CRITICAL COMMUNICATIONS RESEARCH IN AUSTRALIA: FROM RADICAL POPULISM TO CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

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Abstract

This paper tracks the development of critical communications research in Australia over a 30-–year period. It assesses the relative significance of critical theory, Marxist political economy and cultural studies to the development of such a tradition, linking this to distinctive elements of Australian politics and culture, particularly the weakness of the institutional left and the significance of populism as a mode of political engagement. The paper also evaluates the rise of "creative industries" discourse as an emergent development, and a distinctive contribution of Australian media and communications research to the field internationally.

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Introduction: Local "Rocks" and Global "Hard Places"

The question of whether there is an Australian critical tradition in communications research that is worth knowing about is one that has certainly engaged scholars in Australia. Graeme Turner (1992) has argued that critical researchers in Australia face a dilemma characteristic of the condition of being post-colonial, of facing a "double bind" between what he terms the "rock" of cultural nationalism and the "hard place" of global circuits of cultural production and distribution. The former is in danger of appearing backward-looking and exclusionary to its critics, while the latter choice to align one's work within dominant "metropolitan" discourses, and accepting a location within global circuits of knowledge production and distribution, may be inappropriate to the political, economic and cultural circumstances faced in one's own national environment. Turner has observed that:

> *Postcolonial intellectuals may feel compromised when criticising their own culture, because their criticism tends to align them with the coloniser; alternatively, uncritical defence of their culture aligns them with the chauvinistic nationalism so widely and variously used as a mechanism for generating consensus on a delimited definition of the nation* (Turner 1992, 427).

By the standards of global critical discourse, Australian traditions in communications, media and cultural studies discourse do not appear overly radical. Marxism has not been a strong intellectual or political influence in Australia, and much Australian research in areas such as cultural studies, cultural policy studies, or, more recently, creative industries, has appeared to those outside of Australia to be overly influenced by the agendas of government and industry, having betrayed a critical impulse in favour of administratively-oriented intellectual pragmatism. To take one famous example, Fredric Jameson regarded the suggestion that critical researchers would wish to work with such cultural and media institutions as "obscene" to those who regarded themselves as being on "the left" (quoted in Bennett 1998a, 34). Others have seen Australian critical researchers, particularly in cultural studies, as failing the struggles of the oppressed and disadvantaged in favour of a free-wheeling "cultural populism" that concedes far too much to the idea of "consumer sovereignty" and the pro-market agenda of neo-liberal economics (McGuigan 1992).

The fault lines also operate within Australia, particularly around questions of whether critical academic work that nonetheless engages with government and industry is inevitably compromised by its complicity with nationalist discourses. Milner (1991) considered one of the strengths of Australian post-structuralism to be the degree to which it could "deconstruct the cultural politics of Australian nationalisms, radical or otherwise" (Milner 1991, 79). At the same time, critical academics are interrogated by those working within policy communities, who find such deconstruction unhelpful, and in danger of weakening their capacity to lobby governments and industry associations (e.g. Bailey 1994). Cunningham famously observed that policy discourse tends to be "so much grist to the critical mill" (Cunningham 1992a, 69), yet without policy interventions that are often motivated by cultural nationalism, Australian cultural infrastructures would be highly vulnerable to pressures associated with economic globalisation:

> *National rhetorics, which may appear transparently ideological to the social critics, are of recent vintage and are quite vulnerable to the stronger*

> *imperatives towards internationalisation which have a persuasive technological and economic cachet. Without a national cultural infrastructure, and a workable rhetoric to sustain it, the sources for enlivening community, local, regional or ethnic cultural activity would be impoverished* (Cunningham 1992a, 43).

While the Australian Labor Party (ALP) was one of the first socialist parties in the world, it is important to note at the outset that the socialist tradition in Australia is not a strong one. As early as 1902, French writer Albert Métin described what the ALP had developed as "socialism without doctrines" (*socialisme sans doctrines*), where the need to prioritise electoral success over political principle was taken to be so self-evident as to be barely worth debating. Indeed, V. I. Lenin observed in 1913 that the Australian Labor Party was a "liberal-bourgeois party," and its history has been that of a party where a pragmatic electoral politics and a commitment to "civilizing capitalism" rather than overthrowing it has predominated.[1] Despite challenges from the Communist Party of Australia for control over the trade unions, and, more recently, the rise of the Australian Greens as an electoral force, the ALP has remained the dominant left-of-centre political party in Australia. However, it has not been the dominant force in Australian politics; for about three-quarters of the time since Federation in 1901, Australia has been governed at a Federal level by conservative political parties.

One consequence of the institutional weakness of the Australian left, and the decidedly centrist and pragmatic instincts of the ALP, has been the difficulty facing radical intellectuals in forming what Terry Eagleton (1984) has termed a "counter-public sphere." Eagleton defined a counter-public sphere as providing relations of mutuality between critical intellectuals and oppositional social and political movements, enabling a "shift [of] the role of critic from isolated intellectual to political functionary," and providing "a readership [that is] institutionalised rather than amorphous, able to receive and interpret such work in a collective context and to ponder its consequences for political action" (Eagleton 1984, 112). At the same time, there is a history of what can best be termed *radical populism*, which typically arises in sporadic, non-institutional forms, and which has been of considerable interest to Australian critical intellectuals. It has been a factor in the dynamism of Australian cultural studies, which quickly came to occupy the core position in Australian critical communications from the mid-1980s onwards.[2] A passionate interest in popular culture and the everyday has been a recurring feature of Australian work in the field, marked, as Frow and Morris observe, not by a "discourse of intellectual alienation," but rather by a "discourse of social involvement" (Frow and Morris 1993, xviii). A "post-Marxist" politics of articulation and engagement with the popular is arguably found at the inception of the Australian critical tradition; it does not displace a once-dominant Marxism grounded in the practice of collective institutions and socialist politics.

One feature of the Australian critical tradition is the absence of strong divides between political economy and cultural studies, of the sort found, for example, in British media studies (e.g. Curran, Walkerdine and Morley 1996). This is not to say that there is a consensus, but rather that researchers often move between the "industrial" and "textual" strands of media and communication studies.[3] Some of the more interesting divisions have been between those who see critical work as best

aligned to literary criticism, sociology or popular media, or whether an ability to engage with policy agencies is a measure of the relevance of critical research. Similarly, given the absence of a strong tradition of "mainstream" communications research in Australia, it did not prove difficult for the critical tradition to establish itself as the "mainstream" of Australian media and communications research.[4] John Sinclair has argued that the best work in Australian media and communications research "fuses ("European") critical theory with ("US") attention to empirical detail, is premised on an understanding of industry structure and functioning, and perhaps also maintains an eye on policy implications. No centre or school of thought has a monopoly on such a fusion" (Sinclair 2002, 34).

With its (post-1788 invasion) origins as a white settler outpost of the British Empire in the Asia-Pacific region, Australia has always been a centre of trade and the movement of people, commodities, images and ideas, and this is reflected in its adoption and absorption of key concepts from Europe and North America in particular. At the same time, the uses to which such work is put by Australian critical communications researchers is often quite different to that found in the countries of origin of such work. Turner (1993) argued that hybridity was a central attribute of Australian cultural studies, and that:

> *In Australian cultural studies, European theory has not been simply a fashionable avenue for intellectual window shopping. It is less respectful than that, as those who raid the European shelves have little compunction in making major modifications to, or entirely discarding, whatever they find, if it fails to suit local conditions. Indeed, the relationship between Australian cultural studies and European cultural studies is dominated by the regular practice of appropriation and then modification to local conditions* (Turner 1993, 6).

In a recent assessment of the work of Australian cultural theorist Meaghan Morris, Tania Lewis (2003) has proposed that Australian cultural studies has developed through a process of exchange based around a "located transnationalism," where there is a two-way exchange of ideas between "global" (i.e. Anglo-American or metropolitan) cultural and intellectual formations, and their modes of reception, application and transformation in nationally-based intellectual formations such as that of Australia.

The final point to be observed is the strong emphasis upon the importance of practicality in the application of critical media and communication research. While critical theorists elsewhere have viewed policy-oriented research as part of the "administrative" tradition, and hence not as a part of the spectrum of critical communications research (e.g. Mosco 1996, 253-256), cultural policy studies has presented the applicability of its ideas to policy agencies as an important crucible on which the political application of critical theories can be empirically tested. More generally, critical researchers seeking other outlets for their work have often sought to have practical influence in the public domain by other means, whether through journalism, involvement in popular media, or engagement with community organisations. Even where involvement has remained largely academic, it has frequently sought to intervene in contemporary political debates.[5] Most recently, the initiative to establish creative industries faculties at universities such as Queensland University of Technology and Edith Cowan University, and the championing of creative industries as a new direction for Australian media and communications research,

can be seen as a new direction for practical and applied research, albeit a contentious one, as its looks for new forms of engagement with the commercial sectors.

Radical Populism and High Theory: The Emergence of Critical Australian Media and Communications Research

The origins of a radical tradition in Australian media and communications research can be more or less precisely dated to 1975. While a series of media reform coalitions, and criticisms of the status quo in Australian media, had existed since the early 1960s,[6] 1975 marks a year when a series of tendencies came together that would form the basis of an Australian tradition in critical communications research. The Australian Labor Party (ALP) government led by Gough Whitlam was elected in 1972. As Australia's Labor government since the late 1940s, it pursued a vigorous reform agenda including the introduction of a universal health insurance system, the abolition of higher education fees, withdrawal of Australian troops from the Vietnam War, and major increases in expenditure on the arts, culture and urban development. The dismissal of Whitlam by the Governor-General (as representative of the British Crown acting as the Australian Head of State) on November 11, 1975, was viewed by many on the political left as a ruling class "coup", which – most notably for our purposes – was seen as involving the media in a critical role, particularly that section owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation. While the hostility of the Australian mainstream media towards the idea of a Labor government had been taken as a given for many years, what was seen to be happening in the Murdoch press was different: It looked like a systematic attempt by a powerful media mogul to use his newspapers, which had supported Whitlam and Labor only three years earlier, to engineer the downfall of a democratically elected government of the left. Given the global expansion of News Corporation, and both the willingness to get politically involved and the well-publicised move to the political right of its head, it seemed to be an obvious focus for radical, politically motivated research in Australian media and communications.[7]

The fall of Whitlam in 1975 came at the end of a period where the left had experienced modest growth in its political influence, and a substantial transformation in its social composition. The period from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s marks an era where the rise to maturity of the "Baby Boom" generation coincides with a questioning of the bases of political conservatism in Australia, and the rise of a "New Left" in Australia (Gordon 1970; Playford and Kirsner 1972). Such "New Left" movements in Australia – which followed the United States reasonably closely in the rise of a "New Left" and counter-cultural movements – occurred alongside the new opportunities for young people to pursue careers in the creative and performing arts, the emerging film industry, or the rapidly growing higher education system. The result was that the resurgence of the political left was strongly linked to what would later be understood as cultural politics. While the political left in the 1950s and 1960s had largely devoted itself to organizing in the trade union movement, and had only taken a limited involvement in cultural activities, the "New Left" of the 1970s was determined to be visible to the wider Australian public, savvy in its use of the media, and committed to a wholesale modernisation and transformation of an Australian culture that it saw to be conservative, insular, anti-intellectual, and timid.[8]

An understanding of Australian media thus came to have two elements. It was, on the one hand, committed to a political economy of Australian capitalism as part of the dominant capitalist world-system,[9] and a placing of Australian media within this emergent new international division of labour (Frobel, Heinrichs and Kreye 1980; c.f. Crough and Wheelwright 1983). On the other hand, it promoted a more forensic and media-specific analysis of how mass communication institutions could present messages in ways that shaped the political and cultural values of the wider Australian community. Humphrey McQueen's *Australia's Media Monopolies* (McQueen 1977) saw the Australian media as the compliant mouthpieces of global monopoly capitalism and US imperialism. In McQueen's Maoist-inspired Marxism, this meant that public broadcasters such as ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) were no less pro-capitalist than the commercial media, and that all of these media outlets actually served American interests. As Mick Counihan observed at the time, McQueen's analysis of media meant that all media messages were shown to serve US-led monopoly capitalism, and all media institutions were so incorporated into this system that the only alternatives for activists were slogan painting and pavement chalking (Counihan 1977). Bob Connell's *Ruling Class, Ruling Culture* (Connell 1977), which came out at roughly the same time, is more representative of the intellectual *milieu* of the period. While it is largely a sociology of the Australian ruling class and a theory of class bias in education rather than a theory of the media, it draws upon Antonio Gramsci's concept of *hegemony*, which was the major influence upon Australian intellectuals interested in cultural politics and associated with the "New Left" in the 1970s (Gramsci 1971). Its idea that bourgeois rule was established largely by consent rather than through coercion, or what Connell called the dominance of "middle-class culture," and its emphasis upon a "shifting equilibrium" between dominant and counter-hegemonic interests to shape dominant ideas, would be one of the major *motifs* of critical Australian media and communications research for many years to come.[10]

Critical media and communications research as it developed in Australia since 1975 was a distinct amalgam of radical populism and high theory. The rise of the "New Left," and the election of the Whitlam Labor government, had been associated with *cultural nationalism*, manifested in the rebirth of the Australian film industry, the rise of commercial TV drama production, the revitalisation of the ABC, and overseas success for Australian writers and musicians. The alignment of cultural nationalism with left politics suggested the possibility of a progressive cultural politics that could attract broad support in the Australian community, particularly if it could be linked to the intransigence of multinational and powerful local media interests. At the same time, the influence of continental European political theory – associated with Gramsci's theory of hegemony, Louis Althusser's revision of Marxist theories of the state, ideology and subjectivity, and later, poststructuralist theorists such as Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard and Baudrillard – pointed towards the development of critical perspectives that would need some distance from the immediate concerns of political activists. The latter tendencies would emerge, and be worked through, in more specialist theoretical journals such as *Arena* and *Intervention*.[11]

The Australian media text perhaps most reflective of critical communications theory as it had developed in Australia by the early 1980s was Bill Bonney and Helen Wilson's *Australia's Commercial Media* (Bonney and Wilson 1983). Bonney

and Wilson described their theoretical orientation as derived "largely from recent British work … done at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham and the Centre for Mass Communication Research at Leicester" (Bonney and Wilson 1983, vii). The book itself divides more or less evenly between a political economy-based account of ownership and control, technology, the labour process, and Australia's place in world capitalism, and a textually-based analysis of advertising and the manufacture of difference, the packaging of femininity in women's magazines, and the structuring of bias in news. Sinclair (2002, 32) has observed that the giving of "equal weight" to the "Birmingham" and "Leicester" approaches was quite different to what was happening at that time in British media and communications research, where these centres had become the diametrically opposed *loci* of the "cultural studies" and "political economy" approaches to media and communications research.

Cultural Studies and Critical Communications Research in Australia: Towards Cultural Populism?

Despite seeming to provide a comprehensive treatment of the critical perspective in Australian media and communications research, *Australia's Commercial Media* was not as widely taken up as a text in Australian communications courses as might have been anticipated. Two reasons suggest themselves for this. One was that it set itself against the dominant "empiricist" model of communication associated with North American mass communications research. In the Australian context, in contrast to North America, this dominant model proved to be a paper tiger, and, after a short period of skirmishing, the critical approach effectively became the dominant one in Australian media and communications research, and those who differed from it largely moved into business communication or into the growing professional "sub-disciplines" such as journalism, public relations and advertising (Sinclair 2002; Flew 2004). The second point would be that political economy as a distinctive approach to media and communications research has not really flourished in Australia, with Buckley and Wheelwright (1987) being perhaps the last significant attempt to develop a distinctive political economy-inspired study of Australian media. This is not to say that political economy perspectives are not utilised. Sinclair (2002, 32) argues that while the political economy tradition is close to the "core" of contemporary media and communication research in Australia, the styles of political economy used have been "much more heterodox and supple" than some of the dominant models applied elsewhere (e.g. Mosco 1996).

By contrast, cultural studies flourished in Australia in the 1980s and 1990s, and largely brought critical media and communications research in Australia into its orbit.[12] Cultural studies took off most quickly in newer, suburban universities, and in cities such as Brisbane and Perth, which had largely been peripheral to Australia's dominant intellectual movements. Why cultural studies developed so quickly in Australia in the 1980s was due in part to the development of a significant transnational *milieu* of cultural studies practitioners based in Australia in the 1980s and early 1990s – Ien Ang, Tony Bennett, John Fiske, John Hartley and Meaghan Morris are among the most prominent – and a more general interest in new projects in British cultural politics.[13] Interestingly, Australian cultural studies develops a distinctly suburban orientation in the 1980s, with key essays being written about

such archetypal components of Australian suburban popular culture as shopping centres, beaches, pubs, rock concerts, suburban homes and, of course, television.

Myths of Oz (Fiske, Hodge and Turner 1987) abundantly demonstrated the capacity of a cultural studies approach to make sense of everyday Australian popular culture. Demonstrating what would later be termed either the "British cultural studies" approach (Fiske 1992) or "cultural populism" (McGuigan 1992), *Myths of Oz* presented a rich account of how international cultural theory could be applied to everyday activities, and how the semiotic richness of popular culture could be mined through the methodologies of cultural studies. It draws upon the work of Roland Barthes, Pierre Bourdieu, Rosalind Coward, Jacques Lacan, Louis Althusser and Raymond Williams, to make sense of phenomena as diverse as the Australian pub, live rock concerts, display homes, surfing, playing video games, television game shows, suburban shopping centres, Aboriginal tourism, art galleries and war memorials, cricket, and Australian dress and speech. *Myths of Oz* exemplified what Graeme Turner would later identify as the capacity of those in Australian cultural studies to "raid" European cultural theory, for "making major modifications to, or entirely discarding, whatever they find, if it fails to suit local conditions … the relationship between Australian cultural studies and European cultural studies is dominated by the regular practice of appropriation and then modification to local conditions" (Turner 1993, 6).

Myths of Oz was very influential in its time, defining for both its supporters and critics the characteristics of a "cultural studies approach" in Australia as a mix of semiotics, popular resistance to dominant meanings, and a focus upon the politics of everyday culture. It had its critics, who questioned: its association of "the popular" with the cultural practices of the Australian-born as the "norm" in an increasingly multicultural society; its devaluing of class as a significant structural variable in Australian culture; its seeming capacity to find evidence of "semiotic resistance" in virtually all activities of popular culture; its conflation of "culture" and "ideology" (Fiske, Hodge and Turner 1987, x.); and the politics that followed from claims that ordinary people "made do" with existing cultural resources (e.g. Frow 1995; Morris 1998).

Some critics also had a concern that the rise of cultural studies had cemented an approach to politics that was dominated, not so much by cultural populism, but by a deconstructionist mode of criticism derived from radical literary theory that was "insurrectionist and textual … [and] avowedly utopic" (Miller 1994, 267). Yet, in this radical utopian tendency, it seemed to its critics to have no substantive capacity to change Australian politics and culture, not least because of its refusal to engage with institutions and agencies capable of making decisions that would promote progressive political and cultural change. As Australia was experiencing its longest period of uninterrupted Federal Labor party rule during this time, the implied pessimism of such an "unworldly" yet "principled" stance seemed to a significant number of people to be misplaced, and they took a second look at the nature of the state and the realm of policy.

The Cultural Policy "Moment" in Australia

One of the most significant debates in Australian media and cultural studies in the 1990s was the *cultural policy debate*. Leading academics such as Tony Bennett

(1992, 1998), Stuart Cunningham (1992a, 1992b) and Colin Mercer (1994) proposed that culture and cultural practices were best understood as "intrinsically governmental," and defined in terms of "the specificity of the governmental tasks and programmes in which those practices come to be inscribed" (Bennett 1992a, 397). Thus identifying policy and government as central to the constitution of culture, cultural policy studies theorists proposed that cultural criticism needed to be less oppositional and lofty, and needed to develop "a more subtle and context-sensitive grasp of the strategic nature of policy discourse in negotiating piecemeal, ongoing reform in democratic capitalist societies" (Cunningham 1992b, 535), and frame their own discourses in terms that were able to be adapted and utilised by institutions and organisations actively engaged with the policy process. The "cultural policy turn" was explicitly linked to a cultural politics that would not only incorporate insights from the social sciences into how policy is made and how academics can effectively influence it, but aimed to move Australian cultural studies from its anchor in neo-Marxist-inspired cultural criticism towards a "renewed concept of citizenship" that would "commit cultural studies to a reformist vocation within the terms of a social democratic politics" (Cunningham 1992a, 10-11).

Not surprisingly, those championing neo-Marxist-inspired cultural criticism objected to such a reformist, arguably post-Marxist, vocation for their work, which they clearly saw as a "new revisionism."[14] Bronwen Levy accused cultural policy studies of possessing a "lack of skepticism … about the political programmes of governments" (Levy 1992, 534), while Boris Frankel termed these theorists "cultural technocrats", who were promoting "a managerial, market-oriented form of cultural policy" (Frankel 1992, 270). Cultural policy theorists responded in two ways. First, it was argued that the model of critical intellectual practice championed by the neo-Marxists assumed a wide divide between state institutions and those of civil society, whereas the boundaries between state institutions and those of civil society were highly porous in countries such as Australia, and where "public spheres … are brought into being … in varying degrees of quasi-autonomous relationship to state bureaucracies" (Bennett 1992b, 235-236). Gay Hawkins' "revisionist" history of Australian community arts was relevant here, as she revealed the extent to which community arts was "a creation of government policy, an official invention" (Hawkins 1993, xviii), rather than the expression of oppositional cultural politics. The second point, argued most strongly by Stuart Cunningham in *Framing Culture* (Cunningham 1992a), was that the critical political mission of cultural studies and related disciplines could in fact be revitalised by engagement with the policy process. Cunningham used the examples of policy debates around Australian content regulations for commercial TV, advertising standards, the introduction of pay television, and media violence debates, to put the case for critical researchers in media and communications to work with activist groups such as the Communications Law Centre and the Public Interest Advocacy Centre to try and influence policy outcomes in politically progressive directions.

Tom O'Regan (1992) proposed that a focus on policy was a legitimate one for critical research in Australia, but argued that the concept of "policy" needed to be broadened. O'Regan argued that the agenda of cultural policy studies unduly narrowed the focus of cultural studies around state administrative purposes and reformism within the governmental system, whereas it could also serve oppositional purposes and what he termed "diagnostic purposes," in which "policy

emerges as a politics of discourse in a descriptive enterprise" (O'Regan 1992, 418). He argued for a reorientation of cultural policy studies towards what he saw as a "bottom-up" approach, oriented towards those most socially disadvantaged and acting on behalf of the subjects of institutional power, rather than a "top-down" approach of working with government institutions in the management of social and cultural relations. O'Regan's critique of cultural policy studies was a wide-ranging, sympathetic and cogent one. It posed the question of whether most forms of cultural studies and cultural criticism could be interpreted as "policy," much as the cultural policy studies approach had itself critiqued the claim that critical academic research could be taken as synonymous with effective political engagement on behalf of disadvantaged social groups.

Toby Miller (1994) developed the most compelling critique of cultural policy studies, throwing into question the idea of straightforward translations between the contributions of intellectuals and the formation of policy, and the idea that contributions to the policy process were politically neutral or necessarily progressive. In its haste to abandon the textualist lineage of cultural studies, Miller argued that cultural policy studies had failed to address the history of critical policy studies, and in particular the vitally important distinction made in this literature between advocacy for engagement with policy processes, and critical analysis of the impact of policy processes. While the Keating Labor government had been interventionist in the area of cultural policy in Australia, it was certainly arguable that policies by the Hawke and Keating Labor governments – particularly its deregulation of financial markets and reforms to media ownership laws – had not been progressive in their outcomes, and that Labor had over this period ceded too much ground to neo-liberal policy ideas. The election of the Howard Liberal-National Party government in 1996 saw a significant decline in the political and policy "spaces" available for those who wished to participate and influence Federal government policy from a progressive point of view.

The cultural policy moment in Australia was an institutional as well as an intellectual one, most clearly marked by the establishment of the Australian Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy in Brisbane in 1995, which was Australia's first Key Centre in the arts and humanities, and whose Director was Tony Bennett until 1998. Bennett's successor was, interestingly, Tom O'Regan, who has recently conducted a stock take of developments in cultural policy. He has argued that cultural policy has become "a victim of its own success in convincing governments, firms and movements of the central importance of culture" (O'Regan 2002, 9). Observing that arguments to broaden understandings of culture and the domain of cultural policy from its traditional anchoring in the elite arts have largely succeeded in Australia, O'Regan observes that cultural policy is now enlisted as part of "whole-of-government" approaches to policy, as a component of (as distinct from a previous status as an adjunct to) strategies to promote competitiveness, capacity building and community development in a globalising environment. O'Regan concluded that:

> *Even in the domain of "creativity," the close attribute of "the arts," policy-making is no longer being carried out by arts-based cultural policy institutions but by other actors and agents. Cultural policy ideas are now likely to be taken up as part of wider national, state, city or regional development programs*

and translated through these. Even "creativity" seemed too important to be left up to cultural policy institutions and frameworks (O'Regan 2002, 20).

The Rise of Creative Industries: The End of Critical Research?

As with much of what has been discussed above, creative industries is a concept "imported" into Australian intellectual and policy discourse, yet one that has been significantly modified in its application to "local" conditions. The origins of the creative industries concept are found in the Blair Labour government's establishment of a Creative Industries Task Force (CITF) soon after its election in Britain in 1997, to map current activities in the creative industries and identify policy measures that could promote their further development. The CITF's *Creative Industries Mapping Document* identified creative industries as "those activities which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have the potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property" (Department of Culture, Media and Sport 1998). It generated an eclectic mix of activities deemed to be a part of the creative industries, that included traditional arts and crafts activities, publishing, film, broadcast media, music and multimedia, and also included decidedly "non-arts" areas such as advertising, architecture, design, fashion, games and software. The extent to which creative industries should be seen to have its genesis in the traditional policy domains of arts and media, or is an element of a wider "creative economy," where the significance of these sectors is dwarfed by sectors such as design, software, publishing, and research and development more generally, is a definitional debate around the term that is of considerable practical significance (see Flew 2002, 133-136).

The creative industries concept has been adopted in Australia by a number of academic researchers, particularly those associated with the newly-developed Creative Industries Faculty at Queensland University of Technology. Observing the tendency towards *ad hocery* arising from list-based approaches to defining and understanding the concept, Flew (2002) proposed that creative industries was best understood as a new set of creative and policy practices associated with: the shift towards a services-based economy; the rise of knowledge and creativity as key sources of wealth generation and competitive advantage; the need to rethink cultural policy from an arts-centred approach to one that was derived from multiple government sectors; and the growing significance of cities and regions *vis-ŕ-vis* nations as the principal sources of economic dynamism in a globalised economy. Cunningham (2002) argued that the term "creative industries" better captured the significance of "new economy" dynamics as:

> *Technological and organisational innovation enables new relationships with customers and the public that are not reliant on "mass" models of centralised production (media) and real-time public consumption (the arts) … Creative industries are less national, and more global and local/regional, than is typical among public broadcasting systems, flagship arts companies and so on. Their characteristic organisational mode is the micro-firm to small to medium-sized enterprise (SMEs) relating to large established distribution/circulation organisations. And, while many creative enterprises remain identifiably within*

> *the arts and media, it is the case that creative inputs are increasingly important throughout the services sector* (Cunningham 2002, 59).

John Hartley rather succinctly described creative industries as "cultural studies with funding" (Hartley 2002, 115). Again pointing to the significance of new, interactive media technologies and the rise of the post-industrial economy, Hartley proposed that creative industries was linked to a shift from a "*broadcast* model of communication, where pre-made commodities were sent to mass audiences," to one where recursiveness, passionate engagement, and the blurring of boundaries between production and consumption were in the ascendancy, as seen in new fields such as massive multi-player online gaming (Hartley 2002, 116). While Cunningham presented creative industries as moving beyond cultural policy, in its engagement with the commercial sector and its focus on the "enabling state" rather than direct public subsidy for the arts, Hartley saw in creative industries an opportunity to recuperate the dynamic possibilities associated with pleasure in popular culture, epitomised in earlier works such as *Myths of Oz*.

Again not surprisingly, claims for the creative industries being a principal object of critical research have been contested. McQuire (2001) expressed concern that creative industries ran the risk of blurring "the slender but significant difference between being market-savvy and being market driven," running the risk of losing sight of "the important role that art has assumed in generating a critical space within contemporary culture" (McQuire 2001, 209- 210). McNamara (2002) argued that the creative industries model may generate an unduly narrow definition of creativity as that which acquires commercial value, while O'Regan (2002) wondered whether sharp demarcations between cultural and creative industries may have the consequence of failing to adequately address the balance between "old" and "new" media, or between publicly subsidised and commercial creative practice. Drawing upon Angela McRobbie's (2002) critical appraisal of work practices in the London creative industries, Rossiter (2003) argued that creative industries advocates had given insufficient attention to the power differentials between content creators and distributors, particularly in relation to negotiating control over intellectual property rights associated with the commercial application and exploitation of creative work, concepts and ideas.

Whatever the outcomes of creative industries developments in Australia, and recognising that debates surrounding the concept are at an early stage, it can be seen as being within a tradition of Australian critical communications research, that is post-Marxist in political orientation, pragmatic in its dealings with industry and government, and applies concepts developed elsewhere in new and distinctive ways. The idea of a relationship between creative industries development and cultural studies as a disciplinary field has, as far as I am aware, received little airing outside of Australia, yet a plausible case can be made for more vocationally-oriented cultural studies, linking its graduates to the growing media and entertainment industries. Similarly, in a small, open economy such as Australia, that is highly permeable to international economic and cultural flows, the question of how to develop digital media content that is leading-edge in global markets is a highly pertinent question, and one that intellectual work may be productively directed towards without it leading inexorably to complicity with global neo-liberalism and the agendas of multinational corporations. It is also reflective of the extent to which

intellectual divides that have driven antagonisms elsewhere, such as that between cultural studies and political economy, have not been as significant in the Australian context as they have been elsewhere.

Notes:

1. Beliharz (1994) provides a comprehensive overview of the ALP and the "Labor tradition" in Australia, and its relationship to various currents in social and political thought.

2. Wark (1993) provides an example of this, in his championing of Peter Garrett, lead singer for the rock band Midnight Oil and political candidate for the Nuclear Disarmament Party in the mid-1980s, as an "organic intellectual" more effectively able to articulate a progressive politics around environmentalism and Aboriginal land rights than political leaders or radical intellectuals. Interestingly, Garrett himself became a parliamentarian for the Federal ALP in 2004.

3. In his survey of Media and Communication Studies in Australia, Turner (1998) did identify concerns with the dominance of "literary" modes of analysis, based around a fear of their lack of understanding of other elements of social and cultural theory, and a concern that a lack of associated focus upon the industrial conditions of cultural production could lead to a "deskilling" of graduates in the field.

4. This is not without complaint from the conservative side. In this respect, the most interesting critic is Keith Windschuttle. Windschuttle was author of *The Media* (1980), a very popular Australian media and communications textbook, which combined a radical political economy critique of Australian commercial media industries with a championing of popular culture as an authentic expression of working class interests and aspirations. In its time, it was considered to be "radical populist," and a text associated with the political left. In time, however, Windschuttle would become known as a vocal critic of what he saw as the "theoretical obscurantism" of media and cultural studies influenced by Marxist and poststructuralist thought, arguing that such work was of little practical relevance to students in applied communications fields such as journalism, and that it imposed a "politically correct" orthodoxy in the field (Windschuttle 2000; c.f. Flew and Sternberg 1999; Turner 2000 for commentary on the "Media Wars"). While this has received support from some in journalism education (e.g. Breen 1998), it also marked a decisive turn to the political right by Windschuttle, who is now best known in Australia for denying claims of massacres of Aboriginal people by early Australian colonial settlers.

5. To take one example, Meaghan Morris, in her anthology of writings *Too Soon, Too Late: History in Popular Culture* (Morris 1998), concludes with an essay "Lunching for the Republic." It warned of the dangers of political campaigns such as that to establish an Australian republic, which failed in a popular referendum in 1999, being associated with a middle-class, Anglo-Celtic mode of negotiating change through "lunching" that would be seen elsewhere in the Australian community (by recent migrants or women, for example) as the indulgent behaviour of middle-aged males with too much time on their hands.

6. I have discussed elsewhere (Flew 2001) the rise of media activism in Australia during the 1960s and early 1970s, based around demands for greater support from the commercial television broadcasters for local TV productions and the associated demands for government support for an Australian film industry. While this activism was associated with groups with links to the Communist Party of Australia, such as the Australian Mass Communications Council, its dominant politics are best understood as informed by cultural nationalism rather than a perspective explicitly informed by the theory and politics of the left.

7. For Australian research on Rupert Murdoch and News Corporation, see Munster 1985; Bowman 1987; Chadwick 1989; Chenoweth 2002.

8. McQueen (1970) provided the most famous "New Left" critique of the "petty-bourgeois" nature of Australian Laborism and its culture.

9. World-systems theory was strongly adopted by Australian political economists, particularly through the work of Ted Wheelwright and collaborators associated with the trade union movement, the left wing of the Australian Labor Party, and the Communist Party of Australia. Within the paradigm of world-systems theory, Australia was a "semi-peripheral" nation, that was

both exploited by metropolitan capital (through foreign investment in the mining and agricultural industries), and an exploiter of smaller nations in the South Pacific, such as Papua New Guinea and Fiji. Wheelwright and others were particularly concerned with the growth of foreign investment in Australia, arguing that it had reduced Australian governments to a "client state" status (Crough et al. 1982; Crough and Wheelwright 1983). A major difference between "traditional" Labor and "modernising" Labor, associated with the Whitlam, Hawke and Keating Labor governments, was that the latter dismantled tariff protection for local industry, in order to promote Australia's international competitiveness (Emy 1993; Kelly 1993; Catley 1996).

10. Gramscian thought was very influential among the leadership of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA). It provided both an explanation of the CPA's marginality in Australian society and culture, and how this had been reinforced by political dogmatism and a "pro-Moscow" political line in the 1940s and 1950s, as well as a potential way forward for the CPA through linking with the "New Left" and emergent social movements through a "broad left" coalition that could exercise leverage over the ALP. For a pioneering Gramscian analysis of the history of the Communist party of Australia, see Davidson 1969.

11. *Arena* was established in 1963 by Melbourne-based intellectuals, some of whom had left the CPA after the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, as a journal of Marxist theory and politics, but one that was distanced from the "official (pro-Soviet) Marxism" of its time. *Arena* can claim to be the first "New Left" publishing outlet in Australia, and it continues to this day, both as a bi-monthly magazine and as a theoretical journal. *Intervention* was established in 1972, and was the major outlet for Althusserian Marxism in Australia until the late 1970s, when it took a strongly post-structuralist turn; it ceased publication in 1986.

12. See Bennett (1998b, 530-534) for an account of the growth of cultural studies courses, Chairs, research centres and academic journals in Australia

13. To commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the death of Karl Marx in 1983, the Communist Party of Australia brought over Stuart Hall and Beatrix Campbell, who both dealt with the need to rethink Marxism in light of changes in contemporary culture.

14. "Post-Marxism," as represented by the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), has never acquired a strong foothold in Australia. The move away from neo-Marxist cultural studies was most strongly associated with an interpretation of the work of Michel Foucault, particularly the later essays on "governmentality." For key Australian texts articulating the move from Marx to Foucault with cultural policy research, see Hunter (1993) and Bennett (1995, 1998)

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