Despite a number of retrospective works on cultural studies, to date no other book dedicates itself to the historical and theoretical examination of British cultural studies’ engagement with the «active audience theory» of the Birmingham School and its legacies.

However, this book is no mere reconstruction of active audience theory as Huimin Jin develops new theoretical insights initially through a critical review of Stuart Hall’s classical model of «encoding/decoding» and close readings of David Morley’s groundbreaking ethnographic audience studies. Questioning the discourse model of the active audience proposed by Hall and Morley, Jin elaborates a new materialistic concept of audiences for the twenty-first century.

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### Appendix 1. Towards Global Dialogism

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Appendix 2. British Cultural Studies, Active Audiences and the Status of Cultural Theory
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Since the 1970s, cultural studies has played a leading role in establishing and generating critically and sociologically oriented media studies, in the context of which the works of David Morley feature prominently. Following Stuart Hall's conceptual and theoretical works, and closely combining analytical reflections with empirical research, Morley has laid a firm foundation for the sociology of reception. His works serve as a highly important referential point for qualitative-ethnographic investigations into the media world, and also for research into the dynamic relations between local contexts and global influences, or, for an understanding of the social changes conditioned by media or media technology. Morley is now read world-wide and discussed vigorously as well.

However, there have so far been little philosophical discussion of the significance and relevance of this form of media studies. It is regrettable that traditionally a philosophical study has largely been absent in the field of cultural studies. This may be ascribed to the fact that cultural studies sees its own methodological approach basically as a *bricolage*. The theoretical positions and methods at hand are adapted and synthesised in order to analyse actual social and cultural problems. The purpose of cultural studies is therefore not the development of a general theory of culture or society but the political intervention, underpinned by theories or empirical research, with the aim to gain greater degrees of democracy and social justice. This view of theory, both reflexive and practical, which clearly distinguishes cultural studies from other approaches, is based upon the pedagogic and socio-political considerations that are connected...
to the emergence and formation of cultural studies in the context of New Left in the 1950s. Nevertheless, the philosophical, sociological, and even aesthetical contextualisation, systematisation, and development of the ideas, connections and requisites of cultural studies are needed and will be very helpful, with which we could better learn from cultural studies and contribute to its development.

Considered in this context, the present book by the Chinese cultural theorist Huimin Jin is extremely valuable and deserves warm congratulations. Professor Jin is an outstanding expert in philosophical hermeneutics and reception theory. He is also one of the most important representatives of cultural studies in China. He has made many presentations in international conferences held in various countries, and published articles in the journal Theory, Culture and Society (London et al.: Sage Publications) for which he serves as an associate editor. He made various efforts, distinguished and detailed, to expose the latent philosophical problematic in David Morley’s media studies via an exploration of its origins and principles. His profound knowledge, especially of German philosophy, and his special perspective developed from Confucius, have led to a reading of Morley’s work which considers him as a classic whose ideas are not fully comprehended and applied.

More importantly, Professor Jin suggests a new materialistic conception of active audiences, with which he is trying to show that the experience, practice and Eigensinn (making their own sense) of audiences will not be properly understood if one limits himself to the discursive level only. We must investigate what the ground is for audiences, what hides from them, or more precisely, what resistance means to them. The models for and the interlocutors with Jin are Schopenhauer, Freud, Lacan and Heidegger who have foregrounded the bodily Trieb and pre-linguistic unconscious of the ‘Being-in-the-World’, the defining role of which is exhibited. The sociologist Morley did not debate on these authors intensively enough; he wrote little about them. Professor Jin ennobles his Morley, positioning him in a rank of those discursive ground-breakers who are still powerfully relevant today.
my home institution, a home, which has maternally nourished me bodily, intellectually and spiritually since 1984.

I owe a great debt to Shanghai International Studies University with which I have been affiliated since 2009 as 211 Chair Professor, the post of which encourages me to publish more abroad in English as well as in German—that is exactly what I have been looking forward to for long. Thanks, therefore, to Professor Jianhua Yu, Professor Deming Cao and Professor Shuguang Zhang of the University who have offered me the opportunity of honour and delight, by which I could realise my Wunsch.

Last but not the least important, my thanks and appreciation should be voiced to Ms. Jennifer Niediek and Mr. Kai Reinhardt at transcript Verlag, both of whom have tried their every effort to make the manuscript into a better product for readers as well as for the author.

Dr. Haiyan Chen, my father, if he were still alive, would be very happy to see the book, in English, and of his son!

H. J.
Beijing, August 17, 2012
June 2006, when the authorities of the University of Birmingham removed, abruptly yet resolutely, ‘cultural studies’, which, as a discipline though trans-disciplinary, had existed since the foundation of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in 1964, from their list of departments, is not a summer as it was in the natural sequence of seasons, but a winter which felt chilly for scholars of cultural studies, especially for those alumni and alumnae who were practicing and developing the model/s of cultural studies created by the so-called Birmingham School. The removal is absolutely no mere action of ‘restructuring’ a department as the university declared, but signals a collapse of a ‘sacred temple’, a spiritual and emotional hometown, to which scholars of cultural studies, no matter where they lived, believed they were belonging. However, from my point of view, this event is not necessarily an obituary of cultural studies as read by many. Rather, it should be understood as a better turn for cultural studies, since the closedown of a ‘centre’ is itself an act of decentering, wherein lies an objective of cultural studies. As John Hartley remarked, cultural studies is ‘a philosophy of plenty’, a spirit of differences, and of being marginal, regional, and critical.1 If Hartley is not wrong, then a death of a ‘centre’ as happened in Birmingham would be most welcome by such cultural studies. When cultural studies becomes ubiquitous with various projects of its own, is a ‘center’, which always functions as a commander, still possible and necessary?

Indeed, cultural studies has already been transnationalised and universalised, with numerous departments or programs established, with a plenty of books and articles brought out, and with conferences held domestically or internationally one after another; and what is more important, perspectives or theories of cultural studies have been widely applied to the humanities and social sciences, and the ‘cultural studies unconscious’, coined after Fredric Jameson’s term the ‘political unconscious’, is on the way, just like a propitious rain, as quoted from Du Fu, a poet sage in the Tang Dynasty, which, ‘With the wind, slips secretly into the night, /Silent and soft, moistens the world.’ A ‘centre’ fell down in Birmingham, but countless centres have stood up elsewhere, which look like, to use a traditional Chinese metaphor, ‘bamboos after a spring rain’, wildly growing with greater vitality. Cultural studies, as far as it is concerned as an intellectual space, is not closed; quite the opposite, it is now being opened up with infinite possibilities.

However, retrospection is needed for cultural studies before it goes any further, the necessity of which arises from the fact that for every step forward in the humanities, there must be three steps backwards first and that what is gained must be at the cost of something lost. This is a reflexive claim which defines the humanities. One may criticise it as nostalgia, but for the humanities, nostalgia is not just a look back but by which a look forward is made in a way. Cultural studies has achieved a great deal over the last decades and will, as it looks, achieve more in the future; however, it should not be ignored that cultural studies, as many other movements, are also full of bubbles and baubles, sound and fury, and opportunism and commercialism. In this context, if cultural studies would like to go further, even a bit, or negatively speaking, if it is not willing to die of, still in Du Fu’s poetic words, ‘The happy craziness with which to roughly pack up all the books of poetry’\(^2\), it needs then a kind of reflection and contemplation.

\(^2\) The significance of the ‘books of poetry’ in traditional Chinese context is much like what Matthew Arnold suggests by his saying ‘the best that is
We would better halt for a while, looking over our shoulder or walking backwards a bit, to check if there is anything lost when we are moving straightforward. More concretely for the topic of this text, we would better make a retrospective reading of the past cultural studies. As a matter of fact, cultural studies has never ceased to make reflections upon itself, and has never forgotten to look backwards at the traces it left. Needless to mention in between what have been done, which are too many to be put into consideration, we only refer back to Raymond Williams’ essay ‘The Future of Cultural Studies’ (1989), and also forward to a most recent one, a namesake with Williams’ but a book, *Die Zukunft der Cultural Studies*, edited by Rainer Winter, and to be printed in July 2011. How coincidental they are! Or, the truth may be that Winter has been inspired by Williams. But anyhow, both of them indicate a reflexive consciousness which has never gone with the development of cultural studies.

Viewed this way, my book will be also a retrospective endeavor, with an aim to critically look backwards at British cultural studies, its history and theoretical legacy.

Among their best books of this kind are Graeme Turner’s *British Cultural Studies* (1st ed. in 1990, and 2nd ed. in 1996) and John Hartley’s *A Short History of Cultural Studies* (2003). The former is trying to provide an overview of British cultural studies, and comments in depth on the central categories as well, while the latter, revealing a genealogy of British cultural studies though, is basically thought and said’. Du Fu’s verse is borrowed here to indicate a spectacle of cultural studies in which the elite culture, poetry in particular, is thrown away and scholars turn to crazily dive into the study of popular culture that features the *carnivalesque* with which Mikhail Bakhtin has described the medieval popular culture.

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a guide to the field of cultural studies in general. Besides, historical accounts of British cultural studies are also found in introductory works to cultural studies like, to name just a few, Chris Barker’s *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice* (2000), Simon During’s *Cultural Studies: A Critical Introduction* (2005), John Storey’s *Cultural studies and the Study of Popular Culture* (1996), and Fred Inglis’ *Cultural Studies* (1993).

Despite a large number of retrospective works on/of cultural studies, there has been up to now no such one in a book form as dedicating itself exclusively to the study of one specific theoretical issue of it in the English speaking world. My book hopefully will be a pioneer, since it for the first time investigates into a particular theory of British cultural studies, i.e., *active audience theory*.

British cultural studies has of course many theoretical achievements, among which, however, active audience theory should be a defining one, by which I do not mean to say that British cultural studies is defined as and *is* active audience theory. The notion of ‘culture industry’ of the Frankfurt School has *already* won a worldwide currency with the logo of Critical Theory *for many years*; the notion of ‘active audiences’ of the Birmingham School, though paralleled in theoretical importance with the notion of ‘culture industry’, has not received the recognition it deserves with the worldwide movement of Cultural Studies. Too many attentions have been paid to ‘culture industry’, and too many people, especially Marxist critics, have accepted the definition of mass culture as culture industry of capitalism; but the related issues at stake remain unexplored concerning how capitalist mass culture is modified and resisted, and how capitalist discourse and its hegemonic structure are deconstructed by audiences. This book deals with, clarifying and interrogating, these issues, and in so doing, it is intended to establish a monument for active audience theory. We do not have to cancel the notion of ‘culture industry’ by wholesale, but we will insist that without active audience theory, the ‘cognitive mapping’ (Fredric Jameson) of mass culture would be incomplete and insufficient. Both ‘active audiences’ and ‘culture industry’ are needed, and they will make *supplément* (Jacques Derrida)
to, but not substitute, each other. Only by this way can a complete map of mass culture be expected.

One may grumble that active audience theory is nothing but an old tale in the 70-80s of last century. As for this kind of complaints, I would like to give a warning that nothing will be outdated in the humanities which feature reflexivity, especially in the field of philosophy: as Hegel has taught us, the owl of Minerva takes its flight only when the shades of night are gathering. The night for active audience theory is coming right now.

More importantly, this book is far beyond a ‘cognitive mapping’ of active audience theory as it was. It speaks its own theory, it is a creative interpretation of, and has taken a further step from, the latter. To judge whether a theory is outdated or not is to see if it is still addressing us. Active audience theory, at least for the moment, still has something to tell us, and still bears some relevance to us. Of course, after 30 years or so when the theory was produced, we now have to say for it, of it yet, and certainly, more than it, since it is ‘classic’, past yet last.

It should be acknowledged that active audience theory is an epoch-making contribution by the Birmingham School to television studies, and if, broadly speaking, i.e., from the viewpoint of the study of popular culture, it should be as well a significant break-through with the notion of ‘culture industry’ held by the Frankfurt School. Nowadays active audience theory is employed as one of the primary treasures of British cultural studies, and regarded as one of the fundamentals in contemporary communication studies. Be it as it may, a kernel question why audiences are active has not been given, in the last analysis, a philosophical answer either by Stuart Hall or David Morley as its principal advocators. To speak frankly therefore, active audience theory is only halfway yet to its completion. By critically reviewing Hall’s model of encoding/decoding, and especially by a close reading of Morley’s ethnographic studies of audiences and the theoretical elucidations accompanied with them, this book has excluded all the ways to find the active audience in the direction of discourse as suggested by Hall in particular, and Morley in one way or another,
and turned to develop a socio-ontological concept of audiences. This concept assumes that it is just because of its socio-ontological existence that the audience could have the activeness that is rendered eminent by the resistance; or, with a ring of Marx and Freud, the material existence of audiences serves as the last word to its activeness and resistance. Perhaps the argument here will be questioned for radicalising and therefore running off the track of active audience theory, but as defended by Karl Marx, ‘To be radical is to grasp the matter by the root’, and the root of the matter, as I understand it, is the life-existence of man.

This is the point where we differ from Morley: it is with ‘everyday life’ that Morley stops but we depart; we go further to strip away the costumes of discourse, ideology, ‘way’, ‘routine’, and ‘everyday’ from ‘everyday life’, leaving the barely material existence of everyday life, the life that has not been culturised, the life in itself, as the last line of defense.

But how can the ‘material existence’ resist actively? One may remind us of that the ‘material’ is not any far from ‘the masses’ of ‘culture industry’ though they are of course not synonymous. Answers to this will vary according to the way in which the term ‘active’ is defined. In this book, we talk about the notion of ‘active’ ontologically, tracing the active force of ‘the masses’ farthest back to their unchangeable ‘material existence’. But if so, anaesthetisation and deception, say, of mass culture, would be then naturally impossible; and given this, why do intellectuals bother to worry at all? The fact is that the material does voice its resistance, murmuring, moaning, sobbing and howling, for example, although such voice has not crystallised itself into discourse or ideology. And to make its voice, the material may, in some cases, appropriate the existing discourse or ideology, which seems to many as if it had discourse or ideology. The voice of literature has been long misunderstood as an ideology, for

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instance, by Luis Althusser, Terry Eagleton, and most Chinese critics, who believe that literature is an aesthetic ideology. There is a long way for a voice to become a discourse, so intellectuals are needed, who have the duties to listen to various voices and transform them into discourses, since only when transformed into a discourse, can a voice be effective to realise itself.

That we insist upon the active resistance of ‘the masses’ as ‘material existence’ is connected with and strongly supported by a supposition that matter has/is energy, as physics holds. One may follow the Frankfurt School, viewing the ‘audience’ as ‘the masses’, but s/he can not necessarily go as even to assert that ‘the masses’ are passive. ‘The masses’ have/are energy, and they exist actively, of which theorists of the Frankfurt School have no idea, and although well informed with Marxism, they fail to apply Marxist materialism to their speculations on the audience. To conceptualise ‘the masses’ as being passive is a misrepresentation of ‘the masses’. As Raymond Williams remarks, ‘There are in fact no masses; there are only ways of seeing people as masses.’

Sociology of the audience perhaps does not need a philosophical version of active audience theory which can not be applied directly to those ethnographic investigations it usually makes into social contexts in which television is watched. I will not complain that Morley, as basically a sociologist of media, has not fully developed this version, nor will I do to his rebuke of my work in which sociology gives way to biology that, he insists, does not make sense in audience studies. Nevertheless, there are three points I have to briefly make in


7 | At ‘The Symposium on Contemporary Active Audiences and Cultural Studies’ held by the University of International Business and Trade on Nov. 8th, 2010, the author gave a speech on ‘Modernity and Postmodernity of British Cultural Studies’. Morley cast his doubts on the author’s philosophical approach to active audiences and believed that the author was replacing sociology with biology.
defence: first, far from leaving behind the discursive and sociological studies of audiences, a philosophical version of active audiences as I am trying to draft will bring forth and give prominence to a dynamic relationship between the discourse and the material existence of audiences in a given society; second, it will drive scholars of audience studies to pay more attention to how the material existence of audiences shapes the ‘way’ of their daily life and the way of their ‘discourse’; and third, to mention once again, we talk about the resistance ontologically, and if a biological force is ontologically the final determinant, it will be no longer merely biological but philosophical déjà.

‘Resistance’, as a topic generated in social theory many years ago, should not be accused of obsolescence. Quite the contrary, it is a topic of ever-increasing urgency with the global asymmetry as debates on climate exchange show, and with economic and cultural imperialism arising from globalisation that still does not come to an end for the moment. In China, for instance, ‘resistance’ is a complicated paradox. On the one hand, China, which has been ideologically disadvantaged since the times of 1840 when the Opium Wars broke out, has to resist the Western ideology, a capitalist ideology, in order to protect and reinforce its indigenous ideology, Confucianism, for instance; on the other hand, China, which has been highly motivated to modernise itself in order to catch up with the currents of the world, has to resist its traditional cultural forces, social values and norms in everyday life, in which context the Western discourses such as ‘sciences’ and ‘democracy’, which were called respectively ‘Mr. Sai’ and ‘Mr. De’ in the era of the May Fourth Movement (1919), and the trinity of ‘Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity’, are employed by the intellectual elites. More recent examples, among others, are the big split of New Left and New Right in China since the 1990s, and the half embrace and half skepticism with which Chinese official media meet ‘universal values’.

In contrast to the domestic relevance of active audience theory when it was forged in its beginning years, the chapter ‘Towards a Global Dialogism’ as an appendix to this book is intended to transfer the discussion of ‘resistance’ into a global context in which the debate
on ‘cultural imperialism’ was motivated in the 1960’s and has been kept in the agenda of cultural politics till now. This transference does not originate with the author; Hall and Morley have initiated it much earlier, as this chapter shows. In his recent speech in Beijing, Morley once again emphasised the relevance of active audience theory to a global context.\(^8\) Not devoted exclusively to the topic of resistance which, though, underpins it, what this chapter is trying to do chiefly is to divide, according to the arguments about ‘cultural imperialism’, cultural studies into two models, the modern and the post-modern; and with a hope to transcend the dichotomy, it then advocates a third one: global cultural studies. The spirit of this model is ‘global dialogism’, which holds simultaneously the singularity of interlocutors which can not be thoroughly penetrated and the transcendence of it only with which can a dialogue really happen. Obviously, this ‘transcendence’ is required essentially by dialogism; and if so, the word ‘global’ will be then just an intensifying description of that ‘dialogism’. Besides these academic pursuits in this chapter, I also suggest a philosophical solution to the conflicts among civilisations in the contemporary world.

My interview with Morley, which is also included as an appendix, makes more visible and vivid my dialogue with Morley which has been already undertaken in the previous part of the book. However, this is not to say that Morley gives in the interview a clearer and friendlier restatement of his work, or even an authoritative endorsement, as one may expect, to my study of his work. I take Morley’s response to my questions as, in a poststructuralist sense, a text, the inclusion of which will shed another light on my arguments and certainly leave them more or less in an insecure situation, but the same will happen with Morley’s text. This is what ‘intertextuality’ suggests to us: in the context of ‘intertextuality’ there is no authoritative meaning that has been often misunderstood as the author’s intention which, however, will be open to ever renewed interpretations by other texts.

A book will never be complete in a sense that it is unable to include everything relevant into its body. This book is no exception. It, for instance, leaves substantially untouched a pre-history of active audience theory, say, the works of Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams (It is just in a note where this prehistory is mentioned), and neither has it brought into focus the contemporary contributions from other scholars like Ien Ang and John Fiske, to name the most prominent. We regret this. It is the fate of a book, which is always yet to be finished. But, being yet to be finished suggests, on the other hand, more meanings that are to be produced by others in the future. As its topic is on the active audience, this book should leave more blanks, even though we do not know yet the blanks it has left will be productive or not. This is not the author’s saying but the readers’. Therefore, I’d better stop here for readers to step.
Introduction

With cultural studies spreading across the world, ‘British cultural studies’, or more accurately, the so-called Birmingham School, is increasingly received as one of the best traditions of that kind. However, it is still no easier matter to define ‘British Cultural studies’, even for such an expert as Professor John Storey, for instance, who is well-known for his good knowledge of how British cultural studies has come to be what it is today. Storey understood only too well that ‘Cultural studies is not a monolithic body of theories and methods’, just as Stuart Hall pointed out, ‘Cultural studies has multiple discourses; it has a number of different histories. It has a whole set of formations; it has its own different conjunctures and moments in the past. It included many different kinds of work. [...] It had many trajectories.’ And in this sense, had he not maltreated himself, Hall even claimed that ‘the theoretical work of the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies’ (CCCS) of Birmingham, led by him, was not a chorus of the octave harmonious melody, but, should be ‘more appropriately called theoretical noise’.

Kind of timid and doubtful as Storey was when he associated British Cultural Studies with the works of Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, E. P. Thompson, Hall, and so on, he was actually

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Quite assured and had given a clear-cut answer to such an undecided question—if seriously considered—as ‘What is British cultural studies’. We could savor this between his lines in the passage that follows, and we would perceive that and we must say of many twists and exquisite parts, he had made careful and insightful observations:

If we are in search of a founding moment when cultural studies first emerges from left-Leavisism, ‘pessimistic’ versions of Marxism, American mass communication models, culturalism and structuralism, the publication of Stuart Hall’s ‘Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse’ (Hall 1980; first published in 1973) is perhaps it.3

If we could not argue that Storey here had taken Hall’s drafting of decoding and encoding paradigm as the début of British cultural studies, which seems not matching the widely recognised accounts of that history as we know it4, then on the second thought, there is no

3 | John Storey, Cultural Studies and the Study of Popular Culture, p. 9. Stuart Hall’s article ‘Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse’ (1973) that the quotation refers to was revised and retitled as ‘Encoding/Decoding’ (1980). This book uses the revised edition, and when the old version is used, the original title will be accordingly referred to.

4 | The books such as The Uses of Literacy (Richard Hoggart, 1957), Culture and Society (Raymond Williams, 1958), The Long Revolution (Raymond Williams, 1961), and The Making of the English Working Class (E. P. Thompson, 1963) are recognised by Stuart Hall as ‘founding’ and ‘originating’ texts of British cultural studies (See Stuart Hall, ‘Cultural Studies and the Centre: Some Problematics and Problems’, in S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe and P. Willis [eds], Culture, Media, Language, London: Hutchinson, 1981 [1980], p.16 and p. 278). However, this should not mean that they are the headwaters of cultural studies in any sense. As reminded by Raymond Williams, courses of cultural studies were conducted as early as in the late 1940’s in army education or even in the 1930’s in adult education. The only problem Williams felt sad with was that those people who were active in that field at that time did not
doubt, at least, that he had marked Hall’s work as a new start-point of British cultural studies. This is the beginning of Hall’s times of British cultural studies. If we can switch our perspective, for instance, picking out the most representative one from the beat spectrum in the field of British cultural studies and we find this has to be Stuart Hall actually, then we can certainly claim further that it was Hall who inaugurated the long lasting influential British cultural studies with his programmatic research on television discourse. No exaggeration to speak, Hall is British cultural studies! Before Hall, it was just a prehistory of British cultural studies. In other words, British cultural studies began with Hall.

David Morley (1945- ), born with the times, luckily caught up with this great turning point of history. As a student of Hall, he was assigned to do cultural studies of television. In 1974, he wrote a course paper, but a seminal work as proved later on, titled ‘reconceptualising the Media Audience: Towards an Ethnography of Audiences’. And since then, he has been running on this road of audience studies without stop and has published one after another the works such as *The ‘Nationwide’ Audience* (1980), *Family Television* (1986), and *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies* (1992), etc., all of which are now read as classical in the field of television studies, and with which he is regarded as a major representative of the ‘Active Audience Theory’. Even in a broader sense, i.e., in the field of communication and media studies, he could have no sense of shame to stand among the handful of the masters.

Hall’s status as the chief designer of British cultural studies should not be called into question at any moment, but if not succeeded by Morley’s continuous, lasting, deepening and systematic intensification and extension, Hall’s idea about encoding and decoding, for instance, would remain nothing but a blueprint, notwithstanding its undeniable merit. Morley accepted Hall, but perhaps what is more important, he realised Hall’s model. Hall’s publish (see Raymond Williams, *Politics of Modernism, Against the New Conformists*, London & New York: Verso, 2007 [1989], pp. 154-155).
significance as a text was revealed, expanded and rendered in this process of realisation, with which then consummated as a magnificent master piece. To us, however, the most appealing was not Morley’s realisation of Hall’s idea, but some new theoretical themes derived from this realising process, no matter they were discovered, stressed, or neglected, or even decidedly rejected, abandoned by Morley. The text cannot be monopolised by its author; this was recognised both by Hall and Morley. Now it was just that this commonplace proposition, mostly associated with German reception-aesthetics, has been used on them—to read them mainly in a negotiated or even oppositional position, though the dominant-hegemonic will not be discarded totally, the result of which, as I wish heartedly, will not surprise or embarrass them. The textual meaning is always growing if not so wildly as unexpected.

It is intended in this book to expose and develop the theoretical dimensions of Morley’s television audience studies. That may run counter to the principle of cultural studies which features not to produce theories but to borrow the existing theories as in the case of Hall, who once compared himself to a magpie, collecting materials anywhere but to build its own nest. What concerns cultural studies or Hall most is the specific use of theories. As a follower of Hall, Morley also held an attitude of ‘pragmatism’ if this term does not imply anything Philistine, who said: ‘If a theory is useful, then it must be able to be put into use.’ According to him, whether a theory is good or not is decided by how well it has been used; theories that cannot be used are certainly useless, ineffective, and unnecessary and should be abandoned.5 In his agenda-setting ‘Introduction’ to

Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies, Morley even mocked the cross-boundary travel of theory in the form of cartoon: ‘higher levels of abstraction (“theory”) can be sold in a more extensive (and not naturally specific) market, and thus tend towards both higher levels of profitability for the publisher, and a wider reputation for the theorist. In short, “theory” travels best.’

Now that Morley was so annoyed by theories and then so opposed to treating cultural studies ‘simply as “theory”’, he would certainly not object Graeme Turner’s account of the achievement of The ‘Nationwide’ Audience in his British Cultural Studies: An Introduction which was placed as ‘the first and remains the best of its kind’; or, at least, Morley wouldn’t have any objections to Turner who identified the empirical characteristics of Morley’s research on television audiences:

The ‘Nationwide’ Audience is an important book because it provides us with empirical evidence that the polysemy of the television text is not just a theoretical abstraction, but an active, verifiable and determinate characteristic. Morley’s continuing body of work has greatly advanced our understanding of the social dimension of television discourses [...]

At a visible level, this is quite a faithful description of Morley’s work which seemed to place ‘empirical’ evidence over ‘theoretical’ deduction in value. The ‘Nationwide’ Audience was no more than a field report of the audience’s response to the evening journal program ‘Nationwide’. Although concluded with the conceptualisation of the audience, it was just the checking and verifying of his tutor’s encoding and decoding formula, almost without any new sense theoretically. If

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7 | Ibid., p. 3.
9 | Graeme Turner, British cultural studies, p. 113.
such is the case, to launch a research project on Morley’s ‘theory’ would be just like climbing the tree to catch the fish, the method being entirely wrong. However, if we are not satisfied with the Morley at the visible level, but take the visibility as the starting point and move a few steps further, or use the visibility as the material, we will discover what can be hardly perceived, and create Morley’s image as a theorist or even a philosopher. We don’t want to stick a theory upon Morley, but hope to knit out a theory of Morley. It comes from Morley and still belongs to Morley. In this case, if we retrospect Turner’s conclusive remark on Morley’s work, we will cry foul for Morley for it limits Morley’s achievement only in the scope of empirical research, and fails to make out the theoretical implications at the deeper level. Our research will show that Morley’s theoretical significance just lies in his act of opposing ‘theories’, and his intentional avoiding and rejecting theories. He did have a theory, but which was a non-theory. 

Turner underestimated or even denied Morley’s theoretical achievement, but he had provided us with the clues to seek Morley’s theoretical significance. The clues are ‘television discourses’ and their ‘social dimension’ as lying silently in the passage quoted above. Between these two key terms, but not in either of them independently, hide all the theoretical mysteries and the generating points of the active audience.

Now let’s start with ‘television discourses’!