



University of  
Western Sydney

CENTRE FOR  
CULTURAL RESEARCH

# CCR Seminar Series

2011

**Ien Ang**

(CCR, University of Western Sydney)

Navigating Complexity:  
From Cultural Critique to Cultural Intelligence

**Date**

Thursday February 17,  
2011

**Time**

2pm - 4:30pm

**Venue**

The Boardroom  
Superintendent's Cottage  
Building ET  
Parramatta Campus  
([view map](#))

**RSVP**

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That the world is terribly complex is now a vital part of global cultural experience, a structure of feeling which has grown more pervasive in the 21st century. How do we find ways of navigating the complex challenges of our time? And what role can we, as cultural researchers, play in this task? Much humanities and social science scholarship in the past few decades has embraced complexity, so much so that the pursuit of complexity (e.g. in scholarly theorising) has become an end in itself, a key element in the production of cultural critique. In this paper, I argue that if we wish to engage with the real-world need to deal with complex realities, cultural research must go beyond deconstructive cultural critique and work towards what I call 'cultural intelligence'. This involves a form of argument which illuminates that the development of sophisticated and sustainable responses to the world's complex problems \*needs\* the recognition of complexity, not for complexity's own sake, but because simplistic solutions are unsustainable or counterproductive. At the same time, cultural intelligence also recognises the need for simplification to combat the paralysing effects of complexity. Developing simplifications should not be equated with being simplistic. While being simplistic is tantamount to reductionism which dispenses with complexity, simplification allows us to plot a course through complexity. To put the question simply, how does one simplify without being simplistic?

**Distinguished Professor Ien Ang** is Professor of Cultural Studies and Director of the Centre for Cultural Research, University of Western Sydney. She is one of the leaders in cultural studies worldwide, with work spanning many areas of the humanities and social sciences. Professor Ang's innovative interdisciplinary work deals broadly with patterns of cultural flow and exchange in our globalised world, focusing on issues such as: intercultural dialogue, the formation of audiences and publics; and, issues of representation in contemporary cultural institutions. Her books include *Watching Dallas* (1985), *On Not Speaking Chinese* (Routledge, 2001) and most recently, co-authored with Gay Hawkins and Lamia Dabboussy, *The SBS Story: The Challenge of Cultural Diversity* (UNSW Press, 2008).

**David Rowe**

(CCR, University of Western Sydney)

**Nathaniel Bavinton**

Tender for the Night:  
After-Dark Cultural Complexities in the Night-time Economy

The concept of the night-time economy emerged in Britain in the early 1990s in the context of strategies to counter de-industrialisation and inner-urban decline. Despite registering a shift towards more fluid, fragmented and diversified structures and rhythms of work, leisure and urban space, a framework that acknowledges cultural complexity has not, in practice, characterised night-time economy policy development and implementation. After-dark cultural complexity has been obscured by a concentration on those night-time economy leisure practices entangled with rapid, high-level consumption of alcohol, especially among young people. This reductionist discourse – oscillating between stimulating and controlling leisure cultures – has restricted policy development within a complex governance environment. This talk exposes the contrasting multi-layered complexities of the diverse cultural practices of urban nightlife, proposing new conceptual trajectories for a more effective framework for understanding the lived experience of night-time culture.

**David Rowe** is a Professor in the Centre for Cultural Research, University of Western Sydney. His main research interests are in the interdisciplinary analysis of media and popular culture, including sport, journalism, and urban leisure. Among his current research activities are two ARC-funded projects on online media sport and the night-time economy, and two international comparative analyses of media systems, political culture and citizenship, and of viewing mega media sports events. David is currently working on three contracted books, and has recent peer-reviewed articles in journals including *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, *Sport in Society*, *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, *Sociology Compass*, and *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism*.

**Nathaniel Bavinton** is a sociologist interested in the spaces of urban culture. His current research focuses on interconnections between urban policy, cultures of consumption and the rhythms and mobilities of nightlife. Prominent outcomes address nightlife interaction in terms of urban assemblages, cultural fragmentation and convergence, and after-dark urban design. His academic trajectory encompasses broader research interests including everyday life, consumer practices and subjectivities, governmentality, representation and city imaging. Nathaniel has researched, lectured and published in fields of sociology, cultural studies, leisure and architecture. He is currently working in local government; putting theory into practice in the field of community planning.



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