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Combining Methodologies in Cultural Studies

Main questions

- **Empirical research in cultural studies is structured by an interest in the interplay between lived experience, texts or discourses and the social context. How have recent historical and intellectual developments complicated these three areas of research?**
- **Why is the classical notion that 'valid' research is objective problematic? What alternative notions of validity are there? What are the criteria for valid or good research?**
- **What are the shortcomings of the notion of 'triangulation', according to which one combines different methodologies in order to get closer to a 'truth'? What are the shortcomings of the notion that different methodologies create different, possibly incommensurable 'truths'? How does a notion of combining methodologies in terms of fostering dialogues between different approaches help to get beyond positivist notion of one truth and relativist notion of multiple truths?**

The trademark of the cultural studies approach to empirical research has been an interest in the interplay between lived experience, texts or discourses, and the social context. One of the classical studies, addressing these three dimensions of social reality, is David Morley's research on audience responses to the *Nationwide* current affairs programme and its coverage of the British Miners' Strike in the 1970s (Morley and Brunsdon, 1999[1980, 1987]). Combining these three views allowed Morley to come up with new insights on the 'active' nature of media audiences and the mediated, social and political dynamics of a

historical turning point. The task of this book is to outline and discuss ways of thinking, doing and writing research in cultural studies, taking the three-faceted interest in lived realities, discursive mediation, and the social and political landscape as a starting point.

However, as cultural studies has matured, and as several historical developments have made our social reality quite different from the one in the 1970s, some challenging questions have been raised about the feasibility of its project. Three fundamental questions have been particularly pertinent to research methodology. The first one asks: Has our interest in cultures that are radically different from our own, such as working-class or non-Western cultures, been warranted, and can we understand and do justice to these cultures? The second, and closely related, methodological question asks: How can we critically analyze culture in a situation where we as scholars, and research as an institution, are an integral part of this culture and its struggles? The third question takes a slightly different task and asks: Is culture the most important topic to investigate in the face of gruelling global economic inequality and exploitation?

To illustrate what these three questions mean, one may ask them from Morley's study. First, one can ask, to what extent Morley attended to the nuances and contradictions of working-class life, and to what extent he read his hypothesis that working-class is bound to 'resist' conservative media coverage from his focus groups. Second, one may ask to what extent Morley's hypothesis was informed by the Marxist idea that there is a correspondence between a socioeconomic position and an ideological one, and whether this made him turn a blind eye to other issues that did not fit the theoretical framework. Third, one may ask to what extent interest in cultural struggles – such as media content and interpretation – has directed attention away from analyzing the complex, global, economic and policy processes that shape industrial disputes and industries, such as mining. These questions do not, of course, render Morley's landmark study irrelevant. They simply point out that there are alternative ways of studying lived experience, discourses and the social context, and that these alternative approaches are becoming increasingly prominent in cultural studies.

This book is structured around the three-faceted research interest of cultural studies in the lived, discursive and social/global dimensions of contemporary reality. However, besides discussing the classical ways of studying these three areas of life, it pays particular attention to new research approaches, such as new ethnography, genealogical research and analysis of globalization, that take seriously, and aim to respond to, the three questions that have been posed to cultural studies. However, before I proceed to discuss these methodological programmes, I take a detour to the history of cultural studies that helps to clarify the roots of its particular methodological approach as well as the roots of the contemporary methodological questions or challenges.

Histories of cultural study

Cultural studies emerged from the political and intellectual climate and situation of the Great Britain of the 1970s. This was a time, when the field of social research was structured by hard-nosed positivist empirical inquiry, often of a functionalist ilk, and traditional Marxist political economy (Hall, 1982). The more right-wing or 'administrative' research, doing surveys and small-group research, aimed to prove that pluralism and democracy have become a reality in postwar North America and Western Europe. On the contrary, the leftist intelligentsia, such as the Frankfurt School, did a series of piercing criticisms of popular culture and opinions to prove that the postwar consumer culture and media had killed all social criticism and dissent and created a nearly fascist 'mass society' (e.g. Adorno *et al.*, 1950; Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979; Held, 1980).

In this somewhat polarized situation, cultural studies carved itself a space between and beyond these two positions. To do this, it welded together humanistic, structuralist and New Left Marxist philosophies (Hall, 1980). The humanist bent in cultural studies aimed to understand and capture the creative potential of people's lived worlds, such as working-class culture (Hoggart, 1992[1957]). Structuralism and structuralist methods, such as semiotics, focused attention on linguistic patterns and tropes that recur in texts, such as popular culture, and that shape our thinking. New Leftism brought an interest in examining the connection between lived experience and/or a body of texts and the larger social, political and economic environment. These three philosophical currents enabled cultural studies to articulate a mediating space between right-wing optimism and left-wing pessimism that allowed the paradigm to examine how people's everyday life was strife with creative and critical potential, while their lives and imagination were also constrained by problematic cultural ideologies as well as structures of social inequality. This 'middle stance' informed the classical Birmingham-period works on media audiences (Ang, 1985; Morley and Brunsdon, 1999[1980, 1987]), subcultures (Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Hebdige, 1976, 1988), and the cultures of working-class boys and girls (Willis, 1977; McRobbie, 2000) (for overviews see: Hall *et al.*, 1980; Gurevitch *et al.*, 1982).

However, as the political and philosophical roots of cultural studies indicate, the methodological project has been riddled with tensions from the start. One cannot, without running into contradictions, bring together a phenomenological or hermeneutic desire to 'understand' the creative lived world of another person or a group of people, and the distanced, critical structuralist interest in 'analyzing' linguistic tropes, which guide people's perceptions and understanding. Furthermore, neither the interest in lived realities or the cultures and languages that mediate our perception of reality bode well with the tendency to make statements about the social and political situation, which is always, to an extent, wedded to a realist quest to find out how the world or reality simply 'is'.

In the early days of cultural studies these contradictions could still be smoothed by the positivist notion of scientific objectivity. However, in the early twenty-first century the discrepancies between the three classic areas of research in cultural studies have been both magnified and blurred by developments often grouped under terms, such as postmodernity, late modernity, post-industrialism, postcolonialism, late capitalism, more recently, globalization and neo-liberalism (e.g. Harvey, 1989; Jameson, 1991; Rose, 1999; Tomlinson, 1999). Even if discussions around these phenomena have sometimes become markers of changing intellectual fashions, they point to important historical and intellectual processes or shifts that have changed social reality and research.

First, since the 1960s, women, blacks and various postcolonial people, and their movements, have accused institutions, including the state, education, media and so on, of institutionalized discrimination. They have also accused that research, which has always had a particular interest in underprivileged groups, has not depicted the realities of women, ethnic minorities or postcolonial people but used them to back up the scholar's theoretical and political projects, ranging from colonialism to Marxism and liberal humanist feminism (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Said, 1995[1978]). Second, the increasing media saturation of our everyday life, ranging from the long hours we spend watching television to the more recent Internet surfing, has made our everyday life and experience more 'virtual' (Baudrillard, 1983). These new technologies and experiences have eroded our faith in the ability of media or science to 'objectively' describe reality for us, making us critically, or even ironically, aware of the way in which all understanding of the world is mediated by cultural images and discourses. Third, the late twentieth century witnessed a series of social, political and economic processes that undermined faith in postwar political and economic arrangements and ideologies. The collapse of state-run socialism in 1989 in Eastern Europe has been a blow and cause of reorientation for various leftist projects. Still, the Western postwar dreams of 'progress' or 'modernization', which were supposed to spread Western prosperity and democracy across the globe, were also dashed as these dreams never came true. Thus, we have awakened to the early twenty-first century, structured by a new division between an exhilarated talk about multiculturalism and the possibilities of creating and disseminating alternative, previously silenced knowledges and cultures, and steep inequalities and mistrust and feuding between different groups of people (Castells, 1996, 1997, 1998).

Cultural studies as an intellectual and political project has actively played into and out of these historical and social developments. At the same time, these developments have given rise to new research and methodological orientations within, and on the borders of, cultural studies. Scholars grouped under the banner of new ethnography have developed new collaborative or dialogic modes of research that aim to be truer to the lived worlds of others. Poststructuralism has led to self-reflexive and genealogical analytical strategies, which critically investigate the historical, social and political commitments of

those discourses that direct people's, including scholars', understanding of themselves and their projects. Analyses of globalization have come up with more 'complex' ways of making sense of economic, political and so on developments, which challenge traditional simpler or linear modes of analysis and prediction.

These new lines of inquiry arise from the same current historical situation, marked by greater ambiguity. Yet, they run into tensions with one another in a similar way that the three methodological currents contradicted each other in early cultural studies. The new ethnographic quest to be truthful to the lived realities of other people runs into a contradiction with the poststructuralist aim to critically analyze discourses that form the very stuff out of which our experiences are made. The aim to understand the 'real' complex, contemporary global economic and political processes and structures is also not easily combined with the new ethnographic and poststructuralist insistence that there are multiple 'realities'. The question that these contradictions and challenges raise is whether we can still find some common ground to determine what constitutes 'good' or 'valid' research. In traditional methodological parlance, 'validity' is the beginning and end of all research, referring to a series of litmus tests that determine whether the research is 'true' or 'objectively' describes how things 'really' are. The current discussions point out that there are multiple realities, raising the question, whether research is a matter of opinion. If this was so, there would be no point in writing methodology books. I argue that there are still guidelines on what constitutes, if not true, then 'good' and valid research.

On validity

Mead and the 'truth' about Samoa

Before moving on to explain what I and others have meant by good or valid research, I will take my reader on a brief trip to a different time and place: to Margaret Mead's research on Samoa of the 1920s (Mead, 1929). The reason for doing this is that Mead's classical anthropology has become the focus of one of the major disputes over validity, as, soon after Mead's death, Freeman (1983) pronounced that her work was totally non-valid, wrong, or simply a gross lie. This debate, which has become a staple of many books on research methods (e.g. Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Seale, 1999), usefully illustrates the issues and problems associated with traditional forms of validity, and helps to pave the way for a discussion on new validities.

Mead's book, *Coming of age in Samoa: A psychological study of primitive youth for Western civilization* was published in 1929. In the book Mead sets out to study adolescence, asking: 'Are the disturbances which vex our adolescents due to the nature of adolescence itself or the civilization?' (Mead, 1929: 11). The study focused on adolescent females, with whom Mead as a young woman felt affinity, and she concluded that, unlike in the West, adolescence in Samoa was

not a time of conflict and strife and that the budding sexuality of the young women was not a cause of great anxiety or repression. The opening paragraph of the book gives one a flavour of the picture of Samoan sexual life she painted:

> As the dawn begins to fall among the soft brown roofs and the slender palm trees stand out against a colourless, gleaming sea, lovers slip home from trysts beneath the palm trees or in the shadow of beached canoes, that the light may find each sleeper in his appointed place. (1929: 14)

In 1983 Derek Freeman published *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The making and unmaking of an anthropological myth* that set out to refute Mead's fieldwork. He argued that Samoa was not the harmonious and sexually permissive primitive society Mead had depicted, but that Samoans held premarital virginity in high esteem and that occurrences of violence and rape were commonplace on the islands. Freeman's notion of Samoan sexual mores is captured in the following:

> On a Sunday in June 1959, Tautalafua, aged 17, found his 18-year-old classificatory sister sitting under a breadfruit tree at about 9:00 in the evening with Vave, a 20-year-old youth from another family. He struck Vave with such violence as to fracture his jaw in two places. For this attack he was later sentenced to six weeks' imprisonment. (1983: 237)

A heated public and scholarly debate ensued the controversy. Different stakeholders debated the issue in *New York Times*, and in a special issue of the *American Anthropologist* (Brady, 1983), a series of experts on Samoa attacked Freeman. They criticized Freeman for comparing Mead's fieldwork in the small, remote island of Manu'a with his own work on the main island of Upolu. It was also pointed out that the Christian missionary influence would have had a greater impact on Samoan culture in the 1940s and 1960s when Freeman conducted his research than it did in the 1920s when Mead visited the islands (Weiner, 1983). Furthermore, it was noted that whereas Mead, as a young woman, used adolescent girls as informants, Freeman's description derived from adult men of rank (Schwartz, 1983).

However, the greatest strife between the two scholars was their paradigmatic orientation. Wedded to a culturalist paradigm, Mead set out to argue that behaviours (such as adolescence or sexuality), which have been thought to be shared by all humanity, have turned out to be the result of civilization, 'present in the inhabitants of one country, absent in another country, and this without a change of race' (Mead, 1929: 4). Mead's culturalist project, with its (sexually) liberalist undertones, was framed by, and stood in opposition to, the 1920s belligerently racist eugenic movement that explained variation in human behaviour in terms of genetic differences. Freeman, on the contrary, represents a later sociobiological stance. This is illuminated in his concluding chapter in which he, referring to certain violent events in Samoa, argues that in such circumstances conventional behaviours are dropped and people are taken over by 'highly emotional and impulsive behavior that is animal-like in its ferocity' (1983: 301). In his view

this aggression is a proof of 'much older phylogenetically given structures' that define behaviour in addition to culture. Thus, where Mead finds a harmonious culture, Freeman finds 'primal' or biological aggression.

The paradigmatic differences between the two authors are also reflected in their writing. Mead's book is impressionistic in style, it reads, at times, as a romantic travelogue, aiming to capture the ethos of Samoan life. On the contrary, Freeman obeys the logic of classical scientific realistic reporting and his 'refutation' of Mead, strife with minute numerical details such as precise times of the day, reads like a police-report or a court case.

What this debate tells us, is not whether Mead or Freeman was 'right' or 'wrong' about Samoa. It rather illuminates that the 'truth' about Samoa is complicated by, at least, three issues. First, the fluidity of Samoa itself (different opinions, groups, historical change, and so on), second by the commitments that frame the research of the scholars (historical, political and theoretical investments), and third by the language (impressionistic or realist genre) used to describe Samoa. To elaborate on these three issues, first, Samoa does not hold still as a fixed object of study but ends up multifaceted, contradictory (Shore, 1983: 943) or amoeba-like, changing from one angle and instant to another. There are young girls, village elders, myths, customs, different rules, institutionalized and informal trespasses, rank-based and gendered social and political divisions, struggles and perspectives, all constantly evolving and transforming. Second, the anthropologist's vision is coloured by her and his personal gendered, raced and aged inclinations and paradigmatic and political allegiances. As Clifford (1986) notes, both Mead and Freeman render Samoa a parable or allegory for the West, and their oppositional readings end up encapsulating the classic juxtapositions harboured in the Western notion of the 'primitive': Apollonian sensual paradise and Dionysian violence and danger. Third, the language proves not to be a neutral medium of communication but part of the message. Mead's broad-brushed impressionistic style paints a dreamy, soft-shaped portrait of Samoa. Freeman's use of hard-core objectivist realism presents us a police-report on the aggressive Samoans and a court-case against Mead, ending up no less ideological and political than Mead's writing.

There are many cases similar to the Mead-controversy, some of the most famous ones have challenged W.F. Whyte's *Street corner society* (Whyte, 1955[1943]; *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 1992; Whyte, 1993), and, most lately, Rigoberta Menchú's autobiography on the Guatemalan genocide (Menchú, 1984; Beverley, 1999; Stoll, 1999; Arias, 2001). These continuous debates illuminate the ways in which we continue to be infatuated with fighting whose research is 'true' and 'valid', and whose is 'false', or 'biased'.

From validity to validities

The Mead controversy is grounded in the positivist notion of science, which understands the purpose of research to be the creation of true and objective

knowledge of social reality, following a scientific method. The goal of positivist research is to produce valid results, understood to be nothing less than 'the truth' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Thus, the argument became, whether Mead or Freeman were telling the 'truth', and on what grounds.

The positivist criterion of truthfulness or validity is understood to be universal. This means that the same rules of truthfulness apply, whether the research wants to capture the 'objective reality' (social facts, such as economic developments) or people's subjective or intersubjective experiences (the meanings people give to their lives and actions) (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000: viiii). The Mead–Freeman debate concerned both the general truth about Samoan society and its ethos as well as what Samoans thought of their life and activities, and Freeman argued that Mead got them both 'wrong'.

The general goal of truthfulness is, in positivist methodology, translated into a series of detailed procedures and checks. I am not going to delve into these checks at length (for good overviews see: Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Seale, 1999). Yet, the Mead–Freeman controversy reveals their problems. One of the central criteria for validity in research is 'reliability', which refers to the idea that if a different scholar conducted the same research, (s)he would come up with the same or similar results. However, one can imagine that if one would send both Mead and Freeman to Samoa, they would never agree or come up with an 'inter-rater' consensus. Their theoretical and political commitments are simply so different that they are practically looking at different Samoas. Another criterion for validity in research is neutrality, which refers to the need to make sure research is not being biased by the scholar's personal or political commitments. The Mead–Freeman controversy illustrates that scholarship, like any social activity, is bound to be part of a historical, social, political and theoretical environment and its commitments. Furthermore, looking at the different genres of writing of Mead and Freeman, highlights the fact that the language we use to report our findings makes neutrality impossible, as all language is social and cultural and never a transparent medium that could describe the reality 'as it is' (MacCabe, 1973).

Despite the fact that we can hardly come up with a 'truth' about Samoa, there are still better and worse ways of conducting research in settings like Samoa or anywhere else. Trying to imagine what guidelines and criteria for good research would look like after traditional validity no longer seems feasible, scholars have begun to suggest alternative notions of validity (e.g. Lincoln and Guba, 1985, 1994) and multiple validities (Lather, 1993). Talking about validities, instead of validity, has two advantages. First, it draws attention to the fact that the theories, methods and modes of writing that underpin our research open up different and always partial and political views on reality. Instead of considering this an outrage, scholarship suggesting multiple validities ask us to be more critically aware of what drives our research. Second, acknowledging that there is more than one way of making sense of social phenomena, asks one to come up with a more multidimensional, nuanced, and tentative way of understanding one's object of study. The battle over the validity

of Mead's research on Samoa ended up in a shouting match over whether Samoa was or is an Apollonian Paradise or a Dionysian Hell. Multiple validities suggest that we should approach reality in less simplistically dichotomous ('true' or 'false'; 'right' or 'wrong'; 'heaven' or 'hell') and more complex terms.

The notion of multiple validities does not mean that there are no rules for conducting research. It simply means that rather than one universal rule that applies everywhere there are different rules, and we need to be aware how they make us relate to reality differently. Drawing on the Mead-controversy, the methodological focus of cultural studies as well as some other works on alternative validities (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Lather, 1993), one can delineate three broadly different methodological approaches that each subscribe to a different notion of validity. The first, hermeneutic methodological approach obeys what I would term a 'dialogic' validity, which means that it evaluates research in terms of how well it manages to capture the lived realities of others. Thus, it would assess the value of research on Samoa in terms of how well it manages to be true to the lived reality of Samoans. The second, poststructuralist methodological approach subscribes to what I would term 'deconstructive' validity, and it assesses the value of research in terms of how well it unravels problematic social discourses that mediate the way in which we perceive reality and other people. Thus, poststructuralist research would assess the value of research on Samoa in terms of how thoroughly it unmasks the colonialist tropes that describe Samoa in terms of 'primitive' sensuality and danger. The third, realist or contextualist methodological approach inheres to a contextualist validity, which evaluates research in terms of how well it understands the social, economic and political context and connections of the phenomenon it is studying. Thus, it would assess the value of research on Samoa in terms of how thoroughly and critically it maps the internal and external structures of power and inequality, such as rank-hierarchies, forms of livelihood, colonialist politics, trade and culture, that shape the life of Samoan village elders and adolescent girls.

These three methodological approaches, and concomitant validities, roughly correspond to the 'humanistic', 'structuralist' and New Leftist of 'contextualist' bents in early cultural studies. There are also parallels between the three 'new' methodological approaches and validities and older notions of validity. However, despite these continuities the three methodologies/validities push research in cultural studies and social sciences more generally to new directions. In what follows, I will discuss how these new approaches/validities both continue and break away from older ways of doing research.

Alternative validities

Dialogic validity

To start with discussing, in more detail, the hermeneutic approach and accompanying 'dialogic' validity, it can be said that it evaluates research in terms of

how truthfully it captures the lived worlds of the people being studied (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, 1994; Lincoln, 1995). This broad principle can be further broken down to three specific criteria for 'good' or valid research:

1 *Truthfulness*. Research should do justice to the perspectives of the people being studied, so that they can, in the main, agree with it. This entails collaborative forms of research, such as measures to allow the people being studied, such as Samoans, to have a say in the way in which they are studied and represented (in traditional research parlance the latter is referred to as 'member check' (e.g. Seale, 1999)).
2 *Self-reflexivity*. Researchers should be reflexive about the personal, social, and paradigmatic discourses that guide the way they perceive reality and other people. This entails that scholars need to try to become aware of the cultural baggage, such as notions of the 'primitive', that mediates their understanding of different worlds.
3 *Polyvocality*. Researchers should be conscientious that they are not studying *a* lived reality but *many*. This means that they should make sure that they include the views or voices of major 'stakeholders', such as young girls as well as village elders (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), trying to be true to their diversity as well as relations and tensions between them.

Dialogic validity is reminiscent of the old ethnographic goal of capturing the 'native's point of view'. Where it departs from the old ethnographic project is that it does not claim to have access to some privileged 'objective' position, from which to describe the lives of others. Dialogism does not view research in terms of describing other worlds from the outside, but in terms of an encounter or interaction between different worlds. The main criteria of validity of this approach then is how well the researcher fulfils the ethical imperative to be true to, and to respect, other people's lived worlds and realities.

Deconstructive validity

Poststructuralist research and the accompanying deconstructive validity evaluates research in terms of how well it manages to unravel social tropes and discourses that, over time, have come to pass for a 'truth' about the world. There are three poststructuralist strategies to unravel discourses that mediate our understanding of the world that constitute three different criteria for good research within the tradition:

1 *Postmodern excess*. The postmodern or Baudrillardian (1980; also Lather, 1993) notion of 'excess' of discourses points out that there is a potentially infinite number of 'truths' or ways of approaching the reality. Thus, research is assessed in terms of how it manages to highlight the multiple ways in which a particular phenomenon can be understood, in order to destabilize any 'fixed' understanding of it. The Freeman–Mead controversy is an illustration of postmodern

questioning, as it highlights that there are myriad, different 'truths' about Samoa.

2 *Genealogical historicity*. Genealogy, associated with the work of Foucault (1984), challenges truths by exposing their historicity. Thus, research is evaluated in terms of how well it unravels the way in which certain taken-for-granted truths are not universal or timeless but products of specific historical and political agendas. An example or genealogical research is the analysis of the historical, political and theoretical commitments of Mead's and Freeman's works, which make them render Samoa very different.

3 *Deconstructive critique*. Deconstruction, associated with the work of Derrida (1976), aims to question the binaries that organize our thought, in order to expose their hidden politics. Thus, research is evaluated in terms of how it manages to unearth the constitutive binaries that underpin our understanding of a particular phenomenon. An example would be an analysis of the constitutive binary between the sensual or aggressive nature of 'primitive' societies and the 'civilized constraint' of the Western world that interlace both Mead's and Freeman's works.

Poststructuralist critique may, occasionally, bring into mind the traditional research endeavour of uncovering 'bias' in research or, for example, in news coverage. However, poststructuralism parts from this line of inquiry in that it argues that there is no 'unbiased' way of comprehending the world. Therefore, its notion of good research is twofold. First, good or valid research is understood to expose the historicity, political investments, omissions and blind spots of social 'truths'. Second, good or valid research is also understood to be aware of its own historical, political and social investments, continuously reflecting back on its own commitments.

Contextual validity

Research on social context and concomitant contextualist validity refer to the capability of research to locate the phenomenon it is studying within the wider social, political, and even global, context. In this sense contextualism is committed to a form of realism, that is bound to make statements of how the world 'really is'. This realist underpinning contradicts the hermeneutic and poststructuralist methodologies and validities, which both underline that there are multiple 'realities' and that the world looks different when observed from a different social place or historical time. Yet, both the dialogism and poststructuralism are driven by a democratic and egalitarian impulse to listen to multiple voices and to challenge authoritative discourses. When these approaches argue that they are listening to, perhaps, silenced voices or challenging authoritative discourses, they claim that some people are more, and some are less, powerful and able to get their voices heard, and some discourses are more powerful and more authoritative than others. In order to make those claims, scholars need to resort to some notion of social and historical context and structures of inequality and

need some criteria on how to analyze them. However, contextual validity not only refers to a requirement to comprehend the social context but also to a requirement to comprehend the way in which research is located within and shapes this context. The twofold nature of the task of capturing the social context in research can be encapsulated by two criteria for contextualist research:

1 *Sensitivity to social context*. This refers to the duty of scholarship to carefully analyze, for example, historical events, statistics and developments, using and comparing different resources and views. This simply means that research cannot be haphazard or based on a hunch. Studying Samoa from this perspective would mean to carefully analyze the history of the islands, their social structures and interaction with the outside world through commerce, missionaries, even anthropologists. Even if both Mead and Freeman discuss the social context of Samoa, this fades into the background against their project of capturing the 'ethos' of a relatively timeless 'primitive' society.
2 *Awareness of historicity*. This criteria refers to the ability of research to understand its own historicity. Thus, research on Samoa would need to be aware of the ways in which it is implicated in the social context of which Samoa forms a part, such as structures of colonialism or anti-colonialist struggles (see Bhaskar, 1979). This means that social science and its object, historical society, cannot be separated, and analyzing the social context also enables research to become aware, and be able to critically evaluate, its role in it.

Cultural studies has sometimes been hesitant to say much about, for example, social or economic structures, as it argues that we cannot describe those structures without the mediation of culture and language. However, cultural studies frequently makes reference to how this or that cultural practice consolidates class, race or gender inequalities and so on. What the notion of contextual validity underlines is that we need to be careful about those statements. For example, my doctoral student recently set out to investigate the historical facts about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in order to contextualize her analysis of films on it. She soon found out that there was not 'a' history on the conflict but multiple complex and controversial histories. This underlines two things. First, we should analyze historical and social 'facts' carefully, attending to details, complicated processes, and different perspectives, and not to go with popular assumptions or maybe jingoistic basic textbooks. Second, we need to be aware that our accounts are never separate from history but always historical and political, being shaped by and shaping the landscape we are studying.

The list of validities discussed is not meant to be exhaustive. It is designed for the purposes of this book to outline some central modes of doing qualitative research in cultural studies. The different notions of validity draw attention to the unfeasibility of the notion of validity as singular 'truth'. The list of validities also illuminate the fact that, abandoning singular validity, does not entail a

state of 'lawlessness' in research, but that they each set forth specific guidelines, rules and criteria for good research.

Combining methodologies

Triangulation

Looking at the list of three different types of methodological approaches and their accompanying different validities begs a question: Is there a way to bring the three approaches together in a research project? After all, combining methodologies is required if one is to continue the cultural studies tradition of studying the interplay between lived experience, discourses and texts and the historical, social and political context.

One does not, obviously, always need to combine methodologies. There are many research projects that obey only the rules of one of the validities. Some new ethnographic projects are concentrated on working to be true to the lived worlds of, often disenfranchised, people. The same way, many critical analyses of media texts mainly aim to criticize the way in which they construct authoritative truths. As has been said earlier, being true to lived realities of people may be difficult to combine with critical analysis of the discourses that form part of the people's lived realities. The same way, an analysis of global and social structures may contradict, or simply surpass, the people's local or lived sense of their environment.

However, if one wants to combine approaches, one needs a framework that helps to do this. Traditional social and cultural inquiry usually refers to techniques of combining different theories, methods, sources and material, in terms of 'triangulation' (Denzin, 1989; Flick, 1998). The classical aim of triangulation is to combine different kinds of material or methods to see whether they corroborate one another. Thus, one could, for example, complement one's participant observation on, for example, Samoa, by consulting documents and colonial archives, in order to find out whether the people 'lie' or misremember things (this is, in fact, quite close to the way in which Freeman understood and conducted his project to refute Mead). All in all, the classical aim of triangulation is to get a more accurate or truthful picture of the social world. This aim reflects the original meaning of triangulation, which comes from navigation where it refers to the use of different bearings to give the correct position of an object (Silverman, 1992: 156).

Interpreted as a pursuit of truth, triangulation is not particularly useful for combining the three methodological approaches, discussed above. This is because the basic goal of these approaches is to problematize any simple notion of 'truth'. Dialogism aims to be true to the lived worlds' of the people being studied, and rather than trying to find whether girls or village elders spoke the 'truth', would aim to capture the different worldviews of both. Genealogy

would point out that one cannot find a truth from, for example, colonial archives, as they are locales that 'produce' historical and highly politically invested truths about people and places (as 'unruly' and so on) to be 'governed'. Part of Freeman's 'evidence' on the aggression of Samoans, for instance, comes from colonial administration's reports on 'troubles' on the islands. While it is quite feasible to think that there is violence on the islands, these kinds of archives are bound to focus on it, as they are logs on the 'managing' of the islands. This finally brings one to the contextualist insight that research can never be objective as it is always part of and shapes the social landscapes, such as structures of colonialism, that it studies.

To understand the specific nature of positivist triangulation, and to be able to compare it with other ways of combining methodologies, it is useful to analyze how it understands ontology (the nature of reality) and epistemology (the nature of knowledge). The classical positivist understanding of reality is that it is 'fixed'. Thus, in classical physics, the physical reality is understood to be a knowable and relatively stable 'object' that can be accurately observed through the use of scientific methods (microscopes, calculations and so on). The same way, in positivist social science, the society is understood to be an observable entity that stays put and can be captured using statistics, surveys and interviews. The trouble with this ontological position is that, as we have seen in the Mead debate, reality does not hold still, but is amoeba-like, multifaceted, evolving, looking different from different angles (from the perspectives of the young girls, village elders, colonial archives etc.).

The ontological commitment to the idea that reality is a fixed object that exists separately from research informs the positivist epistemological goal of research to 'reflect' reality. According to positivism, the reason for using methods (conversation analysis, semiotics, statistical analysis) is to get closer to 'truth' about the reality. Different methods are viewed as 'magnifying glasses' that help the scholar to see the reality more clearly, or in a less biased and more systematic manner. The aim of combining different methods is to use different lenses to calibrate an optimally clear vision. As a consequence, the positivist discussion on how to do research is often quite technical, aiming to perfect the method's ability to capture reality correctly. However, the idea of research that exists outside, or uses methods to beam itself above, reality is not feasible, as research is a social activity. Both Mead's and Freeman's research are heavily invested in the social agendas of their time, rendering Samoa a parable for their politics (Clifford, 1986). Instead of considering this an outrage, one could ask how else could it be, and what would be the purpose of social inquiry without a social agenda. Yet, the trouble with the positivist denial of a political agenda is that it becomes coveted; pushed to the sphere of eternal truths instead of political debate and decision-making. This is evident in the way Mead and Freeman frame their research as a timeless and unbiased 'truth' on a 'primitive' society, instead of situating their commentary on Samoa as part of heated, highly political and controversial (post)colonial debates over human nature (see Table 1.1).

TABLE 1.1 *Paradigms of combining methodologies*

Paradigms	Ontology	Epistemology	Metaphor	Goal of Research	Politics
Triangulation	Fixed reality	Reflect reality	Magnifying glass	Truth	No bias
Prisms	Fluid reality	Social construction of reality	Prism refracting vision	Conveying multiple realities	Pluralist science and society
Material semiotic	Interactive reality	Material/ semiotic construction of reality	Prism diffracting light	Creating egalitarian realities	Egalitarian science and society
Dialogue	Interactive reality	Material/ semiotic construction of reality	Dialogue	Dialogues between multiple realities	Egalitarian and pluralist science and society

The positivist ontological and epistemological programme has lately been widely questioned. In physics, so called 'quantum physics' has illustrated that research into physical phenomena does not merely describe them but interferes or alters them. In social science this is all the more obvious, so that Marxism was a scientific project that not only described nineteenth-century industrial societies but also profoundly transformed them, informing both the establishment of state-socialism in Eastern Europe and Western welfare states (Bhaskar, 1979). Because of the inherently political nature of research, I underline that this book is primarily on 'methodology' and not 'methods'. The notion of methodology draws attention to the fact that the tools and approaches (methods) that we use to make sense of reality, are not mere neutral techniques but come with a knowledge or ideology ('logos') that often makes the 'reality' seem quite different. My aim is not to help the reader to get rid of this inherent 'bias' of all research but to become more aware of the worldviews and politics embedded in our research approaches, in order to advance better and more egalitarian research and better and more egalitarian realities.

Research as a prism

Richardson (2000) has suggested that, instead of talking about triangulation, we should begin to talk about combining different ways of doing and writing research in terms of 'crystallization'. Crystals, Richardson points out, are prisms. Therefore, crystals not only 'reflect externalities' but 'refract them within themselves' (2000: 934). What the metaphor of crystals brings into light is the way in which reality changes when we change the methodological angle or perspective from which we look at it.

The notion of research prisms subscribes to an ontology and epistemology that are quite different from the positivist ones. It views reality as fluid (ontology) and, rather than seeing the task of research to accurately describe this reality, it argues that research creates or socially constructs the realities it studies (epistemology). Rather than view research as describing a reality from the outside, this perspective locates research within reality, as one of the processes that 'makes' realities. Often, the prismatic vision of research is committed to projects that bring to the fore multiple perspectives on reality, or multiple realities, with the specific aim of challenging the old idea that there is one privileged way of looking at reality, or one reality. Scholars working within this paradigm have been particularly interested in creating 'alternative' realities that contradict accepted scientific truths. Part of this project has been to give voice to silenced or subordinated knowledges or realities. Academics, subscribing to the idea of research as a prism, point out that science has historically been, and still often continues to be, a closed realm of white, privileged, Western men, who make definitions and decisions with far-reaching consequences for our lives, all in the name of unbiased scientific 'objectivity' (for general critiques, see Haraway, 1997: 24–31; also Harding, 1991, 1993; Latour, 1993). Consequently, they have developed ways of doing and writing scholarship that would be truer to, for example, women's and non-Western people's ways of relating to, and communicating about, the world (see also Narayan and George, 2001). An example of what this means is a poem Richardson (1992) has written on the life-story of a woman, 'Louisa May', whom she had interviewed as part of a project on unwed mothers. Through the poem, Richardson wanted to convey Louisa May's life in her own terms and in her own Southern rhythm, without reducing her to statistical, sociological categories of class, educational level and so on. Thus, methodologies and writing strategies are not seen as means of reflecting reality, presumably 'objectively', but as devices that the scholar uses to create and convey different realities (see Table 1.1).

Coming back to the three methodological approaches and validities I outlined above, the notion of a prism would suit combining dialogic validity (conveying new/neglected realities) and deconstructive validity (dismantling old authoritative, such as male anthropological or sociological, realities). Both the dialogic and deconstructive enterprises draw attention to the way in which language and research 'create' different realities, providing tools for both critically analyzing mainstream realities as well as for creating alternative ones.

However, the idea of prisms sits uneasily with contextualist validity. If one thinks of context in terms of, for example, global, economic structures of inequality, one can say that one can view them very differently from different perspectives. Yet, there is also a stubbornly 'real' dimension to global structures that is similar everywhere; even if economic and political processes are experienced in perhaps highly different ways by different people and in different places, they still affect all of us, binding our realities and fates together. The idea of methodologies as prisms that convey different realities often views its task to

be the understanding of difference or comprehending that the way in which we perceive the world is just one possible one. One can say that it aims to enhance comprehension or conversations between different realities, enabling us to, for example, feel empathetic affinity with a different world, such as Louisa May's. Fostering this kind of affinity or understanding has its undeniable merits. However, it is not well suited to analyze the way in which, for example, global economic developments affect us both similarly and differently. Thus, it is not well suited for fostering political or policy initiatives that would bring people together to transform these structures.

One could say that, if one would remove 70 years from the writing, Mead's impressionistic description of young Samoan girls is close to the prismatic effort to bring to the fore a different way of relating to the world that has previously been neglected (and here one needs to remember how rare female academics and female-oriented perspectives were in Mead's time). However, even if the story opens a window onto a fascinatingly different world, this world seems to be floating in timeless isolation. We have very little sense of how colonialism, as a cultural, political, economic and military process, shapes Samoa. Therefore, we have hardly any way of imagining how our realities and theirs might be interlinked, except by a kind of human affinity, and how it might be possible to build some collective project or politics around it.

Material-semiotic perspective

If the problem with positivist research is that it views there to be only one 'truth' about the reality, the problem with research subscribing to the notion of 'prisms' is that it understands that there are endless or multiple truths about the reality. If positivism autocratically imposes its 'truth' on other views, the notion of prisms and multiple, incommensurable truths make it difficult to envision politics that would begin to change our shared reality together. Trying to find some mediating ground between these two positions, it is useful to resort to Donna Haraway's methodological idea of 'diffraction'. The notion of diffraction is both close to Richardson's idea of prisms that refract reality, while also departing from it in a significant way. Diffraction, unlike refraction, refers not simply to a symbolic or social construction of reality – or to 'creating worlds with words' (Austin, 1965) – but it understands research as a force that alters or creates reality in both symbolic and material terms. Thus, if refraction refers to the process through which vision changes when it goes through a prism, diffraction refers to the way in which light, as both an optic and a material force, is transformed when it passes through a prism (Clough, 2000: 162).

The difference between the notion of research as a process of symbolically constructing reality and the notion of it as a process of symbolically and materially constructing reality can be illustrated by an old dispute between the two main figureheads of the poststructuralist movement: Derrida and Foucault. Derrida's argument was that nineteenth-century Enlightenment 'rationality'

constituted or legitimated itself through the invention or new 'scientific' definition of madness or 'irrationality'. Against this, Foucault (1979b) pointed out that this 'act' was far from being purely a matter of linguistic definition, as it entailed locking the madmen up into asylums, of stripping them of any basic rights and of condemning them to a life-time of physical, social and emotional deprivation. What this story highlights is that research and science do not make the world 'seem' a particular way, but that research and science, such as psychiatry, bring about certain, very concrete and sometimes very problematic worlds. To return to Samoa, one can point out that anthropological research on the islands have been part and parcel of both colonialist and anti-colonialist politics, and, rather than merely describing or giving meaning to the life on the islands, they have been part of processes that have effectuated fundamental cultural, political and economic changes on Samoa.

The lessons that a material-semiotic view on research has to teach are twofold:

1 It draws attention to the limits of positivism in that it highlights that research is never objective but a reality changing material-semiotic force, which always has an agenda or is political.
2 It also draws attention to the limits of the social constructionist view in that it highlights the fact that research cannot create realities at will, or simply through telling a different story. Research is both enabled and constrained by a host of intertwined cultural/political/economic/ecological processes, and we need to understand those processes, if we are to intervene in them.

Thus, the way in which the material-semiotic perspective views the nature of reality (ontology) and the way in which we can know it (epistemology) is different from both the positivist and prismatic perspectives. It does not view reality to be either a fixed entity to be described (the positivist view) or fluid symbolic clay to be moulded into different realities (prismatic view), but understands the relationship between reality and research to be one of interaction. Thus, while the material-semiotic perspective understands research not to describe but to 'create' worlds, it underlines that reality exists beyond research and that it can 'fight back', making some types of research and conclusions more possible than others (Massumi, 1992). This means that it departs from the prismatic notion of 'writing different realities' arguing for a 'materialistically' tempered notion of 'creation'. It acknowledges that research is always facilitated and constrained by the existing social and material environment and it needs to understand, for example, structures of social inequality or the basics of ecological reality, if it is going to change them.

Similar to the 'prismatic' perspective, the goal of research in this configuration is to render research permeable to a wider variety of perspectives. However, the idea of prisms interpreted this goal in pluralistic terms to allow all voices or realities to be heard. Somewhat differently, Haraway (1997) and

Harding (1991, 1993, 2001) see the goal of incorporating different views in more egalitarian terms as a means to enhance more equal scientific, social and economic structures. Haraway, borrowing from Harding, terms this methodological approach 'strong objectivity'. Strong objectivity refers to a commitment to take into account different perspectives – particularly those of the subjugated groups, such as Samoan girls, as they are likely to be critical of existing forms of knowledge – in order to produce more inclusive or encompassing, and thereby more 'accurate', accounts of the world. Haraway (1988) acknowledges that research is never objective but always partial or 'situated', however, this does not constitute a licence to be parochial or narrow-minded. On the contrary, the fact that research is always political, underlines our ethical responsibility to be aware of 'what kinds of realities and beings we are creating, out of whom, and for whom' (Haraway, 1997: 58). This means that we should be conscientious of how our particular research, for its small or big part, produces the reality it looks at, such as the notions of sensual or dangerous 'primitives', which have given rise to a host of discourses and practices, providing support for sexual liberalization, tourism, countless films and media images as well as sterilization campaigns. In order not to produce narrow-minded, racist research that perpetuates inequality, research needs, according to Haraway and Harding, to be rigorous and use a 'systematic method' that facilitates taking into account and critically evaluating different views on the phenomenon it is studying. This systematic collecting and assessing of perspectives, particularly subjugated ones, helps to produce research that is both more encompassing or scientifically rigorous and more aware of its political and ethical implications.

Within the material-semiotic perspective, the goal of combining different methodologies, and their respective validities, is to produce these 'better' or more inclusive accounts of the world, or more inclusive worlds. The dialogic principle enables scholarly practice to tune into the perspectives of different groups, particularly those of disenfranchised groups, such as young Samoan girls or the 'mad'. Deconstruction helps to critically analyze the long-sedimented discourses on 'primitives' or 'mentally disordered' that masquerade as truth but express the politics of a select few, thereby opening up space for new and a more egalitarian range of views. Contextualism enables one to make sense of the way in which both notions of primitive sexuality and mental disorders are intertwined with complex social, political and economic structures, such as colonialism, eugenics or liberal humanist interest in and fascination with difference. As a whole, combining methodologies helps to bring forth 'strong objectivity' that produces knowledge that is both more 'accurate' and more egalitarian.

Methodological dialogues

Despite its many merits, the material-semiotic perspective makes me uncomfortable in one respect. The notion of diffraction (as well as the notions of

reflection and refraction) is optical, and vision, as a sense, is one of the most linear, and least interactive, ones. The visual logic of the material-semiotic position shines through from, for example, the writings of Haraway and Harding that take a relatively traditional view on the practicalities of empirical research and writing. Thus, they understand 'strong objectivity' to refer to research that systematically combines different, including subjugated, views and then synthesizes them into a more inclusive and accurate scientific statement politically committed to fighting social inequality and exclusion. This position differs from traditional research principles in that it takes a political position, but its 'revised' commitment to being 'scientific' adheres to traditional synthetizing research style that translates other perspectives into a scientific view, in a way that obeys the visual logic of detachment, constancy and control.

In my view, this optical framework does not quite do justice to the ideal of inclusiveness or to the notion of research as interaction with reality. It reveals that the idea of material-semiotic nature of research is weak, where the notion of prisms is strong, namely, the dialogic principle of listening to the texture and nuance of different worlds. Therefore, I would like to return to Richardson's (1997, 2000; also Denzin, 1997a) idea that methodologies and modes of writing may be better or worse in tune with the pattern of communication of certain groups or the operating mode of certain spheres of life. Thus, in order to do justice to the lived realities of, for example, Samoan girls, one may need a collaborative or dialogic research strategy and a more poetic style of writing. The same way, a contextual analysis and realist writing may suit an investigation of colonialist cultural, political and economic structures. This does not mean that we should delegate women and life-stories into the emotional/fictive/private and politics and economy into contextual/realist/public, as this may consolidate structures of inequality and confinement (caring for women, and control for men). It rather underlines the fact that modes of reading and writing or inscribing reality are always political and that unless we do justice to their specificity we risk not being sensitive to all the social and subjugated views, values and interests that we want to inform a more inclusive, egalitarian and pluralist research.

The ideal of an 'encompassing' view, embedded in the notion of strong objectivity, draws attention to the general, whereas the notion of prisms underlines the importance of capturing the particular. If one is to imagine a methodological position between the general and the particular, however, it is best to switch sense from vision to sound or conversation. Vision segments reality into one true view (positivism), several different views (prisms), or a particular but encompassing view (material-semiotic view). The metaphor of sound or conversation views different realities in more porous or interactive terms. Instead of arguing for fusing different realities into one view, or capturing separate realities, the notion of sound imagines different realities and methodologies in terms of soundscapes that each have their distinctive chords, but that also resonate and interact with one another. An example would be a jazz trumpetist's

solo, which gets translated into the audience's tapping of their feet and plays into and out of other multicultural sounds and politics of contemporary urban neighbourhoods (see Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 530–50) on rhythm for inspiration). In each of the milieus, the sound of jazz strikes a different chord; yet, the artistic/performative, embodied, and urban/political incarnations of jazz also bleed into one another. The same way the different lived experiences of sexuality, the cultural, political and medical discourses that mediate it, as well as the scientific, socioeconomic and global political regimes that it forms a part speak in different tone and about different sexualities; yet, they also resonate and interact with one another. Thus, a sound-based approach to combining methodologies, and their respective validities, enables a multidimensional research strategy, which both respects the specifity of different modes of inquiry/reality and points to unities and intersections that bind different methodologies and realities together.

To illustrate what a sound-based or dialogic approach to combining methodologies would look like, I will sketch a possible way of analyzing the sexuality of Samoan girls from different perspectives. My intention is not to say what Mead or Freeman should have done. One cannot judge a piece of research done 70 or 20 years ago by contemporary standards or social agendas, even if some of the questions that they raise are still pertinent today. Rather, I simply draw on the Mead–Freeman debate in order to provide some heuristic ideas for doing multidimensional research, in somewhat similar spirit as Frow and Morris (1992) sketch a way of studying a shopping mall without actually ever studying it.

Thus, if one was to start with analyzing the lived reality of the Samoan adolescent girls, one could use the principles of hermeneutic or dialogic approach and aim to – in collaboration with the girls and being critically aware of one's cultural baggage that might hamper one's understanding of them – capture the issue from their perspective. In a similar fashion, and in the spirit of polyvocality, one could aim to understand the issue of sexuality from the perspectives of boys, and of older villagers, men as well as women. If one was to study the discourses that mediate the way in which we, and they, understand the girls' sexuality one could start with critically examining the Western social-psychological discourse, which Mead wanted to problematize, that has constituted adolescent female sexuality as a 'problem' and a source of agony. One could discuss the origins and politics of this discourse that governs female sexuality by constituting it as a 'problem' and then aiming to 'solve' it by either protectively suggesting abstinence or arguing for a freedom from repression or in favour of 'natural' sexuality. One could then continue to study how this discourse, first, intersects with notions of 'primitive' sexuality, which is used to back up either prurient or 'free' sexual behaviour as the 'natural' one. Second, one could investigate how the discourse on 'primitive' sexuality forms part of colonialist, eugenistic and touristic discourses that define people from the South as more 'sex' or 'body' than 'mind', thereby, defining them as more 'animal-like' than

'human'. One could then continue to examine how these racist discourses on sexuality form part and parcel of colonialist and postcolonialist regimes of military, political and economic rule that have affected life and society in places like Samoa in fundamental ways. However, one could also investigate how notions of natural, buoyant sexuality form part of regimes of social thought and actions, such as Mead's culturalist liberalism, that, in all their contradictions, have fought against racist policies. Finally, one could come back full circle and study how global discourses and practices related to sexuality, from Western missionary and other 'civilizing' missions to contemporary global media today, guide normative notions of sexuality in Samoa, so that it is conceivable that when interviewing Samoan girls, one can hear echoes of local culture, social-psychological notions of adolescent sexuality and Western interpretations of 'primitive' sexuality.

A study like this would not answer the positivist question of: What is female sexuality in Samoa like? On the contrary, it would study the politics embedded in various discourses that produce, in both symbolic and very material terms, the sexuality of Samoan girls and a range of other practices and agendas to which it is attached. However, capturing the 'politics' embedded in young girls' intimate experience of sexuality and the politics underpinning eugenic and exoticizing discourses on sexuality and their relationships to colonialist and counter-colonialist policies will require different methodologies and genres of writing, to the point that the 'results' of these three perspectives may seem to speak of a different reality. Capturing the particularity of these perspectives is pivotal, if one is going to be true to the project of enhancing research and politics that takes into account, and does justice to, different perspectives on the world.

Bringing the different methodological and political perspectives into dialogue with one another cultivates multidimensional research and politics that is capable of attending to the complexity of social phenomena, such as Samoan sexuality. This research strategy does not try to come up with one enlightened view (triangulation) or to acknowledge that there are multiple views (prisms). Rather, multiperspectival research aims to hold different perspectives in creative tension with one another. For example, if, as part of studying Samoan sexuality, one was to examine the social implications of Mead's work from a dialogic or multiperspectival standpoint, it would appear as neither 'good' nor 'bad' but complicated. On one hand, she defends the Samoans and their life against Western universalizing moral codes and notions of intrinsically superior and inferior forms of human nature. On the other hand, Mead exoticizes the Samoans, ending up affirming the Western trope of universal sensual and natural 'primitiveness'. From a dialogic point of view, Mead's liberal humanism is not epistemologically or politically *either* 'correct' *or* 'incorrect' but has *both* its rights *and* its wrongs. This kind of dialogism cultivates research and politics that can appreciate the multidimensionality of social problematics and not to resort to one-dimensional judgements.

Exploring different perspectives and using different methodologies the way I have just outlined is doable, but it is a large undertaking. My intention is not to suggest that every research project should collect a multitude of perspectives. What I do want to underline, however, is that even if one studies a single aspect of something like Samoan adolescent female sexuality, it is useful to bear in mind that it can be approached from several angles and is part of a larger puzzle. One may want to capture the lived sexuality of a Samoan woman through a life-story interview. Yet, one needs to bear in mind that her account may be interlaced with all the local and global discourses on female and primitive sexuality and both fiercely critique and support these discourses and the political agendas that speak through them. Thus, a life-story is: (1) an expression of lived reality, to be understood dialogically; (2) shot through with social discourses that can be unravelled through deconstruction; and (3) articulates wide local, national and transnational politics, to be analyzed contextually. Therefore, even if one studies a particular area, such as a lived reality, it is useful to be aware that it encompasses multiple dimensions. This is what I discovered when interviewing anorexic women, whose stories were shot through with discourses that define anorexia and all their contradictory national, transnational and highly gendered political and social agendas. The more I study the Mead–Freeman controversy, the more I realize the commonalities between the discourses on anorexia and on adolescent sexuality on Samoa. In both cases the 'true' nature of the female body and self becomes a battleground and a battle cry for a host of complex personal and political struggles. Thus, combining methodologies to study how our intimate experience of our body and self are connected with global regimes of power that bind us with distant people, might foster translocal politics that would question those forces, discourses and practices that subjugate us, while being prepared to consider fundamental differences of opinion and interest and be prepared to negotiate them. In short, it would be committed to egalitarian politics that would acknowledge that part of the egalitarian project is to come to terms with the fact that 'equality' may seem different from different perspectives.

Conclusions

The methodological project of cultural studies is structured around a three-dimensional interest in lived experiences, discourses or texts and the social context. The challenge of this project is that the three areas of focus refer to different methodological approaches. Understanding lived experience demands a hermeneutic or phenomenological approach that aims to understand lived realities. The interest in discourses calls for a (post)structuralist analysis of the tropes and patterns that shape our understanding of our social, cultural and research environment. Analyzing the social and political context, however, is always wedded to some form of realism that wants to make sense of how the

society and its structures 'really' operate. These three methodological approaches may complement and enrich one another, but they also run into contradictions. One cannot easily combine a hermeneutic quest to understand lived realities and a (post)structuralist interest in critically analyzing the discourses that mediate those realities. At the same time, the hermeneutic and (post)structuralist approaches' interest in either multiple realities or the political nature of all realities does not bode well with the realist project of making sense of social reality. Furthermore, the new philosophical and practical challenges brought about by new ethnography, poststructuralism and globalization – which demand research to become, at the same time, truer to different realities and capable of making sense of the increasingly important global reality – have both further pulled research apart as well as underlined the need for dialogues between scholarly as well as political positions.

In this situation, the old notion of 'validity' as truthfulness seems no longer feasible. On the contrary, it has been suggested that instead of validity, we start talking about validities. Against the background of cultural studies interest in the lived, discursive and social/global dimensions of reality, as well as recent methodological discussions, one can suggest three different validities. First, dialogic validity assesses research in terms of how well it remains true to the lifeworlds of the people being studied. Second, deconstructive validity evaluates the value of research in terms of how thoroughly it is aware of the social discourses and tropes that mediate our understanding of reality and frame our research. Third, contextualist validity measures the validity of research in terms of how well it manages to locate the phenomena, as well as research itself, in the wider social, political and global context.

Together, these validities highlight different criteria for good or valid research. At the same time, they raise the question of whether, and how, these different validities, and their concomitant methodological approaches, could be brought together. The traditional way of combining methodologies in social and cultural research is triangulation, which refers to the use of different methods in order to get a more accurate idea of social reality. However, the trouble with using the heuristic of triangulation to bring together the three validities and methodologies is that they do not necessarily cohere to an accurate vision of reality as they explore different facets of reality or different realities. Richardson (2000) has suggested that instead of talking about triangulation we should begin to talk about prisms, which highlights the fact that reality changes when we change the methodological perspective from which we look at it. The notion of prisms does justice to the potentially profound differences between different ways of approaching the reality, but the problem with it is that it bypasses the fact that, even if we may approach the global, social world differently, it also binds our fates together. Thus, drawing on both Richardson's idea of prisms and Donna Haraway's notion of material-semiotic construction of reality, I will argue for a mode of combining methodological approaches in terms of creating dialogues between them. The dialogic mode of doing

research would be attentive to the lived, cultural as well as social and material aspects of our realities, and acknowledge that there may be disjunctures between them. It would aim to cultivate modes of social and cultural analysis that would be both sensitive to different realities and capable of building bridges between them. This mode of research would, hopefully, also encourage a politics that would bring different groups, with their different concerns and views, together to begin to build a common, more egalitarian and pluralist world.

Exercise 1

- Design a research strategy for studying a topic of your choice. Think how you would study your topic, using as a guideline: (1) the dialogic validity; (2) deconstructive validity; and (3) contextual validity?
- Discuss how the three approaches might contradict or complement one another.
- Do you think that one of the research approaches is more pertinent to making sense of your topic? Why?
- Would it be best if you focused on one perspective, such as lived experience? What kind of research strategies or methods would you use to explore your topic from the chosen perspective? How could you enrich your preferred methodological perspective by analyzing how other approaches bleed into it (by, for example, analyzing how discourses interlace experiences)?
- Or would it be feasible to study the lived, discursive and social/global dimensions of the phenomenon that you are studying? How could you study these three dimensions in a way that would be manageable? How could you bring the different analysis together without coming up with (1) strict causalities ('social context determines lived lives') or (2) a situation where different perspectives talk past one another ('lived experiences tell about little people and social context tells about big history, and they speak about different realities')?