I came across a survey recently, designed by the artist Marianne Holm Hansen, which asked after ‘any kind of act or action ... where repetition has so far proved futile’ (www.criticalM.org). The survey included questions and optional answers such as:

Why the act was repeated:
- it is my job/it is part of my job
- I made it my job
- to bring attention to (self, site, situation)
- to solve (problem, situation)
- it felt like the right thing to do
- I couldn’t help it
- I didn’t have a choice

And

Consequences of repeating the act
- none
- people know who I am
- people pretend not to know who I am
- I lost my job
- I lost my friends
- I lost my everything

1 This paper is dedicated to Marjetica Potrc and Andrea Phillips, for their huge generosity during A Work in Process, which has been one of the most enjoyable research projects I have worked on. Please note that the descriptions and interpretations of this project which are offered in this paper are my own, and do not represent their views.
The survey caught my attention because it focused on 'useless repetitions experienced in relation to ART, the INSTITUTION and/or EDUCATION'. The questions, but perhaps especially the choices of answers, captured many of my feelings about my repeated and futile attempts to find funding for a practice-based conceptual art project, A Work in Process, in which I have recently been involved (2004-2007).

After much effort, my colleague Andrea Phillips and I finally decided, in December 2007, to fold the project - not because we did not think that it was a good one (we did, and we still do), but because we could not raise the money even for the initial work (a structural survey) which would have generated a budget for us to apply for the full costs. The irony of failing to secure funding for a project that sought, specifically, to dramatise the problem of research funding in higher education, is not lost on me. In order to explore some of the implications of this, I will take the final question of the Hansen's survey - 'Any other Lessons (not) learned?' - as a starting point for this paper. In what follows, I will lay out the practical and theoretical context of the project, and explore some of the different ways that its various dimensions might be evaluated. I do this with reference, firstly, to the sociological problem as it was understood by C. Wright Mills (2000), and secondly to Bruno Latour's 'matters of concern' (2004a). I also argue, however, that the assessment of the project could be pushed further if the sociological problem was refracted through the virtual problem, and if 'matters of concern' pertained not only to a politics of reality but also a politics of virtual reality (for more on this, see Fraser 2008a). Critique, then, is the sub-plot of this paper.

Gird your loins

The project began in October 2004 when I took over as Director of the Centre for the Study of Invention and Social Process (CSISP). CSISP is an active, interdisciplinary research centre based in the Sociology Department at Goldsmiths. The centre space is located on the top floor of a 12-storey tower block called Warmington Tower. It is the tallest building on the

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2 As Andrea Phillips advised me to do, in an email which included the preliminary sketch for the project as an attachment (personal correspondence, 4th November 2005).
Goldsmiths campus, and one of tallest buildings in New Cross, which is a densely-populated, under-resourced area of South East London. Although the centre space is good (is possibly the best space in the entire Sociology Department) its interior is badly neglected. Following discussions with various colleagues about this problem, Nina Wakeford (then Director of INCITE at Surrey University) inspired me to invite students to redesign the Centre's interior. Two or three months later, a team was assembled which included both staff (who I had approached) and students (who were self-selecting) from the Curating Programme in the Visual Arts Department, the Design Department and the Sociology Department at Goldsmiths. Although the brief included some minimum requirements for the space, its emphasis lay on the conceptual dimension: the design should embody the intellectual profile of the Centre, that is, it should reflect/embody/develop the notion of invention and social process. If the budget exceeded the amount that I had put aside for it, all staff members were committed to helping to apply for funding for the design.

During the course of 2005, it became apparent that the Design students would be unable to participate in the project. One of the reasons for this was that, unlike the students from Curating and Sociology, these were undergraduate students who were already overburdened in terms of their commitments. The remaining students modified their brief accordingly. Rather than design a space themselves, they carried out research into number of contemporary artists who they believed would be responsive to the notions of invention and social process. One of these was the artist-architect Marjetica Potrc.

In June 2005, following an invitation from Andrea Phillips (the Deputy Director of the Curating Programme at Goldsmiths), Potrc came to view the space. She came alone and took a lot of photographs, particularly of the extensive views over London from the balcony which leads off the Centre seminar room. Observing the two lifts that run the length of the tower, one for even-numbered floors, the other for odd-numbered floors, Potrc remarked that it reminded her of the Eastern Bloc. At lunch, she told Andrea that she would be happy to take the project on.
Who is Marjetica Potrc?

Potrc is a Slovenian artist-architect, based in Ljubljana. Her work, which has been exhibited at The Guggenheim, MOMA New York, Venice Biennale and Liverpool Biannual, is often understood in terms of a critique of an ideal of spatial and social order. As she puts it:

I'm aware of the fact that Europeans are unconditionally committed to public space, but this is something I have never really understood. Such dedication to the concept of public space has little to do with what these spaces actually become, that is, territories controlled by special interests. ... What I see in contemporary cities is not only a privatization of public space but also its erosion (Potrc 2005: 114).

Potrc's work 'can be described', Jan Verwoert writes, 'as ongoing research into workable alternatives to the capitalist growth economy developed in situations of economic, social or ecological crisis' (Verwoert 2004: 48). So for example, after six months in caracas, Potrc built a dry toilet in the La Vega barrio, a district without access to the municipal water grid.

**Caracas: Dry Toilet**

Building materials and sanitation infrastructure, 2003-2005
'Borne of Necessity', The Weatherspoon Art Museum, UNC, Greensboro, NC, 2004
'Caracas: Dry Toilet', Nordenhake Gallery, Stockholm, 2004
'Urgent Architecture', PBICA, Lake Worth, FL, 2003
'Urgent Architecture', MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, MA, 2004
'Farsites: Urban Crisis and Domestic Symptoms in Recent Contemporary Art', San Diego Museum of Art, San Diego, CA, 2005

This is a case study of a dry toilet built in the La Vega barrio of Caracas in 2003. Because the dry toilet does not need water to operate, it radically reduces the amount of water used by residents while providing a long-term sustainable solution for the problem of wastewater.
There are many different dimensions to Potrc’s work: there is the research that she carries out and the structures she builds in particular locations (the barrios of Caracas, but also the townships of South Africa, gypsy settlements in Belfast, refugee housing in Ljubljana, as well as in the West Bank, Liverpool, and so on); there is the transposition of those structures into the white cube of the gallery;¹ there are her cartoon-like sketches, with their pithy comments; and there is her website, which has been variously described as archive, promotional tool and platform. The relations between the different dimensions of Potrc’s work have been the subject of much critical discussion. Verwoert argues that while on the one hand ‘the work is [literally] a documentation of facts’ - this is a service core unit installed by the city of East London, South Africa⁴ - on the other hand it is a ‘more like an argument, or rather, a proposition’ (Verwoert 2004: 50). In asking ‘what if these core units were installed in prospective shantytowns?’, Potrc dramatizes a problem. ‘What if we take this to be the future of architecture?’ (Verwoert 2004: 50).

Potrc got back to us in November 2005 with a sketch. This would be her first London-based public art structure.

¹ I say ‘transposition’ in the loosest sense, since Potrc does not in fact ‘make exact replicas of the original dwellings for her shows but builds hybrid structures ... using materials that are cheap, available and sourced in the vicinity of the gallery, juxtaposing unrelated elements from various locations’ (Higgie 2006: 137).

⁴ Service core units are an example of collaboration between urban planners and settlers, the formal and informal city. The energy infrastructure and the question of shelter are dealt with separately. The city offers utility services, specifically, potable water, energy and sewage, and the new residents build their own homes. Until very recently, social housing did not exist in South Africa’ (www.potrc.org)
It was unclear, at this point, what this sketch meant - to any of us. Potrc contacted us and asked if we could meet again. This time (January 2006), she invited an architect who would serve as a contact for us in London and who would liaise with her architects in Lubljana. She, the architect, myself, Andrea and the students met for several hours trying to thrash out the conceptual parameters of the project. The turning point came when Potrc asked me what I was genuinely concerned about, as Director of a research centre. I told her that my main concern lay with money (or rather, with the lack of it). Specifically, I was worried about finding the funding to pursue so-called blue skies research in the Centre. It was at this point that Potrc proposed that the wind turbines should feed into Goldsmiths’ energy grid, which would reduce the College’s energy bills. The Centre would then claim these savings back for itself, as a dedicated source of funding for research; research which would, in effect, be ‘powered by the tower’.

For me, this design is simple, elegant and, in keeping with Potrc’s other work, humorous. It invents a new form of research funding by transforming a sustainable source of energy into

5 What was clear however, was that the focus on the interior space was to be abandoned. I resolved this problem myself, with a visit to Ikea (!).
a sustainable source of funding. In doing so, it illustrates how the generation of intellectual energy is bound up with physical energy, as well as with a whole variety of other material, institutional, political, and economic processes. It draws attention to the way that the ‘ivory tower’ is implicated in the local, the national and the international. And it is a timely comment on Full Economic Costings (fEC), which is really about the sustainability of Higher Education Institutes, and the circumstances under which that sustainability is to continue. As in many of Potrc’s designs, there are two dimensions. On the one hand, there is the fact: CSISP is short of research funds. On the other, there is the dramatisation of the problem: what if this type of project was the future of research funding?

But is this a ‘solution’ to a problem? Before proposing a tentative answer (or rather, a series of answers) to this question, I want to dwell for a moment on the ‘crisis’ in higher education, and on how that crisis is often framed. I am referring here to recent changes to
‘the university’ (by which I mean European and North-American models of universities) and to conditions of academic knowledge production.

The University in Ruins?

Changes in the culture of higher education are having an impact on all aspects of academic knowledge production: on employment conditions, management, research, publication, and teaching. The academic literature addressing neo-liberal policy-making and reform is most thoroughly developed in relation to the US. However, especially as the implications of the Bologna Process\(^6\) begin to unravel, it is also a matter of concern across Europe and globally. The surge of interest in this issue is evident at an informal level, for example in the proliferation of web-blogs and discussion groups such as the edu-factory list (see http://www.edu-factory.org).

Two key themes emerge in the debates about higher education. The first, which is of particular concern in the U.S., is the so-called ‘corporatisation’ of the university and the broader issue of whether universities should be public institutions or private enterprises that seek externally generated sources of income. The impact of corporatisation and other related developments (such as withdrawal of various subsidies) has been explored in connection to, for example: academic freedom and academic tenure (which is said to violate the principles of a free-market economy); degree programmes that have traditionally been supported by government funds (such as the humanities); academic publishing (in relation to the restrictions imposed by the TRIPS agreement and also, more immediately, in relation to academic presses which are less likely to be subsidised by the university as part of its mandate and are increasingly obliged to run on a cost-recovery model); the transformation of pedagogic relations, especially in view of an economic and administrative logic that mitigates against labour-intensive teaching practices in favour of the efficient transmission of information.

\(^{6}\) The Bologna Process was initiated in 1999. It is an intergovernmental EU initiative, which ‘aims to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010 and to promote the European system of higher education worldwide’ (http://www.europeunit.ac.uk/bologna_process/index.cfm). To summarise crudely: the Bologna Process seeks to establish uniform standards across European Universities in order to encourage the movement of students, teachers and resources.
Although the situation in the UK is not currently comparable to that of the U.S., similar trends can be identified here. Most obviously, student fees (and other forms of payment that students are required to make, such as for course reading packs) tend to generate a 'client' relation to the department and university. The rise of plagiarism might be understood to be symptomatic of this changed relation, particularly insofar as it implies that 'learning' is no longer necessarily the foremost purpose of a degree. Courses are increasingly oriented to 'the market' (courses with low recruiting numbers sometimes require no more than a change of title to assure wider appeal) and staff are encouraged to confine the time they spend on teaching to generic workload calculations. On the research side, the shift to Full Economic Costings (fEC) in late 2006 is in part designed to make academic research comparable to commercial research. Although the full implications of fEC have yet to unfold, it is already clear that there will be less 'soft' money for developing research infrastructures and for resourcing non-funded research. Indeed justifying the space and time for non-funded research to the university is becoming increasingly difficult.

The second key theme, which is of particular concern in Europe (in part on account of the Bologna Process), is the standardisation and quantification of both teaching and research, which in turn encourages and enables competition between Higher Education Institutes in the form of various comparable statistics and league tables. Building on Bill Readings' thesis in The University in Ruins (1996) - in which the author suggests that, for various reasons, the university can no longer be understood to introduce students to a culture of knowledge - commentators have argued that the product of the university is not only a trans-national consumer-subject (as opposed to a national citizen-subject) but also a subject thoroughly versed in the development and deployment of techniques of measure and metrics. Indeed this is one of the key 'transferable skills' (or 'competencies') now offered by courses that have conventionally been understood to be outside the domain of measure, such as nursing, or which have historically adopted a critical approach to it, such as development studies.

7 Plagiarism is surely futile (it is rather like lying to oneself while on a diet) - but only if one assumes that learning, about anything other than plagiarism, is the purpose of the exercise in the first place.
Critiques of audit culture and its impact on the academic research process are already well-established and overlap with concerns about the stringent ethical guidelines that researchers are required to meet. Marilyn Strathern argues that audit and ethics have become conflated and that both, in the bid to make the research process transparent, belittle the creative power of social relations that characterises academic research (Strathern 2000). Similarly, it is arguable that the Research Assessment Exercise, which obliges individuals and departments to produce outputs and publications that conform to disciplinary boundaries (a trend which is supported by the pressure on academic presses to publish books that already have a 'market'), discourages creative research and/or confines interdisciplinary research, to take another example, to research between disciplines that are identified by funding bodies in advance and which are shaped funding body agendas. The Wellcome Trust's Sciart programme, which was launched in 1997, and the Arts Council England/AHRC's Art-Science Fellowships, which began in 2003, are exemplary here. Both operate largely within a 'public understanding of science' paradigm and, Born and Barry argue, offer 'an aesthetising legitimation that might obviate other forms of accountability' (Born and Barry 2007: 16).

There is also the question of how these changes will impact differently on different disciplines. For example: in the light of recent reforms in higher education funding in the UK, which many believe favour the sciences over the humanities, the alignment of sociology with the sciences might emerge as the better - that is, the more fundable - option (as many a grant application, submitted in the spirit of what might be called 'strategic empiricism', perhaps testify). On the other hand, Franco Ingassia\(^8\) suggests that the market university divides knowledges in ways that cut cross 'traditional' disciplinary groupings. It divides them, he argues, into those that contribute directly to the valorisation of capital - his examples are computer science and biotechnology, general engineering, administrative and economic knowledge, and the management of human resources - and those that serve only

\(^8\) From a posting to the edu-factory list, 23\(^{rd}\) February 2007. Ingassia is part of the Universidad Experimental di Rosario, an autonomous self-education initiative operating in the city of Rosario, Argentina (http://universidadexperimental.wordpress.com/).
as merchandise for 'internal university consumption'. This is the purpose of the both the humanities and the social sciences, Ingrassia writes, which have an exchange-value within the university economy, but no use-value. Both are disconnected, in other words, from social practices. Although Ingrassia does not refer to The University in Ruins, his analysis bears resonance with Bill Readings' (less radical) thesis, in which he argues that 'the University of Excellence' has replaced 'the University of Culture'. Whereas the University of Culture had a referent, Readings argues - it was tied to the nation state, took national culture to be its object, and the national subject to be its product - the University of Excellence is contextless: 'excellence is a purely internal unit of value that effectively brackets all questions of reference or function, thus creating an internal market' (1996: 27).

This 'crisis' of reference and function has called forth, in my view, some rather unreflexive responses. Consider for example Mary Poovey's (2001) article on the 21st century university and the market. Here, Poovey mourns the loss of academic freedom and tenure that federal funds guaranteed up until the mid-1960s. Unable to pay for themselves, the humanities, she claims, are the most seriously affected by cut-backs in government funding. But Poovey also argues that the humanities are the main, if not the only, alternative to the language of number and the logic of the market, not because they 'necessarily or inevitably perform the function of critique' (Poovey 2001: 11) but rather because the object of their address - human knowledge, agency, labour, culture and creativity - is the least available to commodification.9 Putting aside the homogenisation and reification of all disciplines that this argument requires, and the opposition between the qualitative and the quantitative on which it depends, it also obliges Poovey, as she says herself, 'to risk something that poststructuralism has taught me to abhor: I have to essentialize “the human”' (Poovey 2001: 12); 'The goods upon which I stake my claim are the goods of living culture, which embody and preserve human creativity' (Poovey 2001: 12).

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9 Although note that in a later piece, which was part of a symposium organised by the journal Critical Inquiry on 'the future of criticism', Poovey rearticulates the problem in terms of the humanities' sole focus on representation, and suggests that the humanities might benefit by studying social processes, which would involve forming alliances with natural and social scientists. (This, despite the fact that 'practitioners of these disciplines ... need to develop more sophisticated methodologies ... [and] more theoretically informed analytic paradigms' (Poovey 2004)).
I think it is fair to compare Poovey's position on the humanities to that of Edward Said, who shares a similar set of concerns. Indeed because Said confines his brief and partial study of humanities and humanism to 'humanism and critical practice', education generally and the university curricula in particular is an especially important issue for him (Said 2004: 15). Said cites Masao Miyoshi's claim that in the late 20th century, American Universities have been 'corporatized and to a certain degree annexed by defence, medical, biotechnical, and corporate interests' and his further claim that fields such as 'postcolonialism, ethnic studies, and cultural studies' are in part responsible for the fact that nobody is interested in funding the humanities (Said 2004: 14). These sub-disciplines, to quote Said paraphrasing Miyoshi, have led the humanities to fall into 'irrelevance': 'into word-spinning and insouciant specialities, many of them identity-based, that in their jargon and special pleading address only like-minded people, acolytes, and other academics' (Said 2004: 14).

Such criticisms come as no surprise to Said. On the contrary: it is the response he expects when humanism - or at least, humanism when it is associated with 'the disengaged humanist whose area of expertise ... was culture' (Said 2004: 38) (and when 'culture' is expressed by and large in a 'canon') - is forced 'to take account of what, in its high Protestant mode, it had either repressed or deliberately ignored' (Said 2004: 46). Said points to the continuity between the nationalistic and patriotic mood that characterised the American educational psyche during the Cold War (Poovey's golden years) and the contemporary recovery of traditional humanistic values which serves to justify, in his words, 'America's apparently limitless war against evil' (REF). And he attributes that continuity to the epistemological thrust of humanism in the U.S., which defines itself 'in terms of new threats to every succeeding generation' (Said 2004: 36). Quoting the last line of Cavafy's poem 'Waiting for the Barbarians', Said suggests that the other, 'they were, those people, a kind of solution' to humanistic culture (Said 2004: 36). It is for this reason that, as WTJ Mitchell notes, Said's answer to James Clifford - who asked whether it was possible for him to call himself a humanist given the antihumanist assumptions of Orientalism - is yes. '[Q]uite simply, yes ...
it is necessary to be critical of humanism in order to be worthy of the name' (Mitchell 2005).

I mention all this not to suggest that Poovey's concerns about the 'crisis' in the humanities are not important or urgent - I think they are - but rather to highlight how the deployment of the term 'crisis' can be problematic. As I have noted, for Said there is nothing new about the claim that the humanities are in crisis. On the contrary, 'no matter who is writing or speaking, where, when, or to whom,' he writes, 'the humanities always seem to be in deep and usually terminal trouble' (Said 2004: 31). Importantly this 'trouble' is, according to Said, a trouble associated with an other, especially as it poses a threat to the establishment, maintenance, and protection of a perceived national culture. Said's argument suggests therefore that one should be careful about skipping over the critical contributions of, for example, poststructuralism, and of postcolonial studies in particular, even when - or perhaps especially when - seeking to 'protect' the humanities from whatever force is perceived to be undermining it. To this I would add that it is important also not to skip over the critical contributions of posthumanism and postconstructivism.

Having said that, while these 'posts' can contribute to an analysis of the current 'crisis' in the humanities and other disciplines, and can inform the ways in which those disciplines might be defended (or more minimally, the ways in which the 'corporatisation' of these disciplines and of academic knowledge production might be contested), I do not think they can solve this 'crisis' in themselves, nor should they be forced to carry the burden of doing so. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, as I will be arguing below, 'resolution' may not in itself be the most desirable way to tackle the problem of the market, or indeed to tackle any problem of value. Secondly, regardless of the genuine intellectual contribution of poststructuralism etc., not all commentators in this debate attribute their ascendance - or rather, the ascendance of fields in which they are often deployed - to their critical force.
Readings, for example, understands the rise of Cultural Studies and other associated ‘studies’ not as the cause of the loosened tie between the university, the subject and the nation-state, but as the effect:

Such [critical] practices become possible once the link between the nation-state and its virtual subjects, the link that the University's idea of culture (be it philosophical or literary\(^\text{10}\)) has historically served to forge, is no longer the primary ground of a generalized subjectivity. Cultural Studies, that is, arise when culture ceases to be the immanent principle in terms of which knowledge the University is organized, and instead becomes one object among others (Readings 1996: 87).

In the University of Excellence, anything can be taught or researched as long as it is taught and researched excellently. Readings' point here is that 'a mixture of Marxism, psychoanalysis, and semiotics' is not sufficient grounds to protect the humanities and social sciences from commodification and bureaucratisation:

We have to recognise that the grounds on which we used to make large claims for the humanities have been undermined. Unless, that is, we want to end up like the British, who could not resist Thatcherite cuts because they could find no better argument for the humanities than vague appeals to 'human richness' in a world in which leisure has already become the primary site of capitalist penetration (Readings 1996: 90).

\(^{10}\) Readings traces the historical role of the philosophy department both in what he calls the Kantian 'University of Reason' and in the 'University of Culture' which was primarily the achievement of the German Idealists. He also argues that, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, The University of Culture shifts its centre from philosophy to literature, especially in English-speaking nations, and that it is this in particular - because 'the literary is opposed to the scientific in a way that philosophy is not' (Readings 1996: 70) - that contributes to the split that C P Snow noted between scientific and literary culture. See also Chandler (2004), for a different take on the historical formation of various 'studies' (and its relation to Foucault's distinction between the specific and the universal intellectual) and Lepenies (1992) for an account of the historical rise of sociology 'between literature and science'.
One of Readings’ responses to this situation is to suggest that, rather than reorganise the university around a central mission, one might try to imagine ‘what it would mean to be in the University without being able to believe in the University, in either its actual or its ideal form’ (Readings 1996: 18, my emphasis). This means that ‘the University becomes one site among others where the question of being-together is raised, raised with an urgency that proceeds from the absence of the institutional forms (such as the nation-state), which have historically served to mask that question’ (Readings 1996: 20).

Although I think the notion of ‘being-together’ is an interesting one, it seems to imply an orientation towards tolerance (we must learn to live together and with each other’s different values) and relativism (all values are to be equally respected). I want to ‘adjust’ this proposition a little therefore, in my assessment of A Work in Process, and ask not what being-together means but rather what becoming-together might mean. I rely here on Isabelle Stengers’ notion of ‘problematic togetherness’.

**Becoming-together**

To return to Franco Ingrassia, who not only offers a critique of the state and market universities, as I noted earlier, but who also points to a third type of university, what he calls the nomadic university, the non-state public university or the university of thought. The operative principles of the university of thought are subtraction and composition: subtraction, because it is constituted by the subtraction of the social interchanges of the university from state regulation and the logic of the market, and composition, because these subtracted interchanges are then plugged into ‘other social processes for the production of life outside such norms’ (my emphasis).

On both these scores, A Work in Process hardly qualifies. Far from ‘subtracting’ the social interchanges of the university, it actively taps into, exploits and strengthens the relations between the facilities of the public institution (such as its electricity grid, finance department, estates department, research office, funding and PR offices), local government (such as the Planning Department and the Energy Department at Lewisham...
Council) and national government (the national electricity grid, governmental debate and policies on the environment\(^{11}\) and so on). The perceived boundaries of the university are thus expanded and its connection to - not isolation from - the 'outside' is made explicit. Indeed the very visibility of the wind generators are a reminder of, and an opportunity to reflect on how, the university depends upon and might contribute to the various environments within which it is situated. In addition, the project could be said to be entrepreneurial both in spirit and in practice. The wind turbines are designed to ensure that the Centre is invested in the business of trade: their purpose is to enable the sale of physical energy in order to buy intellectual energy. From this perspective, the higher the price that CSISP can command for its energy (the more expensive energy is, in other words), the better. A Work in Process also plays off market values: in the attempt to support something that appears to be of diminishing value ('unfunded' research), the Centre trades on the moral and cultural value currently attached to environmental issues.

In many ways, A Work in Process is a physical dramatisation of the sociological problem in its 'classic' form. As C. Wright Mills understands it, the sociological problem is the bridge between history and biography, and it is in the formulation of the problem that the sociological imagination realises its full potential. While recognising that 'no one is "outside society,"' for Mills the sociologist is nevertheless distinguished from 'the ordinary man' (Mills 2000: 184) insofar as he or she is able to make relevant the relations between the individual's daily experience and historical structures and forces which are not visible in themselves. Making visible the connections between these domains is the political task of the sociologist which, Mills argues, should be exercised in work, in educating, and in life (Mills 2000: 187). Indeed, it is by successfully formulating the problem, Mills argues, that the social scientist is potentially able to transform the ordinary man's experience of his own experience. Not entirely dissimilarly, A Work in Process draws attention to/renders visible historical and contemporary social processes - as I have noted above - which the individual employee of or student at the University may not otherwise reflect upon as they go about their daily business.

\(^{11}\) See for example the UK government debate on sustainable energy and especially wind power (DTI Energy Review 2006).
Nevertheless, Mills’ conception of the sociological problem is both humanistic and human-oriented, while A Work in Process privileges the processual character of human and non-human relations. For example: the project extends public debates about ‘the environment’ to the broader question of material environments by exploring how the physical is inextricably bound into institutional, local and governmental networks (and vice versa), some of which have assume a material form and some of which do not. In doing so, A Work in Process foregrounds the bonds of material and immaterial dependence, debt, and obligation that enable and sustain intellectual and/or artistic creativity. Contra both Mills\(^\text{12}\) and Poovey, creativity, understood in the context of this project, depends not upon a stable platform (the university) which functions as a showcase for the enduring richness of human creativity, but rather on a potentially unstable set of inherited relationships.

All of which sounds very much like Latour’s conception of a ‘matter of concern’.

In the aptly named article ‘Why has critique run out of steam?’, Latour, not unlike Poovey, reflects on the impact of his generation’s theoretical and political contributions. And concludes:

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entire Ph.D. programs are still running to make sure that good American kids are learning the hard way that facts are made up, that there is no such thing as natural, unmediated, unbiased access to truth, that we are always prisoners of language, that we always speak from a particular standpoint, and so on, while dangerous extremists are using the very same argument of social construction to destroy hard-won evidence that could save our lives. Was I wrong to participate in the invention of this field known as science studies? Is it enough to say that we did
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\(^{12}\) Although the emphasis in Mills’ account of sociological craft lies on novelty and invention (indeed the Appendix to The Sociological Imagination, ‘On Intellectual Craftsmanship’, reads like something of an essay on the practice of creative writing), it is noticeable the creativity is, for Mills, located in the figure of the craftsman himself (sic): it is he who possesses (and is possessed by) skill and knowledge and he who moves ‘beyond’ these possessions in order to act on the problem.
not really mean what we said? Why does it burn my tongue to say that global warming is a fact whether you like it or not? (Latour 2004a: 227).

Unlike Poovey however, who finds her theoretical commitments to be inadequate in the face of the political battles in which she is engaged, renewing the critical spirit, for Latour, means further extending and pursuing his original agenda, that is, further cultivating 'a stubbornly realist attitude' (Latour 2004a: 231). In practice, Latour seeks to examine how matters of concern - rather than matters of fact - maintain the sturdiness of their existence by way of the gathering together of participants, ingredients, humans and nonhumans that are not necessarily physically present in a specific spatio-temporal situation. The purpose of critique is to explore and develop this gathering, rather than to focus on its conditions of possibility: 'Is it really possible to transform the critical urge in the ethos of someone who adds reality to matters of fact and not subtract reality?' (Latour 2004a: 232).

Like Mills, Latour is arguing that there is 'more' to the fact that is here and now than meets the eye. Indeed for him, a matter of fact is 'simply a gathering that has failed - a fact that has not been assembled according to due process' (Latour 2004a: 246). What is required, therefore, is that those entities that have been excluded from due process be brought back 'in' to the collective from the outside, or from what Latour calls 'the exterior'. Latour expands on this position in his Politics of Nature (2004b) in which he addresses not only matters of fact, but also matters of value. Interestingly, rather than dislodge the fact/value distinction, or conflate facts and values, Latour attempts to replace the vocabulary that describes facts and values, and to re-coordinate the axes on which they turn. I will not rehearse the details of Latour's position here, which is comprehensively laid out in his chapter on this subject (2004b, see especially chapter three). I merely want to note that, if Latour's life work can be characterized as an exploration of the lengthy and complex ways in which facts are made, created, fabricated, and invented, then the idea that ethical questions are to be raised only after the facts have been established is bound to be a matter for critique. For Latour, it cannot be possible to build the best of possible worlds when the question of values (the common good) is separated from the question of
facts (the common world). He argues instead that these questions must be conjoined - as the term 'the good common world', which Latour claims is synonymous with Stengers's 'cosmos', indicates (Latour 2004b: 93).

The shift that Latour proposes, from 'the normative requirement from foundations to the details of the deployment of matters of concern' (Latour 2004b: 118), is arguably not a pushing-aside of ethics but rather an extension of it to all who/that are involved in world-making. In his words: 'All our requirements have the form of an imperative. In other words, they all involve the question of what ought to be done. ... The question of what ought to be, as we can see now, is not a moment in the process; rather, it is coextensive with the entire process (Latour 2004b: 125). Understood in this light, one might argue that A Work in Process is inherently ethical on the grounds that it extends due process and gathers together a range of concerns that far exceed the comparatively simple matter of fact that CSISP requires research funds in order to function effectively. Nevertheless, while this represents something of a response to the problem of subtraction as it is raised by Ingrassia (by displacing the very notion of 'normative' relations from which A Work in Process might subtract itself), it does rather invite the question as to whether the project only (or even 'merely') adds relations to relations. Or to put that differently: if all praxis, all fabrication, is ethical, then how are we to understand what it might mean to think and act ethically, as opposed to what it might be to think and act at all? Ethics, in short, can hardly be distinguished from due process.13 In order to develop Latour's critique then, I think it is worth expanding his conception of value. I do this with reference to Isabelle Stengers and Alfred North Whitehead, both of whom have shaped Latour's thinking.

13 This is why the ascription of a specific role to moralists is one of the most confusing aspects of Latour's work in this area. Why is this necessary, if every question posed to the world, by whoever or whatever poses it, is always already ethical in character? Latour's answer - that moralists, in contrast to scientists, politicians and economists, do not have an investment in bringing closure to the discussion as to what should be taken into account - is hardly inherent to the profession. Indeed, in view of the many controversies that surround those who work in this field, and the complex networks of power that are invested in the institutionalisation of ethics (and bioethics in particular), one might argue that there are others - artists, for example - who are far better qualified for the role, as its requirements are defined by Latour.
Like Latour, Stengers’ work is indebted to Whitehead’s speculative metaphysics. Indeed any reader familiar with Whitehead will recognize his rather esoteric technical vocabulary in the following definition of what Stengers calls ’cosmopolitics’:

[t]he prefix ’cosmo’ takes into account that the word common should not be restricted to our fellow humans, as politics since Plato has implied, but should entertain the problematic togetherness of the many concrete, heterogeneous, enduring shapes of value that compose actuality, thus including beings as disparate as ’neutrinos’ (a part of the physicist’s reality) and ancestors (a part of the reality for those whose traditions have taught them to communicate with the dead) (Stengers 2002: 248)

The ’problematic togetherness’ to which Stengers refers is informed by Whitehead’s understand of all entities - actual entities - in terms of their relatedness. This is what an actual entity is in Whitehead’s metaphysical system: a coalition into something concrete, a novel concrescence (or becoming), of relatedness or prehensions. It is perhaps no accident that Whitehead often called prehensions ’feelings,’ although they are not emotions in any conventional sense, are not psychological, nor are they necessarily even associated with human subjects. It is by way of prehension, by way of processes of unification, that all actual entities and societies of actual entities come into existence. Importantly, the unity to which Whitehead refers is not given in a subject, a human mind, in consciousness, or in cognition, but is rather ’placed in the unity of an event’ (Whitehead 1985: 114). “Value”, Whitehead writes, ’is the word I use for the intrinsic reality of an event … Realisation is in itself the attainment of value’ (Whitehead 1985: 116).

As this point indicates, for Whitehead, all relations are value-relations. Whitehead's intentions here are to contest the bifurcation of 'nature' into subjects who are active, moral, and able to conceive of and establish value and objects which are passive, mute and indifferent, and which usually have no call on value at all. Values do not exist outside of, or beyond, relations/things; they are neither brought to them, nor can they be separated from
them. Instead, an entity is the source of values for other entities, and is the centre of values felt. Valuative relations, being affected, is a necessary condition of existence. Values are 'part of the very "matter" of fact - part of the very fabric of "things" in and of themselves' (Rose 2002: 2). This conception of value indicates that the 'problematic' dimension of togetherness derives not from the co-existence of 'shapes of value' that struggle to exist in relation to each other - in a relation of opposition, for example - but from their relationality. It is on account of this relationality that 'togetherness' will be achieved not by opposing one value to another, by replacing one value with another, or by affirming two different sets of values. In all these instances, different values remain intact (precisely: different from each other).

Instead, given that no value exists in isolation (to be opposed, replaced or affirmed by, or indeed rendered relative to, another value), given the relationality of all entities, 'making relevant' necessarily involves the transformation of all the 'parties' involved (it involves the creation or invention of things newly transformed, one might say). This is the difference, I think, between being-together (Readings) and becoming-together: becoming-together cannot be about 'tolerating' the changes to higher education but nor can it be about preserving the 'ideal' of the university. Unlike Ingrassia's solution to the problem of the university, which is to detach the values of the university of thought from the values of the state and the market, and unlike Poovey's solution, which is to oppose one value (human creativity) to another (commodification), A Work in Process neither opposes the value that is number to the value that is scholarly research, nor seeks to affirm one value over another. Rather, and in keeping with Whitehead's theory of value, its aim is to make the value number and the value scholarly research relevant to each other. Importantly - and this is where the real lessons, I think, are to be learned - this will mean that both will be transformed.

In theory. In practice however, since Andrea and I were not able to raise the money for this project, these remain, in effect, the unlearned lessons, or rather the 'lessons (not) learned'
as Marianne Holm Hansen would put it. I want to expand more fully on the notion of lessons-not-learned in the final, concluding, part of this paper.

Blue skies

One of the problems with Mills’ sociological problem is that it takes historical social structures on the one hand and some variation of the subject on the other as given. Indeed Gregor McLennan argues, at least with regards to the first part of this formulation, that this is a prerequisite for sociology: sociological concern with ‘structures, institutions and categories of differentiation’, he writes, is ‘never optional’ (McLennan 2005: 43). Given these ‘givens’, one might speculate that making connections is important not solely because it illustrates the relevance of history to biography (say), but because the activity of connecting things that have already been identified by the sociologist in advance makes sociology relevant to itself. Understood in this way, the sociological problem is its own solution: it transforms (or seeks to transform) ordinary experience into sociological experience (for more on this, see Fraser 2008b). This preoccupation with what is already known - and with making what is already known, known to others - applies as much to Latour as it does to Mills. For while Latour is manifestly not interested, as Mills is, in exposing false consciousness, he is nevertheless not averse to a little revelation: ‘give me one matter of concern,’ Latour writes, ‘and I will show you the whole earth and heavens that have to be gathered to hold it firmly in place’ (Latour 2004a: 246). And yet, as Whitehead puts it in relation to any entity, whether physical or conceptual: ‘by the nature of the case, you have abstracted from the remainder of things. In so far as the excluded things are important in your experience, your modes of thought are not fitted to deal with them’ (Whitehead 1985: 73). That which cannot be known and identified is as important, in other words, as that which can: ‘The meaning of “givenness” is that what is “given” might not have been “given”; and that what is not “given” might have been “given”’ (Whitehead 1978: 44).

It is perhaps unsurprising, in the light of Latour’s (empirical and pragmatic) interest in the whole earth and heavens that can be ‘shown’, that he should pay scant attention to
Whitehead’s concept of potentiality which pertains, precisely, to the ‘remainder of things’ (to things that are not given).14 And not surprising also, that this concept should be of interest to Deleuze, who arguably found in potentiality many of the characteristics of his own virtual. I do not want to spend any time here on the technical details of Whitehead’s concept of eternal objects (which is his most developed notion of potentiality), or Deleuze’s concept of the virtual, or on the relation between them.15 Suffice it to note that these are the concepts that enable both Whitehead and Deleuze to account for how ‘new things ... can finally find their conditions’ (Deleuze 2003: 80, my emphasis). It is with the conditions under which ‘new things’ are produced that I bring this evaluation of A Work in Process to a close (of sorts), by asking what a research project would look like, and how it might be assessed, if its basic commitments were not to historical social structures but to virtual structures; and by exploring, along the way, how the demands of the sociological problem are both met and challenged by the virtual problem.

Minimally defined as a dimension of the actual that is neither observable nor accessible in itself, a ‘domain’ such as the virtual is not entirely unfamiliar to the sociological imagination which is devoted, at least as far as Mills would have it, to a ‘beyond’ actual-states-of-affairs, a ‘beyond’ the experience that is here and now, and also (therefore) to the creative work that is involved in making connections between different levels of abstraction. This characteristic of the virtual is important, I think, because the explication of what is not immediately, or indeed ever, accessible is how much of the magic of sociology is generated. Unlike Mills’ and McLennan’s social structures however, virtual structures or patterns cannot do ‘explanatory work’ because they are not determining in the way that social forces, or the material sedimentation of such forces over time, are often understood.

14 Latour’s suggestion that moralists should go looking for excluded entities (which implies that something ‘exists’ that could be ‘found’), indeed his willingness to offer examples of the entities that are located in the exterior (such as the eight thousand lives lost per year in France to speeding cars), indicates, I think, the difference between his concept of exteriority and Whitehead’s concept of potentiality. Latour’s concrete examples make it hard not to conclude that the outside to which he refers is not so much an exterior as a neglected interior.

15 Except to note that it is interesting, and indeed helpful, to read Deleuze on Whitehead on the event in The Fold (2003), in which the concept of eternal objects looms large, before reading Deleuze on the event in The Logic of Sense (2004). For details of the relation between Whitehead’s understanding of potentiality and of eternal objects, or between different kinds of potentiality rather, see Rose (2002).
to be in sociology. Instead, the structures, patterns or regularities of the virtual can be understood in terms of the distribution of singularities. These singularities are not determining not because the virtual has no relation to the actual (it is not an unintelligible outside), but because processes of actualisation introduce many contingent divergences.

Importantly, the social researcher's embodied participation, along with the concepts and methods that she deploys, are among the contingent divergences that will shape the actualization of the virtual as the research process unfolds. This certainly offers a reason for enrolling, as Latour would have it, as many different kinds of 'participants', human and non-human, into a research project as possible: not solely in order to strengthen their reality (by extending due process) but also, and perhaps more importantly, to strengthen the relation of these abstractions to unrealised potentialities. In other words, to extend and expand the opportunities for unknown and unanticipated outcomes, outcomes which cannot be identified or presumed to be relevant in advance. In our case, it alerts us to the importance of the practical dimensions of A Work in Process, and perhaps especially its engagement and intervention in the material structure of management. It alerts us, in other words, to the importance of the very part that we failed to achieve. Without these dimensions, we can only speculate as to whether and in what way A Work in Process would have been transformative of the enduring shapes of value that it sought to gather together, and on the kind of conflicts that this would have involved.

But is not this failure to physically realise the project the problem itself made concrete? Is it not an instantiation of the problem of securing funding for blue skies research: that it is, these days, unlikely to succeed? Although it is tempting to answer yes to these questions, this would, I think, be to understand A Work in Process in terms of the classic sociological problem. That is, it would be to assume to know in advance that the problem that the project addressed, the problem to which it sought to be a 'solution', was the problem of funding. Alternatively however, one might consider the sociological problem - that is, the very formulation of the question - to be itself an actual solution, a temporary and contingent solution to a virtual problem. I say temporary and contingent because, if one
were to understand the relation between problems and solutions, as Manuel DeLanda does, to be the epistemological counterpart of the ontological relations between the actual and the virtual, then there can be no ‘true’ actual solution, no ‘answer’ as it were, to a virtual problem (although there are true problems). Instead, there is only the development of the problem in particular ways. For example: ‘the problem of “light”, Claire Colebrook writes, ‘is posed, creatively, by different forms of life in different ways: photosynthesis for plants, the eye for animal organisms, colour for the artist’ (Colebrook 2002: 21). Photosynthesis, the eye, and colour might have the problem of light in common, but their ancestry, or rather, the distribution of the singularities that determine them as solutions, are different.

This conception of the relation between (virtual) problems and (actual) solutions inevitably compromises the ‘revelatory’ capacity of sociology for there is, in effect, nothing to ‘show’, no solution to reveal, and the articulation of a sociological problem does not, in itself, necessarily act as the agent of transformation. After all, not all research projects, not all sociological problems, develop a virtual problem that is worth trying to extract from actuality.¹⁶ A sociological problem, understood as an actual solution, may indeed be a futile repetition as Holm Hansen’s survey anticipates, a repetition without difference or novelty. A Work in Process could be said to be an especially good illustration of this, precisely because it literally failed to materialise and, in this failure, repeats the original problem, the problem of the difficulty of finding funding for a blue skies project. It ‘proves’, in short, the problem as it was initially formulated.

There is another, more upbeat, conclusion available however, but it is one that requires suspending the identification of relevance. For nearly the entirety of A Work in Process I have assumed that the project was about dramatising the problem of funding for blue skies research. From the perspective of here and now though, and in the light of how it unfolded (and has to be folded away), I wonder whether it could not in fact be understood differently. If the problem that it develops relates not only to funding, or perhaps not to

¹⁶ ‘[W]hat is more frequently found’, Deleuze writes, ‘- and worse - are nonsensical sentences, remarks without interest or importance, banalities mistaken for profundities, ordinary “points” confused with singular points, badly posed or distorted problems - all heavy with dangers, yet the fate of us all’ (Deleuze 2004: 191).
funding at all, but rather to the 'blue skies' which define research whose relevance cannot, by definition, be known or even guaranteed in advance. 'It seems', Deleuze writes, 'that a problem always finds the solution it merits, according to the conditions which define it as a problem' (Deleuze 2004: 65). Perhaps the lesson to be extracted from A Work in Process, from this actual solution which appears to be no solution at all, is the problem of the virtual itself: that it is the incommensurability of the relation between the virtual and the actual that actively institutes an openness with regards to the question of what is and is not important. And this, to me, does seem a lesson worth learning in the context, specifically, of the emphasis on audit culture in the university. By forcing the question of value to be held open, the relation between the virtual and the actual disallows us from seeing the 'answer' to the question of the project's value as an accounting problem - or perhaps more accurately, since an actual solution is never the resolution of a virtual problem - a problem to be accounted for.
Coda

This paper has not included a discussion of our attempt to find funding, which was perhaps the most protracted and complex part of the project, and which would certainly constitute a paper in itself. These attempts brought Andrea and I into contact with a whole variety 'stakeholders' including numerous potential surveyors, builders, planners, engineers and funding-bodies, as well with local government, a consultancy agency and a 'fabrication' studio. Of the many people who were supportive of this project, including Geoffrey Crossick, (the Warden of Goldsmiths), I would like to thank in particular Rebecca Coleman (the then administrator for CSISP), Dominik Kremerskothen (Sexy Machinery), Celia Lury (the then Head of Sociology), and Pauline Sarson (Estates Department, Goldsmiths).