Australian Cultural Studies: Theory, Story, History¹

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In a forthcoming paper on the History of Theory Ian Hunter calls for a space for historical reflection on the so-called 'moment of theory', and goes on to describe his argument as being indicative of 'a particular way of undertaking intellectual history'.² Let me posit, perhaps against the grain of Ian's intentions, that 'historical reflection' and 'intellectual history' constitute distinct sub-sets of the history of philosophy. Historical reflection, which is central to the Hegelian critique of the self-becoming of philosophy, is excluded from contemporary analytic philosophy by its rigorous refusal of historical time as the condition or context of thought. Intellectual history is what is then left over when the history of philosophy is disconnected from the space in which philosophy actually happens, and in that sense is quite different from the historical reflection in which a past is connected, with whatever discontinuities and complexities, to the present that reflects on it. Intellectual history is *histoire*; historical reflection is *discours*.

In what follows I attempt a reconstruction of the early days – roughly the decade of the 1980s – of cultural studies in Australia, in a way that will rely heavily on anecdote and reminiscence, and which will therefore have much of the descriptive character of intellectual history. But it is precisely the disconnected and self-contained character of such a history that I want to confront, its empirical and 'positive' self-evidence that I feel compelled to reflect on. Nor, for reasons that I shall explain later, am I willing to distinguish between a 'moment of theory' that happened then and a post-theoretical clarity from which I now perceive it. One further caveat, tiresome though such qualifications inevitably are: in speaking about Australian cultural studies, a taxon that I've partly been responsible for institutionalising, it's crucial to recognise the arbitrariness of the limits imposed by the concept of 'cultural studies' and, even more, by its geographical demarcation.

'Cultural studies', on the one hand, designates less a formed disciplinary space than a relatively formless potential which is taken up in different and often quite contradictory ways; some of what counted as cultural studies in the 1980s, such as what was then often called 'semiotics', has been more or less a dead end apart from a few rigorous and isolated projects, such as Anne Freadman's work on Peirce³ or Horst Ruthrof's on the bodily dimensions of meaning,⁴ which have gone at a tangent to the consolidating mainstream of work in cultural studies; the notion of the cultural itself, as it was formulated in the Birmingham tradition as a so-called anthropological model of the whole way of life,

has always existed side by side with more normative models of culture. And what counts as cultural studies overlaps substantially with media and communication studies, cultural history, cultural geography, the sociology of culture, cultural policy studies, and even certain forms of auto-ethnographic anthropology. Conversely, many people whose work has at times been coopted for cultural studies – Ian Hunter or Vijay Mishra or Lesley Stern, for example – would probably not classify themselves as cultural studies scholars, and in some cases do their main work in other well-defined disciplines such as postcolonial literary studies or film studies. My own work has always been perched precariously at the edge of cultural studies, sometimes engaging directly with it at a metatheoretical level, at others doing research that is recognisably within the field, but at others again quite disconnected from it. For me it has been, by and large, a strategic rubric – a way of allowing work at the point of convergence of the humanities and the social sciences to get done - rather than a central disciplinary preoccupation, and this has probably been the case for many others.

The label ‘Australian’, on the other hand, constructs a misleading homogeneity in three related ways. First, as Ien Ang and Jon Stratton amongst others have argued, it separates Australia from its place in the Asia-Pacific region and from the plethora of its connections with and interests in other parts of the world;⁵ one of the effects of this is to assimilate it to a model of white and settled Australianness that does little justice to its internal heterogeneity. Second, and more concretely, it fails to account for the cosmopolitanism of Australian cultural studies: the movement backwards and forwards of intellectual formations, on the one hand, and of people and careers on the other. John Fiske, for example, passes through Australia on his way from Britain to the United States, staying less than a decade; in that time he helps shape the discipline by way of patronage, of teaching and supervision, by co-authoring at least one important book, and by his key role in setting up the *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies*; he fosters but also sets up a reaction against a form of cultural populism that he validates with a reading of de Certeau which was as widely contested as it was influential. Meaghan Morris, similarly, builds a career in Paris, the United States and Hong Kong as much as she does in Australia, where she has had no permanent academic placement. And Ien Ang brings a historical trajectory from Indonesia to the Netherlands to Murdoch University to the University of Western Sydney, but with constant forays to other parts of the world. Finally, the category of the Australian covers over the fact that this national story looks very different from different parts of the country; from my perspective, Western Australia and Queensland are major players in the construction of the discipline in this period, but things look very different if your focus is on, say, the Sydney history that runs from the late days of the Push through the Working Papers group, the split in Philosophy at Sydney University, the influence of the Power Institute, and so on. There is no single story, nor any synthesis possible of these competing versions.

The particular story that I have to tell must in the first instance be a story about the people who shaped Australian cultural studies; the force of individuals, working singly or in collaboration, is the irreducible core of any such history. But the work that they do takes place only insofar as a space is made for it in institutions of different kinds that allow it to appear, to be recognised, to count as intellectual work. And indeed, to speak of ‘people’ is to use a shorthand term for a complex of trainings, interests, positions, and opportunities, all shaped into trajectories which have no predetermined path. The deaths of Bill Bonney and Eric Michaels, the move to the US of Marcus Breen or Ken Wark or Toby Miller, John Hartley’s move sideways (and by a circuitous detour through Cardiff) into Creative Industries policy, Lesley Johnson’s career as an administrator - all these set up

relatively contingent changes of state which then resonate more broadly. Institutions such as academic departments, schools and research centres, or journals, or professional associations and conferences, have a more durable and predictable existence, and it is here that the weight of explanation must probably lie.

Graeme Turner argues in *Nation, Culture, Text* that ‘There are no myths of origin for Australian cultural studies . . . In contrast to cultural studies in Britain, there are no key institutions around which Australian cultural studies can be said to have formed. Cultural studies is still multiply fragmented in Australia’.⁶ Yet in another sense this is not quite true. Certainly there is no Australian equivalent of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham (but even in Britain this is by no means the whole story, which would also have to include the Open University’s Popular Culture course, the British Film Institute and the Society for Education in Film and Television, *New Left Review*, the growth of sociology and communication studies in the polytechnics, and perhaps the post-war extra-mural education movement). But after noting the extent to which Australian cultural studies takes place ‘on the edge of more established fields such as film and media studies; within the debates over theory and practice in such disciplines as literary studies, fine arts and sociology or, and beyond the academy, within feminism; and as a means of framing arguments within the development and critique of cultural policy’, Turner goes on to concede that there are, nevertheless, starting points for an institutional genealogy. The ones he isolates for attention are, first, the journals *Arena*, *Intervention*, the *Australian Journal of Screen Theory* and the *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies*; second, the ‘major investment in the culture industries by successive federal governments during the ‘70s and ‘80s’, which ‘licensed new kinds of critics to speak about Australian culture’; and third, the fact that ‘new institutions within an expanded higher education sector defined themselves in opposition to the established universities through their interdisciplinary programmes’ (5).

I’m going to concentrate on academic institutions and on journals, although I recognise the centrality of the culture industries, particularly film, to the development of cultural studies in Australia. The following four institutions, and the programmes within them, seem to me to have been at the heart of the development of Australian cultural studies in the late 1970s and the 1980s:

Programs in the late 1970s and 1980s

WAIT (Curtin University from 1987) - Communication Studies

Murdoch – Communication and Cultural Studies; Comparative Literature

Griffith - Faculty of Humanities; Forms of Communication program

NSWIT (University of Technology Sydney from 1988) - Communication Studies

The crucial factor here is that these are either new, third-generation universities (Murdoch and Griffith both started in 1975), or they are technical institutes or colleges of advanced education: vocationally oriented institutions with humanities departments and an aspiration to produce research. A combination of low cultural capital and a high degree of disciplinary renovation helped drive these institutions to a sense that the research they were producing was in some sense more cutting-edge,

more relevant, more serious than what was being done in the older-established universities. When I began work at Murdoch University in the middle of 1975 the programme in literary studies had been going for only six months, and the communication and cultural studies programme was not yet operating. I was involved in writing the curriculum for each, without restriction on the sense I had of how these disciplines should be structured - a sense, needless to say, very different from those prevailing in the traditional universities.

Thus the space in which cultural studies developed in Australia was shaped, although not of course determined, by the effects of an unequal distribution of cultural capital between the 'sandstone' and the 'new' or technical institutions of tertiary education, as well as by an expansion of the sector which brought a new academic population (many of them the children of '68) into a field in which traditional forms of intellectual capital were losing much of their prestige - although not, of course, in the eyes of their holders. Bourdieu's analyses of academic hierarchies and their emotional as well as intellectual effects get at something of the agonistics involved, although their functionalist bent means they don't perhaps capture the stimulus given to new work by these tensions.⁷ A further set of constraints begins to operate with the introduction of the Dawkins reforms to tertiary education in 1987, which amongst many other things introduce a funding model that gives greater weight to research and thus tends to favour the older universities. Concomitantly with these reforms, then, but also as a normal effect of the institutionalisation of innovation, scholars working in cultural studies begin in the 1990s to move towards the more prestigious institutions, which in turn, for reasons that have in part to do with their power to draw students, begin to establish programmes in the 'new' disciplinary areas. In the same see-sawing movement, some of the institutions where cultural studies had been early established gradually lose their intellectual energy in this area.

These, now, are the people who worked in these 'new' institutions at some point in this period and who had some association with cultural studies (it is in a list such as this that the arbitrariness of my choices, the limitations of my memory, and the difficulty of distinguishing central from peripheral players will be most apparent; the problem with genealogies is that they assume the coherence of the field and that people are either in or out of the field; they look for and are structured by tellable stories, events and trends):

People in the late 1970s and 1980s

WAIT : John Fiske (about 1980 to 1988), Noel King (1986-88), Jon Stratton, Graeme Turner

Murdoch : John Frow, Anna Gibbs, John Hartley, Bob Hodge, Alec McHoul, Toby Miller, Vijay Mishra, Michael O'Toole, Zoe Sofoulis, Lesley Stern

NSWIT : Bill Bonney, Liz Jacka, Noel King from 1989, Gunther Kress from about 1984, Stephen Muecke from 1984 or 1985, Noel Sanders, Ross Gibson, Meaghan Morris, Ken Wark (1988-90; then Macquarie)

Griffith : Tony Bennett (from 1983), Jenny Craik, Sylvia Lawson, Mick Counihan, Stuart Cunningham, Ian Hunter, Noel King (1977-80), Eric Michaels, Tom O'Regan, David Saunders

SACAE (Magill Campus: University of South Australia from 1991): Noel King, Gunther Kress, Stephen Muecke

Footscray Institute of Technology : John Sinclair and Jim Davidson⁸

Unattached or transient or I don't know : John Flaus, Helen Grace, Adrian Martin, Tim Rowse

Others : Anne Freadman (UQ), Gay Hawkins (UNSW), Andrew Milner (Monash), Virginia Nightingale (Nepean CAE), Suvendini Pereira (Latrobe English), Brian Shoesmith (WACAE)

Some of these people work in relative isolation, in the sense that they are not affiliated with journals or research centres and develop projects that are not collaborative, although their teaching may be. Noel Sanders, a central and insufficiently recognised figure in Australian cultural studies, seems to me to be one of these, although that may in part be because I haven't been aware of how he works with others. Eric Michaels was another – an anthropologist whose work bordered on cultural studies and of course contributed to it in a major way, but who was never 'of' it.

The majority of these people, however, work on projects that overlap with those of their colleagues, or have a sense of belonging to the discipline through their affiliation with journals or research centres or even through a common teaching programme that has research consequences, as was the case with the *Forms of Communication* course at Griffith. Thus Turner and Fiske at WAIT were both involved with the *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies* and collaborated on research projects; the Murdoch people were similarly associated with the journal, and had a clear sense of the distinctiveness of the form of cultural studies being developed at the University. Meaghan Morris, who taught part-time at NSWIT from 1979-84, was part of a milieu with strong connections to the film world and which, under Ann Curthoys' direction, became more hospitable both to the strands of structuralist and post-structuralist work that eventually fed into cultural studies, and to historical writing and indigenous studies; the work of Ross Gibson (crossing backwards and forwards between film, history, museum installations and fiction), who had an intermittent association with NSWIT, exemplifies the ways these different areas were able to converge. Morris also had a loose association with the art-school world in which there was a lively cross-institutional undergraduate scene linking students to NSWIT/UTS, to Elizabeth Grosz's feminist philosophy courses at Sydney University, and to film studies at UNSW. Gunther Kress, at SACAE and then NSWIT before his move back to the UK, was at the centre of a politicised Hallidayan network that included Terry Threadgold at Sydney University and a number of others, and he wrote several important books with Bob Hodge. Tony Bennett at Griffith formed a coherent group around cultural policy work at the Institute for Cultural Policy Studies, established in 1987, which later became the Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy; Colin Mercer, Stuart Cunningham, Jennifer Craik, Gillian Swanson, Peter Anderson, and later Julian Thomas and Terry Flew, were central figures, with others such as David Saunders and Albert Moran involved in a less direct way. And a group of people such as John Flaus, Sylvia Lawson, Meaghan Morris, Liz Jacka,

Sue Dermody, and Helen Grace were loosely clustered as contributors to *Filmnews* and as players in the Australian film sector.

The other thing to say about this clustering, however, is that it was always transient. Australian academics are mobile, and although two academics might have worked at the same institution, it wasn't necessarily at the same time or with a great deal of overlap. There is particularly strong traffic between the institutions I have singled out for attention, with Noel King, for example, moving from Griffith to SACAE to WAIT/Curtin to NSWIT; Jon Stratton going from Griffith to Curtin in the early 1990s; and Tom O'Regan moving from Griffith to Murdoch and then back to Griffith; in the later 1980s and the 1990s QIT/QUT attracted Graeme Turner, Stuart Cunningham, and John Hartley; John Frow and Graeme Turner went to the University of Queensland, as eventually did Ian Hunter and Tom O'Regan; and Anna Gibbs, Zoe Sofoulis, Bob Hodge and Helen Grace went to the University of Western Sydney, as did Ien Ang after a brief sojourn at Murdoch University. If institutions are durable, it is only in a relative sense; they are shaped, and they intensify or weaken, within a process of constant flux.

Intellectual life in Australia has been importantly shaped by what Meaghan Morris and I once described as 'the socially mixed but intensively familial urban subculture and the small journal networks which sustained it'.⁹ These are the journals that were directly relevant to the formation of Australian cultural studies:

Journals

Meanjin (1947-)

Arena (1963-)

Southern Review (1963-)

Cantrills' Filmnotes (1971-2000)

Filmnews (1971-1995)

Intervention (1972-88)

Metro (1974-)

Australian Journal of Screen Theory (1976-1985)

Media Information Australia (1980-1995; then merged with Culture and Policy)

Working Papers in Sex, Science and Culture 1 & 2 (1976); continued by *Working Papers 3: studies in the discourse of sex, subjectivity and power* (1977), and producing small monographs under the name Feral Publications (*Working Papers* was formerly *Gay Liberation Press*, 1973-4, then *GLP: A Journal of Sexual Politics*, 1975)

Random Issue (1979-1980)

Art and Text (1981-2000)

Local Consumption (1981-1985); also a monograph series

Australian Journal of Cultural Studies (1983-1987) (becoming *Cultural Studies* [Methuen] from 1987)

On the Beach (1983-1987)

Continuum (1987-)

Culture and Policy (1990-1998; then merged with MIA)

Social Semiotics (1991-; internationalised from 1997)

UTS Review (1995-2001; from 2002 *Cultural Studies Review*)

Most of these, especially the earlier ones, are not directly concerned with cultural studies. *Arena* and *Intervention* are political journals of the left. *Meanjin* is a journal of political and cultural debate with a strong literary inflection, and *Southern Review* is an academic literary journal. *Cantrills*, *Filmnews*, *Metro* and *AJST* are oriented to film, and *Art and Text* is an art journal. *Working Papers* is perhaps the earliest journal to develop concerns that look like those of cultural studies, although its orientation is to what we would now call ‘theory’, both Foucauldian and psychoanalytic. The *Local Consumption Series*, produced by a Griffith graduate, Peter Botsman, doesn’t use the word cultural studies in its editorial material; ‘new theory’ is the defining rubric. Only three journals have defined themselves directly as proponents of cultural studies: the *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies*, *Continuum*, and the *UTS Review*. Others, however, opened their doors at different times to the new discipline: *Meanjin* in particular under Jenny Lee’s editorship from 1988 to 1994, and *Southern Review* under the editorship from 1981 to 1985 of Ken Ruthven (with assistance from Noel King) and later of Cathy Greenfield.

Where did Australian intellectuals train, and which ideas did they engage with? How did native intellectual traditions interact with imported bodies of ideas?¹⁰ Postgraduate training in Australian universities only became a routine matter in the 1970s, and by and large it is only the younger scholars in the discipline of cultural studies who did their graduate work in Australia. There was, of course, no formal training in cultural studies until the late 1970s. Most of the first generation of cultural studies intellectuals in Australia studied overseas, and most came either from literary studies or from film studies.

Training

Australia : Hunter, Jacka, Cunningham, Miller, Sanders, Wark, O'Regan

France : Morris, Muecke, Patton,¹¹ Freadman

UK : Bennett, Craik, Fiske, Hartley, Hodge, King, Kress, McHoul, Stern, Stratton, Turner (and Canada)

US : Frow, Michaels

But the place of training is only a crude indicator of the intellectual formation that individuals have experienced. The more relevant questions are: What was their intellectual provenance? Which intellectual formations shaped the early years of cultural studies in Australia? This is a schematic outline:

Intellectual Provenances

Marxism: a general influence, but especially on the Communications Studies people around Bill Bonney at NSWIT, and on Arena and Intervention ; Morris was in the CPA 1969-72, where she read Althusser in reading groups; Ian Hunter, Tony Bennett, John Frow, and Ken Wark came out of (and in varying degrees reacted against) the Althusserian tradition, especially its British inflection; the Sydney Working Papers group, especially Elizabeth Grosz, read Lacanian psychoanalysis in an Althusserian context

Feminism: a diffuse influence involving a range of orientations; one important event was the split in Sydney Philosophy in 1973, giving rise to 'General Philosophy' with an orientation to questions of subjectivity and the body

Sydney libertarianism: John Flaus, Sylvia Lawson, Meaghan Morris, Noel Sanders

Foucault: one, libertarian and 'resistant' version in Meaghan Morris and Paul Patton; another, pragmatic and governmental, in the Forms of Communication group around Saunders and Hunter; influences from the latter on Bennett, King, Miller, O'Regan, Cunningham, feeding into the development of work in Cultural Policy in the late 1980s

Semiotics and discourse theory, including both structuralist and systemic-functionalist versions; the former influential on Lawson, Morris, Freadman, Frow, Sanders, Muecke, Martin, Gibson; the latter on Hodge and Kress

Film theory, particularly the Marxist/Lacanian version derived from Screen and picked up in Australian Journal of Screen Studies : Stern, Martin, Fiske, Turner - as with Marxism, most of these move quite far away from their starting point

Culture Industries: a set of theoretical moves coming out of connections with the industry, producing a rather different approach to film theory: Lawson and Flaus involved in the revival of the industry; Morris and Martin as professional reviewers; Helen Grace as an independent film-maker; Hartley, Cunningham, Jacka, O'Regan, Counihan as industry theorists. Filmnews was important here.

Birmingham School cultural studies: again, a diffuse influence, but perhaps particularly strong on Fiske, Turner and Stratton, all UK-educated

The Sydney-based reception of Deleuze and Guattari and later of Baudrillard: the latter was incarnated in an influential 1985 conference, Futur*fall, sponsored by the Power Institute,¹² and the ethos of these theorists was carried in journals like Art and Text and On the Beach

Graeme Turner gives a somewhat different version of this list: 'Sources which feed into Australian work', he writes, 'include American anthropology, "area" studies methodologies used in Australian studies courses, British sociological research into deviance and the press, Screen theory, British cultural studies (particularly the encoding/decoding television research), an indigenous breed of media studies interested in policy and the construction of national identity, post-Hallidayan social semiotics, and feminist rewritings of Australian history - to name a few' (6); and he also mentions 'European theory', including Lyotard, Baudrillard, and Foucault. This account diverges considerably from my own, not because we are telling different stories or know different things, but because the story is so diffuse and so difficult to construct in a singular form.¹³ And in any case the question of origins and influence is badly posed and is less interesting than the question of the uses to which a provenance is put. As Meaghan Morris puts it in a conversation with Stephen Muecke, for intellectual exchange as for international trade 'there are networks of circulation, rather than spaces in communication, and the space - local, national, inter-national - where one is acting at any given time is criss-crossed by all those networks, each of them constructing "spaces" differently.... So what matters now is not the origin of ideas - here, there, coming in, going out - but ... the performance of the text on the spot, and how intellectuals work to define their "spot" in the world, and its relations to other "spots"'.¹⁴

Yet there is a story – that's the point of this paper – and it is not to be found merely in the listing of its structural conditions. In order to try to give a sense of the intellectual passion that drives it, let me reconstruct one, partial version of it from the contents of the four years of the *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies*; in what follows I attempt to reduce these essays and reviews to a small set of underlying research questions. What I'm trying to account for is the problematic that drives the development of cultural studies in Australia: 'problematic' in the Althusserian sense of an interrelated set of questions that generates a body of knowledge - with the proviso that the singularity of this problematic is as much self-consciously constructed as it is given in advance.

The questions that I see driving the early development of Australian cultural studies, then, would include the following:

The problematic of early Australian cultural studies

- The question of constructing a semiotics of the media; the Hallidayan concept of a 'functional semiotics' points to a concern with the interrelation of systems of meaning with systems of social power
- A set of questions about addressivity which gives a political inflection to the work of Benveniste; some of Bakhtin's work is also adapted to these questions
- A concern with addressing popular culture, in its banal and ordinary forms, as part of an analysis of the construction of a hegemonically organised everyday; the concept of hegemony provokes a further set of questions about the negotiated or resistant relation of audiences to textual systems
- Questions of the construction in popular culture of gender, of national identity, and of race, particularly indigeneity
- The question of the relative autonomy of textual representations from the realities they construct - a question that shifts these concerns from literary to popular texts
- Questions about textual reproducibility, the priority of copies over originals, and the commodification of cultural texts
- Questions about the relation of the popular to systems of cultural capital
- Questions derived from the Foucauldian concept of governmentality about the relation of culture to government
- Finally, questions of methodology, especially in relation to ethnographic research traditions

Each of these questions is in some sense politically inflected (in the way the word 'political' was understood at that time) in its approach to cultural forms. To speak very schematically, we could express the problematic of this phase of Australian cultural studies as the question: how do meaning systems, especially in the mass media, relate to systems of social power? Or, even more briefly, how does culture relate to government (in the broadest sense of each word, and where both 'meaning systems' and 'culture' must be taken as structures of practice)? But to formulate a common intellectual project in this reductive and schematic way is to miss some of the force of its diversity and of the sheer creativity with which it elaborates its objects, as well as the sheer and exhilarating sense of difference from the traditional preoccupations of aesthetic and sociological accounts of the world.

Can we say, however, that this set of shared questions adds up, in any but the most general sense, to a common project? What I'm questioning is the forms of unity that are imputed to intellectual formations, and in particular the predication of an inner logic of forward progression through the unceasing correction of partial syntheses that continues to inform intellectual history: first there was Althusser, then there was Foucault, then Stuart Hall brought Gramsci into play in a powerful lateral move, only to be outflanked in turn by a play from the Baudrillardian left field, which in turn gave way to Deleuze and affect and the embodied subject until this in turn became last year's news... : a logic that Morris once described as 'the delirious consumerism of the theory scene' in Australia.¹⁵

Ideas and intellectual formations have neither this kind of autonomy nor this kind of incremental coherence. Rather, I figure them as being structured by the logic of a field which is in turn substantially shaped by institutions and by the more or less contingent intersections of biographical trajectories at institutionally structured occasions (departments, journals, research centres and so on). These trajectories, the long chains of personal formation through heterogeneous contexts, bring with them intellectual engagements, social and political preoccupations, and particular, quite personal worries and obsessions which only occasionally connect with the concerns of others; the points where they do intersect are thus made up of multiple temporalities and of divergent lines of force. Let me get personal, because the easiest way for me to talk concretely about this is to think for a little while about the way my own trajectory intersects with the long chains of other people's lives.

I grew up in country towns and took to books as a way of dealing with them. I won a scholarship to the ANU in 1966 and spent three years of more or less wasted time in a Leavisite English Department; I read widely outside the curriculum, however, in political and sociological theory, in philosophy, in anthropology, and in early structuralism; I was also involved in the turmoil of May 68 as it spread to Australian campuses, and in the movement against Australian involvement in Vietnam. After teaching for a year in Sydney I headed for Buenos Aires, where I taught for another year then travelled through South America. My friends in Argentina were radical Peronists and we saw ourselves as part of a huge anti-imperialist wave. My encounter with real poverty in South America for the first time in my life was a politically radicalising experience; the shock of dealing with poverty of this order was reinforced by trips to India with my Parsi wife, whom I met in Buenos Aires. In 1971 I began graduate work in Comparative Literature at Cornell, again on a full scholarship. These were the early days of poststructuralism; Foucault and Derrida were regular visitors to the university, and Paul de Man had recently left. I took a seminar with a visiting French art historian, Hubert Damisch, who introduced me to both Althusser and Bourdieu, and I read Althusser more fully in a class with Dominick La Capra; I was also politically involved in anti-Vietnam activism. During my time at Cornell I spent a year on exchange at the University of Heidelberg, reading extensively in Marx and Marxist theory, the Frankfurt School, Gadamer, Jauss, and Bourdieu whose work I found in a German translation. I took up a job in Comparative Literature at Murdoch University in 1975, with my PhD still two years from completion. My first book, *Marxism and Literary History*, was published in 1986. I was one of the small group – the key players were John Fiske, Graeme Turner, Bob Hodge and myself - who set up the *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies* in 1983.

My preoccupations in the 1970s and 1980s were with Marxist theory (a preoccupation which grew at least as much out of my political sensibilities as they were theoretical, but which was always located outside party politics), and with finding ways of making Marxist theory less determinist, less reductionist, more capable of dealing with the complexities of literary and, more generally, cultural texts. Althusser and the group around him were useful to me because they dealt with questions of complex causality in ways that broke with the simplicities of base and superstructure. But I also drew on the systemic analyses developed by the Russian Formalists, and on post-structuralist theory; Foucault was particularly important to my thinking about questions of discourse and knowledge - the Foucault, in particular, of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.

My project had a close overlap with that of only one of the other central figures in early Australian cultural studies, Tony Bennett, whose work was similarly structured by a negative engagement with the aesthetics of Georg Lukács and a positive engagement with the Russian Formalists and Bakhtin; both of us took a sociological approach to questions of the aesthetic, and we both came increasingly to be persuaded by the work of Foucault. Our work still overlaps to a considerable extent, although my engagement with the cultural policy turn that Tony initiated was always fairly gestural; we collaborated on a major project in the 1990s, which became *Accounting for Tastes: Australian Everyday Cultures* (1999), and we are currently collaborating on an enormous *Handbook of Cultural Analysis*.

The other points of intersection are more typical, I think, of the ways in which a particular intellectual formation develops: moments of only partial overlap with people whose trajectory is carrying them in quite different directions. Such moments of intersection are occasional, significant and intense on those occasions, and at other times relatively weak, although institutional factors - constant interaction over the years at conferences, on committees, examining student work, as well as the fact of being seen by others as members of the same group - do work to reinforce a sense of commonality.

The most important of these intersections was probably with Meaghan Morris, who has been an important intellectual influence on my work. My first significant interaction with her came when I sent her a draft of an essay on Foucault to which she responded with a long critical commentary, arguing with my reading in ways that forced me to rethink my understanding of Foucault, but doing it in the most generous and supportive way. We have exchanged work regularly since then, and we later collaborated on the editing of *Australian Cultural Studies: A Reader* and wrote the Introduction together, an exercise that required me to imagine what Meaghan might have wanted to write as I put my own thoughts together. Both of us wrote critiques of the politics of populism in cultural studies, and I commissioned and edited her essay 'At Henry Parkes Motel' for an early issue of the internationalised *Cultural Studies*; I in turn have contributed to and reviewed articles for the journal that Meaghan and Stephen Muecke founded, *UTS Review*, of which (in its present incarnation as *Cultural Studies Review*) I became co-editor in 2006.

Some of the other key points of intersection have to do with my work on the editorial board of *AJCS*. Graeme Turner was one of them: someone with whom I had relatively little to do when he was at WAIT, but who became a significant other when we took up positions together at the University of Queensland in 1990, putting together, amongst other things, a program in cultural studies, but also seeing a somewhat fractious English Department through the rapid and unsettling changes of the Dawkins years. Our relationship has been, if I can make this rather problematic distinction, professional rather than intellectual: we have collaborated institutionally in substantial ways, working closely together for a period of ten years; but Graeme's interests in film and media on the one hand, and in questions of the national on the other, have meant that his work has run parallel to mine rather than closely coinciding at any point.

With other colleagues the points of intersection have been more intermittent and sometimes sources of friction. John Fiske's work was a provocation to my book *Cultural Studies and Cultural Value*, which seeks to define the discipline of cultural studies against the grain of the populism that informs his writings (and, in different ways, those of John Hartley, Alan McKee, Cathy Lumby and others). In a

somewhat different way, the work of Ian Hunter, of Bob Hodge, and of Alec McHoul, coming from very different directions and with very different preoccupations from mine and from each other's, has been a source of admiration and a productive stimulus to disagreement. And with others again - Noel Sanders, Tim Rowse, Helen Grace, Elspeth Probyn - I have consistently admired their work without its ever changing mine. These intersections within the field of cultural studies, then, are of different qualities and intensities, and of enormous complexity, since each of these long biographical chains is entangled with every other.

I said before that to speak of persons is to use a shorthand 'for a complex of trainings, interests, positions, and opportunities, all shaped into trajectories which have no predetermined path'. What I find, looking over the shaping of cultural studies in Australia, is at once the contingency of these very different pathways as they momentarily cross each other, and the ways in which they form moments of common purpose which last for a while and then give way to other formations. Many of us, I suspect, carry with us an elsewhere - Buenos Aires and Bombay for me, the Kimberley for Stephen Muecke, perhaps Paris and Hong Kong for Meaghan - which shadows the presence of our work with others and generates its difference. There is no necessary consolidation in intellectual work: rather, we can observe a kind of 'clumping' of intellectual energies at key places and times: the early days of Murdoch and Griffith Universities, and of WAIT and NSWIT; the moment of the Institute for Cultural Policy Studies (later the Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy) at Griffith, of the Creative Industries project under John Hartley at QUT, of Ien Ang's Centre for Cultural Research at the University of Western Sydney, of the *fibreculture* consortium, and of the various journals which brought together editors and contributors in what they felt to be, and what partly became, a common project. This clumping of intellectual work goes together with a movement of post-hoc *consolidation* of disciplinary structure, which is in part no more than the construction of a retrospective and mythic unity, the imposition of a coherent plot upon the heterogeneity of historical stories.

Historical reflection differs from intellectual history both in its questioning of such mythic plots and, as I wrote at the beginning of this paper, in the connection it seeks to establish between a past and the present that reflects on it. The distinction that I have sought to make here has to do with the question of what kind of 'moment of theory' Australian cultural studies constituted in its early phase, and of what comes 'after theory'. Let me approach these questions - which have been implicit in everything I have written to this point - by referring to a recent controversy on the Cultural Studies Association of Australasia list. I pick it up in medias res with a post by Simon During on August 29th 2005, responding to a criticism by Graeme Turner of an earlier post of During's about what has happened to Australian cultural studies today.¹⁶ During writes:

What I meant is that (for what it's worth) none of the original movers and shakers in the field in Australia who still mainly work in cultural studies and still practice in Australia today are working in quite the same academic genres or styles as, say, Judith Butler, Gayatri Spivak, Andrew Ross, Lauren Berlant, David Halperin, Tricia Rose or Brian Massumi or indeed are doing the kind of work that John Frow and Meaghan Morris, say, were doing at the time. Where's Marxism? Feminism? French theory? For instance.... More specifically, I hope that Graeme doesn't mind me saying that I don't regard his work ... as marxist or as feminist or, if it comes to that, as post-structuralist, or as queer theory, or as Foucauldian, or as much influenced by the more philosophical kinds of postcolonial

theory, etc. Which, to say it again, is not at all a complaint directed at him personally. It would be strange if it were intended as one: I don't do that kind of work myself. But I want to work in an environment where lots of other people do do such work, and where some of those people have real institutional clout.¹⁷

Stephen Muecke was one of a number of people who responded with some displeasure to During's comments; in a post of the same day he wrote:

I've only just rejoined this list, so forgive me if I have failed to grasp the full pathos. So it seems that Simon, from the heart of the razor-wire Empire, is telling us we are not political enough, which means doing old theory or having Spivak in the office next door. Graeme [Turner] and John [Hartley] are at least fortunate to have been recognised from Olympus as visible enough to attract the During scorn.... As for the rest of us from that original list he cited, well, we may as well be retired or dead. As if that was it for Oz cultural studies! ... I am not going to be indignant and tell him how some of our scholarship or theory might have made efforts to go beyond the familiar Northern hemisphere theoretical canon, he can find out for himself if he is interested.¹⁸

What Muecke points to is something distinctly old-fashioned in the version of 'Theory' that During posits here: Theory with a capital 'T' as a set of distinct, labelled boxes, each corresponding to a well-defined disciplinary formation and perhaps as well to a structure of prestige that is especially characteristic of literature departments in the United States, in which the careers of major players depend on their mediation to local audiences of European high theory.¹⁹ This is a version of theory that, it seems to me, has never sat comfortably with the way cultural studies has been done in this country. As Meaghan Morris and I wrote in 1993:

It is not that Australian cultural studies (as we see it) is in any way hostile to 'theory'; theoretical work can also be considered a form of cultural practice. It is merely that the doctrinal disputes which have marked and perhaps enabled the emergence of cultural studies elsewhere - disputes between humanism and formalism, formalism and Marxism, Frankfurt School Marxism and post-structuralism, deconstruction and new historicism, 'textualism' and ethnography - have not long remained the focus of debate in Australia, where they are often resolved in practice by a kind of rigorous mixing. (xiv)

If we are 'after Theory', as has become the common wisdom of recent years, it is only that of the kind that During invokes. We have not gone beyond that other, 'mixed' and inventive kind, the theory that grows productively out of its object as it seeks to conceptualise celebrity or virtual personality or media affect or the Asian cinema industries or the place of indigenous people in the polity. Nor could we be: there is no 'positive' space of productivity beyond theory: there is only theory that's aware of the way its categories construct a disciplinary world, and theory that is not.

The question of the 'moment of theory' is thus the question of the kind of theoretical universe we now inhabit, and more concretely of the present state and the possible futures of cultural studies: this is the structure of interest that might drive this construction of the past beyond the merely (and uselessly) descriptive.

Two moments mark an end of 'Australian cultural studies' as it existed in the 1980s: the formation in 1992 of the Cultural Studies Association of Australia, and the publication in 1993 of Graeme Turner's *Nation, Culture, Text* and of Meaghan Morris's and my *Australian Cultural Studies: A Reader*. These are clear markers of a process of institutionalisation; but I hope it is clear from my account that I see institutions as positively productive rather than as betrayals of a primordially free and rebellious spirit. We can, however, use this turning point in the early 1990s to identify some long-term problems that have become more evident than they once were.

The fate of cultural studies is bound up with its institutional place. With whom does it go to bed in the hybridising corporate university - with English, with media studies, with communication studies, with sociology? Is it a distinct domain of enquiry and research, or is it rather an interdisciplinary programme drawing together research objects formed in other disciplines? Why has it failed to make inroads into the elite American universities, and how far will it be damaged by its perceived lack of intellectual rigour? Why is it that, some forty years after the establishment of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham, it is still not possible to point to a single work that exemplifies the realised potential of the discipline, in the way that in literary studies one could point, say, to Auerbach's *Mimesis* or Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* or de Man's *Blindness and Insight*?²⁰ Given, finally, that the fate of cultural studies has been so closely connected with the 'cultural turn' in the social sciences over the last twenty or thirty years, is it now the case that as the explanatory power of the concept of culture becomes exhausted, cultural studies itself must confront the evanescence of its framework of enquiry?

These are questions that should feed in the first instance into a disciplinary reflection, of which one dimension will be a historical self-reflection. Beyond that, they are questions of social purpose: does cultural studies, in Australia as elsewhere, have the capacity to articulate a 'history of the present' to which it could respond in ways that would be at once intellectually and politically productive?²¹ And how must we understand both the present and the past of our 'moment of theory' if that is ever to happen?

¹ Although I 'authored' this paper, it's very much a piece of collective remembering. Particular thanks to Noel King, Meaghan Morris, Tony Bennett, Simon During, Anna Gibbs and Graeme Turner for helpful and often detailed feedback.

² Ian Hunter, 'History of Theory: Notes for a Seminar', at <http://www.ched.uq.edu.au/index.html?page=40667&pid=40622>. Forthcoming in *Critical Inquiry*.

³ Anne Freadman, *The Machinery of Talk: Charles Peirce and the Sign Hypothesis*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.

⁴ Horst Ruthrof, *Semantics and the Body: Meaning from Frege to the Postmodern*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997; *The Body in Language*. London: Cassell, 2000.

⁵ Jon Stratton and Ien Ang, 'On the Impossibility of a Global Cultural Studies: "British" Cultural Studies in an "International" Frame', in David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, eds., Stuart Hall: *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge, 1996, pp. 361-91.

⁶ Graeme Turner, 'Introduction: Moving the Margins: Theory, Practice and Australian Cultural Studies', in Turner, ed., *Nation, Culture, Text: Australian Cultural and Media Studies*. London: Routledge, 1993, pp. 4-5.

⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, trans. Peter Collier. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988; *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*, trans. Lauretta C. Clough. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996.

⁸ Footscray Institute of Technology (now Victoria University) offered a BA course in Australian Cultural Studies from 1981. Cf. John Sinclair and Jim Davidson, 'Cultural Studies = Birmingham + Meanjin, OK?', Occasional Paper, Footscray University of Technology, 1984; the title refers to the melding of sociological and literary interests in this new area of study.

⁹ John Frow and Meaghan Morris, 'Introduction', in Frow and Morris, eds., *Australian Cultural Studies: A Reader*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993, p. xxvi.

¹⁰ Cf. Tania Lewis, 'Meaghan Morris and the Formation of Australian Cultural Studies: A Narrative of Intellectual Exchange and Located Transnationalism', *Cultural Studies <=> Critical Methodologies* 4:1 (2004), p. 52.

¹¹ Meaghan Morris, Paul Patton and Stephen Muecke all attended Deleuze's Mille Plateaux lectures in Paris in 1997-8.

¹² Cf. *Futur*fall: Excursions into Postmodernity*, ed. E. Grosz et al. Sydney: Power Institute Publications, 1986.

¹³ Andrew Milner, too, gives a very different genealogy when he writes that the 'first approximation to an Australian Cultural Studies was ... very often the work of historians, and it continued thus with the post-1956 "New Left" - Ian Turner, Stephen Murray-Smith and *Overland* ... it should be apparent that Australian Cultural Studies actually began here, in the columns of *Meanjin* and *Overland*'. Andrew Milner, 'Cultural Studies and Cultural Hegemony', *Arena Journal* 9 (1997), p. 138.

¹⁴ Meaghan Morris and Stephen Muecke, 'Relations of Theory: Meaghan Morris talks with Stephen Muecke', *Outside the Book: Contemporary Essays on Literary Periodicals*, ed. David Carter. Sydney: Local Consumption Publications, 1991, p. 77.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹⁶ . This controversy was developed as an 'Exchange on Theory and Cultural Studies', forthcoming in *Cultural Studies Review*.

¹⁷ Simon During, post at <http://lists.cdu.edu.au/pipermail/csaa-forum/Week-of-Mon-20050829/000949.html>.

¹⁸ Stephen Muecke, post at <http://lists.cdu.edu.au/pipermail/csaa-forum/Week-of-Mon-20050829/000950.html>.

¹⁹ My thanks to Tony Bennett for this formulation.

²⁰ Yet, as a respondent to a version of this paper delivered at Sydney University pointed out, it may be that this is the wrong way of asking this question, with an emphasis on the masterwork rather than, say, the long hybrid essay which is so characteristic of Australian cultural studies, or the hybrid book such as Bentrak, Muecke and Roe's *Reading the Country*.

²¹ Simon During finds no tradition in cultural studies of such an articulation: no tradition 'within which history writing (here the history of theory itself) triggers theorisation'. 'Socialist Ends: The British New Left, Cultural Studies, and the Emergence of Academic "Theory"', at <http://www.ched.uq.edu.au/index.html?page=40667&pid=40622>.

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