Cultural Studies: A Critical Realist Intervention.

Introduction.

In general terms this chapter is an attempt to answer the question: 'What difference does Critical Realism make within the field of Cultural Studies?' The short answer to this would have to be, regrettably, 'As yet, not much'. Nevertheless we are convinced of the potential of Critical Realism, especially in its dialectical guise as Dialectical Critical Realism (DCR), to make a significant contribution to Cultural Studies. To demonstrate this we examine Cultural Studies, firstly in historical detail, then in its turn to Policy and finally in its move to embrace the New Media, Creative Industries, and the New Economy.[1] We conclude this overview with an attempt to suggest some Critical Realist solutions to the aporiai of Cultural Studies as currently practised.

Cultural Studies Now.

As a discipline, contemporary Cultural Studies gives many signs of strength and vitality, and appears to demonstrate an impressive range of interest among scholars working in the field. For instance, a recent anthology on American Cultural Studies, representative of the diversity of the field more generally, displays a range of interests encompassing a concern with identity politics, Native American Studies, material on transvestites, AIDS and Queer Theory (Hartley & Pearson, 2000).

Rather than an impressive and liberal range of interests, however, we believe that this diversity is best characterised as an "eclecticism", that is, an arbitrary collection of discourses and practices lacking any clearly articulated common features or political perspectives. Characterised in this way, such eclecticism betokens not a strength but a problem, in terms of the absence of a Lakotosian core to the research program. Of course, this putatively absent centre has a long history in the formulation of Cultural Studies as an academic research program – consider for instance, Richard Hoggart's vision of Cultural Studies as a postgraduate interdisciplinary field of research for critics already trained in established academic disciplines (Hoggart,1995: 173), or Stuart Hall's famous refusal to define Cultural Studies in traditional

disciplinary terms, preferring to see it instead as a field of political intervention (Hall, 1992:279,284). However, we would argue that the apparent eclecticism and absent centre of contemporary Cultural Studies are deceptive. Indeed we maintain that in the current context what has actually happened is that the field has developed a hierarchy. Eclecticism prevails in terms of the substantive intellectual approaches and concerns of contemporary cultural studies. This apparent pluralism, however, often functions as a smoke-screen, or dialectical counterpart, for the unofficial centre of the discipline which has developed around what can only be called the organic intellectuals of very late capitalism. We refer here to those cultural critics who, to a greater or less extent, have abandoned the commitment to Critique that informed and even defined much previous good work in the field. They have embraced instead the brave new world of Policy under the sign of a specious Social Democracy (Cunningham, 1992) and appeals to political "realism". This then became a pathway to a more thorough capitulation to the imperatives of capital via projects such as "Cool Britannia" and the Creative Industries initiatives (Heartfield, 2000; Hartley & Haseman, 2000).

We characterise the field of Cultural Studies then as consisting of a pragmatic core that gained its initial and clearest theoretical formulation in the Cultural Policy initiatives of the early 1990s. Around this is a bulwark consisting of an eclecticism that is at times illuminating, at other times tending towards the trivial. To understand how this situation has developed one needs to take a closer look at the history of the Cultural Studies project.

History

The history of Cultural Studies can be gleaned from a variety of sources (Turner, 1990; Agger, 1992; Grosberg et al, 1992; Frow & Morris, 1993; Davies, 1995; Chen 1998; During, 1999, Hartley & Pearson, 2000). It is not our intention to rehearse this in any great detail, nor to offer an analysis of the different conditions under which Cultural Studies has developed in its different national and institutional locations. Rather, we wish to emphasise a number of key political moments in the evolution of the discipline. The formation of Cultural Studies, particularly in its early and influential British variant, has often been linked to the development of the first New Left. Crucial here was the

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[1] By the New Economy we refer to concepts such as the Inoforamtion Economy, the growth of Serrvices etc. This however does not imply that we are uncritical of the hype assoiciated with such terms. New Media refers to the new technology primarilsy associated with the Internet.

move in the early years of the Cold War by a number of key leftist intellectuals away from the general intellectual environment dominated by official Communist Parties. In Britain, this move included such noted figures as Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson, Richard Hoggart (the founding director of the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies), and Stuart Hall, Hoggart's successor and arguably the most influential figure on the formation of Cultural Studies as an academic discipline and research project.

Central to the early Cultural Studies project was a rejection of Leavisism's opposition between high and low culture and consequent valorisation of Literature over other related cultural practices (c.f. Eagleton 1983: 17-53). Instead, Cultural Studies was to be, in the words of Raymond Williams in *The Long Revolution* "the study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life" (Williams 61-3).

Significantly, Cultural Studies was conceived in this period as an explicitly oppositional political formation, in which the emphasis upon "elements in a whole way of life", or the cultural and social totality, was linked with a commitment to the practice of Critique. As Stuart Hall recalled, in terms which indicate the Gramscian and, more generally, Marxist influence upon the formation of Cultural Studies, the early Birmingham school had been 'trying to find an institutional practice that might produce an organic intellectual' (Hall 1992:281). By this he meant an intellectual organic to the emerging new social movements and upsurge of socialist politics of the 60s and 70s who would contribute to the unmasking of the workings of bourgeois ideology.

However, just as the formation of Cultural Studies had participated in the more general political optimism and engagement of the 1960s and early 1970s, so the conservative counter-revolution of Thatcher and Reagan in the 1980s and the decline of the Left witnessed the rise of an increasingly modest and politically quiescent tendency within Cultural Studies. Deprived of any immediate avenues or agencies for political transformation, the attempt to change the world, which had accompanied the genesis of Cultural Studies, was displaced into the theoretical realm. Cultural Studies from the late 1970s onwards became a veritable cornucopia of competing theoretical paradigms and frameworks: first structuralism, and later legacies of the Frankfurt school, feminism, psychoanalysis, semiotics, post-structuralism, post-modernism – all were incorporated and competed for hegemony within the field.

If Cultural Studies continued to produce much good and important work in these new conditions, in its sheer range of interests and approaches far surpassing the achievements of the early years, it did not do so without incurring certain significant political costs. In

particular, themes of social relations of production, domination and exploitation became increasingly obscured, if not ignored, and many practitioners' emphases shifted to a concern with subjectivities and discourse, particularly in its Foucauldian formulation. At the same time, the neo-liberal assault upon higher education funding, particular for the humanities, produced a climate of austerity in which Cultural Studies was increasingly called upon to provide "pragmatic" justifications of itself as a good citizen of the New World Order. So, although enriched in its substantive intellectual concerns and judgements by the "Turn to Theory", the loss of political focus (a contingent rather than necessary consequence of this turn) was to leave the Cultural Studies project open to increasing incorporation within the institutional frameworks and ideological commonsense of the established bourgeois culture. This shrinking of horizons was finally to be given a theoretical formulation by Tony Bennett, Colin Mercer, Ian Hunter et al in the infamous Cultural Policy Studies debate.

The Cultural Policy Debate.

The Policy debate in Australia began in 1989 when Tony Bennett announced a shift in orientation towards Cultural Policy within the field of Cultural Studies. The year 1989 was of course not a coincidence. At the time it was difficult to see its significance but with hindsight one can argue that the collapse of the Soviet Union spelt for many erstwhile "Marxist" intellectuals the end of their illusions concerning the socialist nature of Soviet imperialism and signalled the need to make an accommodation with the existing state of affairs in the triumphant capitalist West.

Bennett in particular was very clear about what this entailed. He argued that culture needed to be seen as 'intrinsically governmental' (cited in Flew, 1999:1). Somewhat more clearly he defined culture as

> …a[n] historically specific set of institutionally embedded relations of government in which forms of thought and conduct of extended populations are targeted for transformation - in part via the extension through the social body of the forms, techniques, and regimens of aesthetic and intellectual culture. (cited in Flew, 1999: 1)

Cultural Policy Studies, then, were to involve an analysis of that

> truth/power symbiosis which characterises particular regions of social management – with a view not only to undoing that symbiosis but also … installing a new one in its place. (Bennett 1990:240)

The implications of this definition were that Cultural Policy was moved centre stage. It was no longer, as Bennett put it, an "optional add-on". Of course this in turn had serious implications for previous practices within the field. What of those aspects of Cultural Studies which were wedded to the notion of critique and moreover often had a Marxist lineage? How could this previously dominant paradigm sit with the turn to Policy? Quite simply, it could not. If Bennett's definition of Policy was to become central, then all practices that were less easily articulated with the formation of government policies had to be abandoned.

An extremely influential and in many ways subtle formulation of the Policy push was given by Stuart Cunningham. He argued for the dominance of the social democratic over the revolutionary paradigm (Cunningham, 1992). For Cunningham the problem was that cultural theorists are dominated by

> …metaphors of resistance and opposition (which) predispose us to view the Policy making process as inevitably compromised, incomplete and inadequate, peopled with those inexpert and ungrounded in theory and history or those wielding gross forms of political power for short term ends (Cunningham, 1992: 9).

Significantly Cunningham's next thrust was drawn from the Marxist paradigm itself. He taunted the neo-Marxist practitioners of critique with practising "critical idealism". By this he meant presumably the belief that criticism itself would be sufficient to bring about a change in *das bestehende*, the existing state of affairs. The alternative was a materialism of practice, which in this instance meant participating in Policy formulation.

So the battle lines were seemingly very clearly drawn. On the one hand were the devotees of critique who were apparently still in thrall to dreams of the workers' paradise to come. On the other hand were the champions of the new realism; those who like Cunningham advocated a social democratic reformism and an outright rejection of what he termed a "totalising and confrontational rhetoric" (Cunningham, 1992:11). A "social democratic view of citizenship" was now the "missing link" (Cunningham, 1992: 10).

We cannot let this claim pass without pointing out that in embracing Social Democracy these former "revolutionaries" were embracing a program and a politics that had decisively broken with its revolutionary origins in Marxism in 1914 when the German Social Democrats voted to finance the German war effort. As Lenin observed at the time of the capitulation of the social democratic Second International, "Opportunism has become over-ripe; it has turned into social-chauvinism and has utterly deserted to the

camp of the bourgeoisie" (Lenin 642). Furthermore, as should have been clear to the Australian advocates of the Policy programme, Social Democracy in the 1990s was no longer a movement which even pretended to offer serious opposition to Capital's increasing exploitation of Labour. Rather, as the Hawke-Keating government of 1983-96 clearly demonstrated, it was now directly engaged in managing, maintaining and extending the status quo.

We would like to essay an immanent critique of the Policy model before we attempt to see how it fares in the new century. For a start, Policy's crucial weakness was dialectically its strength. In Australia, while an ostensibly social democratic government remained in power, then perhaps it did seem to make sense to temper one's criticisms and to participate in the process of reform. However with the demise of what passes for social democracy in the present conjuncture and the advent of the Howard Liberal-National Party government in 1996, the scope for participation in Policy formulation narrowed considerably.

Instead of the 'enabling state' of the social democratic fantasy there was now a government committed to a neo-liberal agenda, which saw government not as the solution but as the problem. So the eager avatars of Policy, found that they were in fact once more out in the cold. Their denunciations of neo-Marxist critique availed them little in the presence of a government blind to such fine distinctions on the Left. This, perhaps, was the source of the motivation for the decamping from Australia to Britain upon the election of the Blair government of such central players in the policy movement as Tony Bennett and Colin Mercer, as the Cool Britannia project opened up new opportunities for exerting practical force.

Cultural Studies and the New Economy

Cultural Policy Studies' aspirations to become the "Queen of the Sciences" had been largely unsuccessful by the mid 1990s, and it settled into an uneasy *modus vivendi* with the continuing practices of Critique, which, however, as we have noted, tended to develop into an eclecticism in the absence of a clearly articulated theoretical focus. We should stress, however, that the moment of policy has far from passed. In Bhaskarian terms, the move to Policy is a real tendency that exists in the intransitive domain and is at times actualised and at others not. An example of this is the formation of the Key Centre for Policy Studies involving cross-institutional cooperation between Queensland University, Griffith Universtiy and Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane.

However, the current conjuncture gives clear signs that the political conditions that gave birth to the policy movement have now spawned an even more curious progeny in the Creative Industries initiatives. The Key Centre has now been disbanded and replaced by inter-institutional rivalry based around the Creative Industries.

The notion of Creative Industries itself has only recently begun to receive theoretical attention, ranging from the celebratory hype of Hall's hailing of the 'Weightless World' to the savagely mordant *non credo* of James Heartfield (Hall, 2000: 63-72; Heartfield, 2000). A classic example of where the analyst becomes the spin doctor is surely provided by Charles Leadbetter when he argued

> We are all in the thin-air business these days…most people in advanced economies produce nothing that can be weighed: communications, software, advertising, financial services. They trade, write, design, talk, spin, and create; rarely do they make anything (Leadbetter cited in Heartfield: 18).

When intellectuals like Hall and Leadbetter posit notions of the 'weightless world' and 'the thin-air business' they forget about the sweatshops that form the bedrock of the Creative Industries in the First as well as the Third World. They also neglect to point out, as Heartfield correctly emphasises, that the turn to Creative Industries in Britain can only be understood in the context of the decline in investment in British industry and the fact of the overall decay of the British economy. This decline in investment, Heartfield argues, has freed up money for conspicuous consumption by the capitalist class. This in turn has helped to fuel the Creative Industries (Heartfield, 1998:47).

As Jim McGuigan has pointed out the phenomenon of Creative Industries has been associated with the advent of the Blair government in May 1997 (McGuigan, 1998: 68). Interestingly Blair was anxious to keep his distance from those sectors of the Arts world that had traditionally supported the Labour Party against the Conservatives. These seemingly were much too oppositional for Blair's Cool Britannia (Greenhalgh, 1998: 84). Moreover the Creative Industries Task Force that Blair set up consisted not of' 'high arts administrators, but of high-profile entrepreneurs''(Greenhalgh, 1998: 89).

A similar determination to distance themselves from the Old and the Oppositional can be seen in the Creative Industries reader edited by John Hartley and Brad Haseman. Having briefly acknowledged the influence of such Marxists theorists as Adorno and the Frankfurt School of the formation of Cultural Studies, Hartley and

Haseman turn with evident relief to the theories of Nicholas Garnham. Unlike the work of Adorno and others, Garnham's

>…analysis begins the process of trying to identify culture as a sector of the economy that can be exploited no matter what your politics are. It's not a matter of left or right and the old adversaries (Hartley & Haseman, 200: 1).

This brief exegesis of Garnham's position leads seamlessly into a definition of the creative industries as

>…a term which moves us beyond trying to understand culture as something pure, outside of Industry and outside of the processes of everyday life or culture (like high culture), or as some sort of pathology that's getting In the way of 'proper politics (like some views of popular culture). The current terminology of creative industries privileges creativity, but insists that this creativity operates within a framework that produces economic outcomes (Hartley & Haseman, 2000: 1).

There are some themes here, which are familiar to us from the Cultural Policy debate. There is the rejection of a concept of Cultural Studies based on the High versus Low distinction. This is linked with a refusal to conceptualise elements of Cultural practice as escaping the imperatives of bourgeois commodity production (leading, necessarily, to a mere rejection of aesthetic categories rather than their critique). Likewise there is no attempt to see Culture as an arena from which might be drawn resources to negate or transcend the existing state of affairs. So Creative Industries as conceptualised by Hartley & Haseman would appear to lack a transcending aesthetic or an ethical commitment to the betterment of humankind. Such a comment might appear unduly harsh, but it is necessary to point out that for instance, within the wealth of documents produced on creative industries at QUT, the ethical has been studiously ignored. When it does appear, as in a recent paper delivered by Hartley to the Cultural Studies Association of Australia (CSAA), it functions as the repressed and scorned negative - the "Ethical High Ground" -where those academics go who do not want to embrace the brave new world of the New Media, the New Economy and Creative Industries (Hartley, 2000: 15).

Indeed Hartley's address to the CSAA is worth considering in some detail because it encapsulates the essential features of the most recent of the New Turns in Cultural Studies. He begins by claiming that 'this is a good time for Cultural Studies' if not indeed a 'Golden Age' (Hartley, 2000: 12). The reason advanced is that the new economy and the new media are converging on the content industries of 'publishing,

computer applications, media, design, music, performance, professional writing and journalism' (ibid). This has been an area of concern for Cultural Studies for some time. However there is a slippage from the 'good analytic tradition' [of Cultural Studies] to the 'Cultural Studies with funding' that the content industries themselves practise (ibid).

This is an important matter and one where theoretical clarity is truly needed. However Hartley has little if anything to say of the relationship that holds between these two forms of Cultural Studies - Cultural Studies A (traditional) and Cultural Studies B (content industries based). He does however claim that:

> Their [the content industries] address to ordinary people, especially young people, holds as much **emancipatory** potential as does the most impassioned critique of the *soi-disant* 'public intellectual' (Our emphasis, ibid).

Unfortunately Hartley does not specify what he means by 'emancipatory' in this context. Nor is it stated clearly in Hartley's address, but the strong implication is that Cultural Studies A should merge into Cultural Studies B via the mechanism of the New Media and the New Economy. This would among other things involve abandoning the last elements of Critique which is only practised in any case by 'secular scientists' and 'radical' intellectuals in search of power (Hartley, 2000: 13 & 15). So there is little to worry about in this Brave New world. We can Hartley assures us 'swing both ways'. We can he claims be like the

> …participants on both sides of the barricades at the recent World Economic Forum in Melbourne, who basically agreed with each other that there are environmental and labour costs to globalisation, and a 'democratic deficit' in transnational dealings and institutions (Hartley, 2000: 13)

Hartley neglects to point out here that those inside the forum may have agreed that there is a 'cost' but only one side is paying it. Moreover despite this 'basic agreement' the Victorian police handed out savage beatings only to those outside the barricades erected around the Forum, which fittingly enough was hosted at the Melbourne Casino. But Hartley is so determined to fill the role of Pangloss that a few hundred bashed demonstrators are as nothing. He assures us there is

> …no traditional wall of fear and loathing between it [Cultural Studies] and the world. That world is commercial, **demotic,** games-oriented… (our emphasis, Hartley, 2000: 14).

The 'wall of fear and loathing' is of course a caricature of the process of Critique. That

wall is well and truly down, even though there is still the odd wailing radical wandering around, but Hartley is in the breach urging on Cultural Studies to

> …take a lead in modernising the arts and humanities, and in innovating new modes of research, criticism, teaching and the commercial application of knowledge and creative content (2000: 16).

It is necessary to refuse this vision. Hartley may see the world of very late capitalism as one of exciting opportunity but this is the vision of the privileged intellectual. It is something of an irony that this intellectual claims to speak on behalf of the people against the "knowledge class". In truth however, he is the new organic intellectual of Capital who believes that he lives in "the best of all possible worlds" (while studiously forgetting F.H. Bradley's sardonic addition to Leibniz's dictum, "and everything in it is a necessary evil").

Critical Realist Solutions.

In general terms Critical Realism can offer to Cultural Studies the possibility of the grounding of Critique. The refutation of empiricism and post-structuralist irrealism, based on the restoration of ontology, provides the possibility of a decisive break from the stagnation between the postmodernists in the discursive periphery around the neo-realists and pragmatists that now occupy the Creative Industries centre within the Cultural Studies research program.

The return to dialectics enables a critique of the status quo, and posits a dialectic of the desire to freedom. This in turn motivates the restoration of the concept of teleology. This is presented in its weak form as being encapsulated in the affirmation of a 'conatus to … freedom' (Bhaskar, 1993: 169). The stronger form is where Bhaskar asserts categorically that this conatus to self-fulfilment will be 'eventually realised' through the process of karmically determined reincarnations (Bhaskar, 2000: 37).

The Bhaskarian dialectic as outlined in *Dialectic: the Pulse of Freedom* consists of four levels or moments. These deal with non-identity, negativity, totality and agency (Bhaskar, 1993:8-13). Along side this dialectic the key to a Critical Realist (cultural) politics is the enlargement of ontology to include absence. Societal ills are seen as absences and the dialectic of freedom consists of the absenting of constraints on the absenting of ills.

Also important in this context is Bhaskar's defence of the notion of a eudemonistic society linked to a program of concrete utopianism (Bhaskar, 1993: 279-98). As part

of this program the aesthetic is constructed in practical terms as 'living well' and is sublated within the ethical (Bhaskar. 1994: 154).

As a movement Critical Realism seeks to underlabour for human emancipation and consequently sets up emancipation as the goal of the social sciences, philosophy and, with the publication of *From East to West*, theology (Bhaskar, 2000). The end state of this process is a

> …society in which, to use Marx's words, 'the free development of each is a condition of the free development of all', that is which is grounded in the concrete singularity of each and every one (and the former as a condition for the latter) based on the core human equality derived from our shared species-being…, and oriented to the presses of human flourishing in the context of concern for future generations, other species and nature generally (Bhaskar, 1993: 179).

It need hardly be said that this orientation presents a radically different set of tasks and possibilities for Cultural Studies, than is now presented by those who are scrambling desperately to get aboard the Creative Industries band wagon or by the postmodernist discursive tendency, who
may not have converted to CI, but have taken the discursive turn which is just as limiting for critique (as will be mentioned later on in the chapter when we discuss power).

We would like now to consider briefly in more specific terms how Dialectical Critical Realism might make a difference to Cultural Studies. The following themes are by no means exhaustive. They are merely intended as the beginning of a critical realist intervention into Cultural Studies.

a. The restoration and development of a philosophically rigorous account of the concept of ideology, particularly the elaboration of the notions of fusion and fission (Bhaskar, 1993: 180);

b. The development of the distinction between Power$_1$ and Power$_2$ could undo some of the worst excesses of the Foucauldians (Bhaskar, 1993: 402);

c. The insistence on the distraction function of much popular culture could help to inoculate us against the idiocies of those popular cultural theorists who have bowdlerised Bakhtin's carnival theory in an often silly celebration of the popular (Fiske, 2000).

Critical Realism and Ideology

Within Cultural Studies a key moment was surely the publication by Abercrombie et al of *The Dominant Ideology Thesis* in 1980. This led to a general abandonment of the concept of ideology in much Cultural Studies analysis and its replacement with what Murdoch terms 'critical pluralism' where the 'cultural field' is viewed

> . . . as the site of a continual struggle between competing discourses, each offering a particular way of looking at or speaking about the social world (or particular segments of it), and engaged in a contest for visibility and legitimacy across a range of institutions (Murdoch, 1993: 84).

Murdoch, it must be said, is aware that in the market place some discourses are more equal than others, as they are 'backed by greater material resources and have preferential access to the major means of publicity and policy-making' (1993: 84). Nevertheless the concept of critical pluralism misses the notion that certain ideologies are essential to capitalism.

It was left to Bhaskar to revive the notion of ideology and to give it a rigorous scientific basis. He did this by arguing that

> . . . the appellation 'ideology' to the set of ideas P is only justified if their necessity can be demonstrated; that is if they can be explained as well as criticised (Bhaskar, 1979: 67).

What form does this process of explanation take? Bhaskar suggests that a theory $\underline{T}$ is required and it must satisfy three kinds of criteria before a practice $\underline{I}$ can be termed ideological. These are critical, explanatory and categorical.

> The critical criterion is satisfied when $\underline{T}$ can:
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> (4) explain most, or most significant, phenomena, under its own descriptions, explained by $\underline{I}$ … and
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> (2) Explain in addition a significant set of phenomena not explained by $\underline{I}$. (Bhaskar, 1979: 86)

The explanatory criterion is met when $\underline{T}$ can:

> (3) Explain the reproduction of $\underline{I}$ (that is, roughly, the conditions for its continued acceptance by agents) and, if possible, specify the limits of $\underline{I}$ and the (endogenous) conditions for its transformation (if any), specifically
>
> (3)' In terms of a real stratification or connection (that is, a level of structure or set of relations) described in $\underline{T}$ but altogether absent from or obscured in $\underline{I}$; and
>
> (4) Explain, or at least situate, itself within itself (Bhaskar, 1979: 86-7).

The categorical criterion is satisfied when I cannot (while T can) satisfy either:

(5) A criterion of scientificity, specifying the minimum necessary conditions for the characterisation of a production as scientific; or

(6) A criterion of domain-adequacy, specifying the minimum necessary conditions for a theory to sustain the historical or social (or whatever) nature of its subject matter. . . .(1979: 88).

Along side this philosophically rigorous use of the term 'ideological', Bhaskar also developed a number of concepts that greatly assist the process of 'ideology critique'. We refer here especially to the mechanisms of 'fusion' and 'fission'. Ideological fusion takes place when sectional interests are represented as universal. The inverse of this is ideological fission where interests that are universal are presented as sectional (Bhaskar, 1993:168). We can see these processes at work in phenomena as diverse as that of proift and wages. Profits, which belong primarily to the capitalist class, are presented as being universally good in the Mass Media. Thus they tend to **rise** and we are all expected to rejoice accordingly and wait patiently for the trickle down effect. Wages, on which almost everyone depends, are, on the other hand, a constant source of worry in the mainstream media for they tend to **break out** rather in the manner of plagues and dangerous criminals and animals.

Critical Realism and Power

It is one of the great ironies of contemporary thought that the concept of power formulated by an anarchist like Foucault has been seized upon by social democrats in an effort to weld Cultural Studies to the practice of social democracy. Within the Foucauldian *Weltanschauung* power is no longer conceived as being possessed by some groups and not by others. Nor is power conceived as having a particular location which could be stormed from outside. Moreover power is not seen as an instrument of a particular mode of production, nor does it simply operate to produce ideological effects (Foucault cited in Morris & Patton: 1979: 59).

Rather Foucault argues

Power is not possessed, it acts in the very body and over the whole surface of the social field according to a system of relays, modes of connection, transmission, distribution, etc. Power acts through the smallest elements: the family, sexual relations, but also: residential relations, neighbourhoods, etc. As far as I go in

the social network, I always find power as something which 'runs through', that acts, that brings about effects. It becomes effective or not, that is, power is always a definite form of momentary and constantly reproduced encounters among a definite number of individuals. Power is thus not possessed because it is 'in play', because it risks itself. Power is won like a battle and lost in just the same way. At the heart of power is a war-like relation and not that of an appropriation (Foucault, cited In Morris & Patton, 1979: 59-60).

The neo-Nietzschean provenance of this conceptualisation of power should be clear. Power is seen to be literally everywhere and the 'will to power' is a fundamental imperative that defines what it is to be human. Moreover truth is subsumed under power and we have the notions of 'regimes of truth', which are each society's officially approved version of things (Foucault, 1980: 131).[2]

By contrast with the Foucauldian analysis of power the Critical Realist account of power is an essential component of a movement that sets itself the task of underlabouring for human emancipation. Fundamental to the Critical Realist model is the distinction between $Power_1$ and $Power_2$. The former has to do with the 'transformative capacity analytic to the concept of agency', that is, the capacity to get anything done. $Power_2$ Involves 'structures of domination, exploitation, subjugation and control' (Bhaskar, 1991: 60).

It should not be necessary to point out that postmodernist thought, especially In its Foucauldian guise, is marked by its refusal to make any distinction between $Power_1$ and $Power_2$ (Foucault, 1980; Morris and Patton, 1979). It is our contention that this refusal severely limits the relevance of Foucauldian thought for an emancipatory cultural politics. By contrast with many such strains of postmodernist thought, Critical Realism argues that $Power_2$ can be abolished but that $Power_1$ cannot.

We would like now to re-emphasise the impact of these differing views of power. If one like Bennet et al adapts a Foucauldian notion of power, one abandons the radical dream of a world without oppression. Instead one enters the realm of moral relativism, beyond good and evil, where the only question is who has the strong enough will to wield power. In so doing the critical impulse that once fed Cultural Studies, the dream of

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[2] Any discussion of Foucault's concept of power has to deal with his own claim towards the end of his life: 'I am very far from a theoretician of power. At the limit, I would say that power, as a question

a world without oppression, is annulled. That we would argue is precisely attraction of Foucault's thought for the social democratic advocates of Policy.

By way of contrast the Critical Realist model of power provides the theoretical motivation for a struggle with Power$_2$. Critique can lay bare the mechanisms of Power$_2$. Within this schema Cultural Studies continues to have a relevance and a *raison d'être*. The fact that one is marginalised or excluded from the halls of power does not *contra* Cunningham and Bennett negate one's critique, because one continues to have a moral imperative to oppose the operations of Power$_2$

Cultural Studies & the Popular: Substituting for the ethical.

As we have stressed, one of the founding impulses of Cultural Studies was a refusal of the Leavisite definition of High versus Low Culture. Instead of a simple reversal of this politically disabling binary opposition, Cultural Studies aspired to conceptualise the entire field of cultural practices as a totality of practices within the society. As Andrew Milner correctly notes,

> …the real promise of Cultural Studies had always been contained, not in the discovery of a new empirical subject matter, but in a "deconstruction"of the very theoretical boundaries that had hitherto demarcated literature from fiction, art from culture, the elite from the popular. (Milner 1996:18)

However, it seems to us that much of contemporary Cultural Studies has fallen away from this challenge and reinstated the High/Low culture distinction. Rather than "Literature", however, it is now the "Popular" which is valorised. The general political co-ordinates of this hypostatisation of the popular can be discerned in the clash between Raymond Williams' judgement of Anstey and Elton's film *Housing Problems* (1935) and John Hartley's verdict on the same documentary. Williams refers to the film's 'superb demotic style' (Williams in Aspinall, 1980: 148). Hartley on the other hand builds an argument for *Housing Problems* as the *locus classicus* of the baleful influence of his hated 'knowledge class' (Hartley in Lusted & Geraghty, 1998). According to Hartley it is this class which produces expert solutions that are then imposed on their working class 'victims'.

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does not interest me' (Cited in Callinicos,1989: 88). Such a denial is of course, as Callinicos points out, 'characteristic' of Foucault's scholarship.

Hartley's approach to the film and the modernising impulse, which it documents, is indeed extremely reminiscent of Richard Hoggart's criticism of the impact of modernity on the working class communities of Northern England (Hoggart, 1971: 45-62). Hoggart explicitly mourned the passing of the 'old' communities that were marked, he argued, by 'tolerance, nonconformity, neighbourliness [and] responsibility' (Hoggart, 1971: 61). For Hoggart the new communities were by contrast 'inorganic' (1971:48).

If the working class are the vicitms for Hoggart, then for Hartley the villains are the modernising experts. These are so evil that they are even compared to the Bolsheviks in their drive to centralized planning and the imposition of expert knowledge (Hartley, 1998: 39). Thus Hartley inveighs against the knowledge class's critical approach to television. Others in the cast of villains would seem to be Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams with their opposition to social democracy (Hartley, 1998: 47).

There is a quite bewildering amount of slippage here and it might help to retrace our steps. Firstly Hartley champions the working class against the knowledge class. Secondly he equates the knowledge class with Bolshevism. Thirdly he brings in Hall and Williams and accuses them of disliking the popular. Fourthly this alleged dislike of the popular is then equated with opposing social democracy. When the words "social democracy" are used like this, they lose of course all referential value. But it is this implicit equation of the popular with social democracy represents the genuinely political moment in Hartley's thought. Unfortunately, this moment contains the same contradictions and incoherence as the pale ghost of social democracy that it purports to revive.

The problem remains that within Hartley's thought the romanticising impulse is never far away. Admiration for working class communal life slips all too easily into an uncritical, "workerist" celebration of the popular.

If there is much of this in Hartley, it becomes even more marked in the work of John Fiske. Thus in an article on the politics of information (reprinted in Hartley and Pearson, 2000) he contrasts three kinds of news. There is firstly the official news, which is to be found in the quality press and on networked television. Then there is the alternative news circulated in radical journals such as *The Nation*. Lastly there is the popular news which flourishes throughout television and the tabloid press. For Fiske official and alternative news are produced out of the political struggle between class fractions. Ultimately it is a battle within the power bloc that is the source of both (Fiske cited in Hartley and Pearson, 2000: 354).

Leaving aside for a moment this characterisation of alternative news, we would like to point out a significant omission when Fiske comes to discuss Popular News. We are told it is consumed on television and the tabloid press. We are not told where it is produced. Fiske skips over the fact that the so-called popular news is produced from within the power bloc, in order to celebrate what he sees as the 'transgressive' virtues of tabloid news. As with much of Fiske's work, a bowdlerised and de-historicised Bakhtin is dragged on stage to give an air of theoretical *gravitas* to what is little more than an exercise in workerism (Fiske, 2000: 355). The problem with workerism is as Collier has pointed out that it aims

> … not at the emancipation of the working class … but at the glorification of the qualities that they have as a result of being oppressed - hence the perpetuation of their oppression (Collier, 1999: 51)

To be fair, Fiske is aware of the dangers of the empty celebration of the popular and he does insert the occasional caveat as in the following:

> While I believe that the pleasures of scepticism and of parodic excess can be progressive I do not wish to suggest that they are always or necessarily so. The politics of popular culture are as deeply conflicted as the experience of the people (Fiske cited in Hartley & Pearson, 2000: 357)
>
> However his is a deeply non-dialectical approach. Thus he refuses not only to discuss the source of popular news, but he also neglects to examine its relationship to the official world. The relationship is not simply one of scepticism as Fiske seems to believe. Rather it is a sanctioned scepticism. In Bhaskarian terms popular news forms a dialectical counterpart with the official news. While seemingly in opposition they instead form a mutually supporting ensemble based on a shared but never articulated common ground, which is that the working class is intrinsically inferior and has to be entertained and kept away from an understanding of the world.

Against such workerist tendencies as are exhibited by Hartley and Fiske, it is necessary to affirm that the solution to the 'commercialized and bourgeoisified [nature]… of consumer capitalist/postmodernist society' is not to lick our chains, but rather as Bhasakar puts it to

> …engage in counter- hegemonic struggle and the totalizing depth praxis that dialectical rationality demands (Bhaskar, 1993: 153-4).

Towards a Concrete Utopianism

In this paper we have given an account of what we believe are the origins of the current state of affairs within Cultural Studies. We have been critical of the loss of political focus which accompanied the broadening of Cultural Studies' theoretical foundations and its shying away from explanatory political Critique. We have also been hard on the allied flight to pseudo-critique with Foucauldian notions of power being everywhere so that there can be no political critique of injustice. By contrast we have offered for consideration what Critical Realists have to say about ideology and power.

We have also been sceptical of the claims of the Policy and Creative Industries paradigms. It is now necessary to ask in conclusion: "What have been the achievements of the Policy move?" In Australia, where Policy originated, Bennett and his co-workers had high hopes for great happenings under the Hawke and Keating Labor governments. However the new realists were to witness a cut back in government funding in all the traditional arts areas. The pragmatism of the Prophets of Policy was to founder in the realities of neo-liberalism. Nor is it likely that the new paradigm of Creative Industries (Policy Mark II) will fare any better. While the bulls run on Wall Street there will continue to be those that believe in the 'weightless world'. However the fate of Blair's prized symbol of Cool Britannia, the Millennium Dome, should be a sobering reminder to those tempted to believe in their own propaganda. Moreover the recent wholesale carnage among the dot coms is surely proof that hype may indeed be 'weightless' but the world certainly is not.

The final and most important contribution we believe Critical Realism can make to the rejuvenation of Cultural Studies is Bhaskar's notion of a Concrete Utopianism. Against the facile capitulation to the imperatives of Capital by those promoting the nexus of the Creative Industries, the New Technology and the New Economy and against their boasts to have discovered the realm of freedom in the postmodern play of the market, it is necessary to stress that although 'the concrete utopian imagination' does not provide recipes for the kitchens of the future, it does affirm that:

> The eudaimonistic society would be an open one in which it would be up to the totality of concretely singularized individuals to decide what to do with their freedoms. Dialectic is the process of absenting constraints on the absenting absences (ills, constraints, untruths, etc.). It is not in the business of telling

people, in commandist (Stalinist) or elitist (Social Democratic) fashion what to do. Rather it is better conceived as an inner urge that flows universally from the logic of elemental absence (lack, need, want or desire). It manifests itself wherever power2 relations hold sway. It is the heartbeat of a positively generalized concept of freedom as flourishing and as autonomy and as reason. It is irrepressible (Bhaskar, 1993: 298-9).

Within Cultural Studies such a concrete utopianism necessarily requires a return to the practices of Critique and a re-engagement with the aims of the founders of Cultural Studies. This in turn implies a willingness to stand against the tide of both of postmodernist trivialising and the blandishments of the market in this the age of scarcity. It remains our conviction that Critical Realism is vital to any such attempt to renew Cultural Studies.

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