing of *Reporting Crime* with Howard was delayed because we both changed jobs and I moved to Scotland. The reworked original ran differently because it was played against the empirical material. This deals with police public relations, for instance, and it attempts to analyse how a limited number of actors work competitively, with unequal resources, to gain airtime and space in newspapers. We were interested in the differentiated distribution of access to the public domain, basically, in fields that overlapped. So I think that was a follow-up. After I moved jobs, I did other things and never really got back to that kind of analysis. But if I were to develop some new thinking on journalism, a critical engagement with Bourdieu's work, among others, would be on my agenda.

TS: Looking at British cultural sociology as a field that is both in dialogue and in opposition to the French, I thought you had positioned yourselves differently from Stuart Hall, who sought to tie in the British cultural studies tradition with French structuralist theory. Still, I think you confirm the typical reception of Bourdieu as filtered through particular British traditions in social anthropology and ethnographic research. There is always a keeping of distance from Bourdieu's more theory-driven, scientific universe. Maybe also you are more interested, with a more Gramscian

²² Schlesinger and Lumley (1985).

emphasis perhaps, in what's going on in institutions and organizations than Bourdieu, and in the practical side, in line with the work you do as an intellectual in academia?

PS: Well, it's a particularly nice way of putting it, and so I will happily accept it. There's a trade-off between certain kinds of obvious academic recognition – citation, of course, giving keynotes - and doing things in an unrecognized way. In fact, unexpectedly, under our new research regime, my type of engagement beyond conventional academic work has now become recognized as 'impact', which is a somewhat ambiguous revaluation of values about which I've written critically.²³

Continuity and variety in academic work

TS: I think that tells us a lot about how a field develops and how we as academics might respond at different times. There can be both continuity and change in our orientations and professional trajectories. In this respect, I was thinking that while there is an impressive range of themes in your work there are also common threads. Having read your recent work on 'creativity'²⁴ and thinking about your earlier work, aren't there lines of continuity and some core problematics in your research?

PS: Do tell me, because I wish I knew how I work.

TS: I was thinking about your work on the intellectuals. Wouldn't you agree that intellectuals and 'creatives' are positioned somewhat similarly in society and that your research over the years often has shown a particular interest in understanding these positions and roles in society?

PS: I think that's right. Actually, even in my very first book, I wrote about Karl Mannheim and his theory of intellectual autonomy within the context of class struggle. I could see how that was relevant for analyzing the BBC's doctrine of impartiality. So I do think this interest has been there for quite a while, not least in work done for this

²³ Schlesinger 2013; Schlesinger, Selfe and Munro (2015b); and Schlesinger (2015c, in press).

²⁴ Schlesinger and Waelde (2011); Schlesinger and Waelde (2012); Waelde and Schlesinger (2011).

journal.²⁵ I was just thinking, as you mentioned it, that at an early stage I thought that journalists were a kind of intellectual.

I next went into this by looking at military intellectuals when I was writing about counter-insurgency. People are still dusting off the piece I wrote all those years ago.²⁶ My interest in the world of military intellectuals and how they related to media came out of my original work: it was an obvious extension from thinking about how the BBC covered Northern Ireland to thinking more generally about how media were seen by military thinkers in the wider ideological struggle over political violence.

So that was one strand, and then it mutated slightly, because in the 1970s and 1980s there was a lot of theorizing going on about intellectuals. One line was very much part of the Cold War, within the opposition to post-Stalinism – or whatever you want to call the system that prevailed in the Soviet Union and in East Central Europe at that time. The rise of various civic movements led by intellectuals gave rise in turn to theorizations of the intellectuals as transformers of society. It was a politics of intervention in various forms.²⁷ The other line concerned post-industrialism and has fed importantly into the ‘creative economy’ debate.

I’m now coming back again to thinking about intellectuals. Some of my most recent work has been focused on how we should understand ‘expertise’ and the world of think tanks in the cultural policy field and I am interested in analysing policy advisers as a kind of intellectual within government.²⁸ Expertise is the form it takes, but it’s very much about the role of intellectuals and how they figure in the way in which decisions are made and how a political discourse is constructed, whether it is rational or not, and whether or not evidence is important. I guess there is a deep underlying continuity, but it’s a distinctive take now. If I were a different kind of academic, I would have sat down and written a big book about this and tried to make the connections. But there’s something about the way I think that doesn’t incline me to do that.

²⁵ Schlesinger (1982, 2013).

²⁶ Schlesinger (1978b) republished in Schlesinger (1991).

²⁷ Schlesinger (1982).

²⁸ Schlesinger (2009); Schlesinger (2013).

For me, right now, this interest connects with the practical uses of expertise. I've had an interesting role, since 2004, of advising the UK communications regulator Ofcom about Scotland, and the role has transformed over time.²⁹ First, when I became chairman of the Advisory Committee for Scotland in 2009 and secondly, in the last few years as the political change in Scotland has affected the regulatory process.³⁰ There's a really fascinating discussion about how to address the shifts within the British state from the standpoint of a UK-wide public body. Of course, constitutional change and how to handle this is being discussed in all organizations of this kind. Addressing regulatory matters has become a major part of my working life. I spend the best part of a couple of months a year doing this sort of work because I believe that such involvement is important.

So, my own reflections as an academic are currently very grounded in a particular kind of practice. I am bound by the need to respect the confidentiality of what I learn. You obviously develop a sense of how these things work, which allows you to understand much better what kinds of consideration will probably be in play in similar sorts of situation and how certain kinds of discussion take place behind the scenes. There's a way in which an academic interest and an engagement in the public interest have come together. I wouldn't have been able to predict it, but this kind of work has reinforced my interest in intellectuals because it's also a practical one.

TS: And the impact of cultural politics on cultural production is becoming a stronger interest? I am thinking about your recent work with your Glasgow colleagues, titled *The Rise and Fall of the UK Film Council*.³¹

PS: The UK Film Council was the lead British film agency for ten years. It's really interesting trying to understand what happens behind the scenes and what is the rationale of film policy. We wrote about the Film Council, which was set up by a Labour government in 2000. Its formation had looked like the outcome of a rational

²⁹ Ofcom, the Office of Communications, established by statute in 2003, as the UK's 'converged' media regulator.

³⁰ Schlesinger became member for Scotland of Ofcom's Content Board, which has a UK-wide remit, in December 2014.

³¹ Doyle et al. (2015).

process. But key decisions had been made beforehand. Once it was established, the government found the ‘right’ people to run the body, and what really became apparent is that expertise was conceived, as embodied in the right people – the ones those in power can trust. The irony of this observation isn’t lost on me, by the way. Often, it doesn’t really matter what anyone else says about cultural policy, because they just get screened out, as I’ve shown in my work on how cultural policy is constructed.³² It’s very gratifying to demonstrate this empirically. This is how it works! The other part of the story is about the killing of the same organization, which was done in a hurried, politically expedient way by Conservative ministers in another government. So, you could actually say there was quite a considered process about setting up the Film Council, but it wasn’t as open as it appeared to be. And in the end, you had a very hasty decision, which was not open at all. What does this tell you about the policy process? Is this what we might expect of how government should operate in a democracy? What are the wider questions?³³ Maybe those will be some of the things I’ll be thinking about in my next work. In this kind of work we come back to quite classic concerns about how media and cultural organizations work.³⁴

TS: You and your colleagues have also recently published *Curators of Cultural Enterprise*, a book on what Bourdieu has called ‘cultural intermediaries’.³⁵

PS: Yes, this is about bodies that deliver support to cultural businesses, and how these fit into a wider policy regime. It’s a study of the ideology and practice of the ‘creative economy’, focused on a Scottish case but with a general import.

TS: Your move to Scotland in 1989. Was it deliberate, in the sense that you knew that this move would bring you back into contact with the questions of statehood and national identity?

PS: First and foremost, I was taking up a new job. But of course, I thought hard about it, and knew that this was certainly going to be quite a radical step. I knew Scotland

³² See Schlesinger (2009).

³³ See Doyle et al. (2015); Schlesinger (2015a); Schlesinger (2015b).

³⁴ For further reflections, see Schlesinger (2016).

³⁵ Schlesinger et al. (2015a).

quite well. Nonetheless, it felt like moving to a different country and I was very conscious that it was an upheaval for my family as well as me. But I've never regretted it – on the contrary. And I think there is a way — and it very rapidly became apparent in my work — in which the move radicalized how I thought about the relationship between nation and state. Just because of the lived experience of being in a nation that does not have a state. Of course, many Scots think it should have a state.³⁶

Obviously, having lived here longer than anywhere else for a continuous period of time, there's no question that if you allow it, Scottishness embeds itself in your practice, sentiments and thinking. Those of us who say, 'This is where I live, this is my home', have internalized the relationship of the periphery to the centre, and much else besides: it becomes your habitus, your sense of society..And that is not a narrowly political point, for, or against, independence. It's much wider and deeper than that. Some things I wrote almost immediately after coming to Scotland were really influenced by that shift. As you'll remember, we had a collaborative symposium for a couple of years with a Scottish-Norwegian exchange in Oslo. In 1999, I gave a lecture on devolution at the British embassy in Oslo, which in part led to another book, *Open Scotland?*³⁷

TS: So how are you involved now? Are you yourself an expert in the processes that are going on at the moment?

PS: Yes, in the field of communications, broadly understood, I'm certainly an expert and I have a practical involvement in how change in Scotland is being addressed by the UK communications regulator, Ofcom.

³⁶ The interview preceded the referendum on Scottish independence on 18 September 2014, when almost 45% of the electorate voted for the creation of a separate Scottish state and exit from the United Kingdom. It was revised for publication some months after the UK general election on 7 May 2015, when the Scottish National Party won 56 out of 59 Scottish seats at Westminster, with 50% of the popular vote.

³⁷ Schlesinger et al. (2001).

TS: You stepped down as director of CCPR,³⁸ and are presently deputy director of CREATE, the copyright centre.³⁹ How is such research positioned in our field?

PS: CREATE is driven by the macro-politics of research. In the UK, of late, there has been an emphasis on the so-called creative economy. There is a governmental view that the UK, because it's English speaking, and because it does have huge reservoirs of talent across the cultural fields — that's indisputable, I think — should capitalize on this in the global economy, since so many other industries are going to the dogs. If that premise is accepted – and you might question it, and I certainly do in its most simplistic formulations - there is a place for research and analysis, and for better understanding this dimension of social, economic and cultural life.

CREATE was set up as part of a wider wave. There are other centres which are less research oriented, more focused on what's now called 'knowledge exchange' between creative industries and academia. Copyright has become absolutely central to cultural trade and stands for and represents the commercialization of culture and its exploitation, as well as the protection of creators. That's where this all comes from, falling in line with a long-standing policy-orientation in the UK government that has been mediated by the Research Councils.

TS: Do you think that such developments threaten the autonomy of researchers?

PS: In many respects, I do. There's no absolute autonomy, of course. But there is a big difference, as I've argued, between being a problem-taker and a problem-maker. Let's take ethnography as one example: it involves a sensibility intent on discovering and uncovering what lies beneath the surface. If it knowingly tips into consultancy, you know you're sunk. And if you can no longer recognise the difference, you're hitting unfathomable depths.

TS: Thank you very much for your time and generous answers!

³⁸ The Centre for Cultural Policy Research at the University of Glasgow (CCPR), which Schlesinger directed from January 2007 to March 2013.

³⁹ CREATE, the RCUK Centre for Copyright and New Business Models in the Creative Economy, headquartered at the University of Glasgow. Schlesinger became Deputy Director in September 2012.

PS: Thank *you*. Nobody has read so much of my work with such care as you. To say that it's gratifying to be taken so seriously would be an understatement.

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