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Cunningham, Stuart D. (2007) *Creative industries as policy and discourse outside the United Kingdom*. *Global Media and Communication*, 3(3). pp. 347-352.

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The final, definitive version of this article has been published in the Journal, *Global Media and Communication* 3(3): (2007) © SAGE Publications Ltd, 2007 by SAGE Publications Ltd at the Global Media and Communication page:
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Creative industries as policy and discourse outside the United Kingdom

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Media, cultural and communication studies' critique of the concept of creative industries as policy discourse has been as consistent as it has been negative. It runs from critical US academics' reflex anti-statist suspicion of 'talking to the ISAs' (in Bennett's (1998) inimitable words), to in-principle opposition to allowance of 'creativity' (for which read bourgeois individualism and essentialism) to displace 'culture' (in the classic British cultural studies tradition, code for solidarity and Broadening media discourses 345 collectivity). It runs from predictable demurs about top-down policy from central government, to grounded worries about the types of work and work cultures encouraged by such discourse (McRobbie, 2002) and further to total-explanatory schema placing creative industries inter alia as the running-dog of the new international division of cultural labour (Miller, 2002). The position is captured in gestalt form in reviews by, for example, Calabrese (2006) and McGuigan (2006) of the volume *Creative Industries* (Hartley, 2005) and arguably reaches its apogee in the wideranging and sophisticated critique of the creative industries policy problematic by Garnham (2005).

The gap between the remarkable enthusiasm with which it has been taken up in policy circles across many parts of the world and at many levels (national, state, regional, supranational), and the depth of opposition to it academically, marks it out as a major contemporary instance of the gap between policy and critique (Cunningham, 1992).

Interestingly, though, almost all of this critique has been focused on the British policy environment, and as such betrays a remarkably metropolitanist bias. This brief overview of policy situations elsewhere in the world offers an interesting case study in internationalizing media studies, comparing their 'problematics' with those identified by Garnham as foundational to the creative industries discourse.

The centrepiece of Garnham's paper is an extensive commentary on the core intellectual lineage of the information society: Daniel Bell and post-industrialism, Schumpeterian theories of innovation, information economics, services and post-Fordism, and the 'technologies of freedom' argument. Creative industries ideas are a kind of Trojan Horse, secreting such a heritage into the realm of cultural practice, suborning the latter's proper claims on the public purse and self-understanding, and aligning it with inappropriate bedfellows such as business services, telecommunications and calls for increases in generic creativity.

There are glimpses of a potentially progressive opportunity allowed by Garnham, but basically he finds no real advances and rests his case on the normative imperative to return to the 'cultural industries' policy focus on distribution (critique of multimedia conglomeration) and consumption (smoothing of the popular market for culture for access and equity) of which he was a main proponent in the 1980s (e.g. Garnham,

1997). One unexplored assumption in this argument is that it has a universalizing applicability. But, even if the situation in the UK bears resemblance to this argument, the situation elsewhere, as the creative industries discourse has travelled, tells an interestingly and complicatedly different story.

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Garnham seeks, and finds, contradictions suffusing the discourses and intellectual heritage of creative industries. It is contradictory for there to be both digital rights management and open licensing approaches to IPR within the discourse (2005: 25); for support for both 'the creation of large, corporate national champions who could compete with American and Japanese companies in global markets for content' and 'a deregulatory argument and a policy in favour of small-scale creative entrepreneurs' (2005: 25). There are fundamental contradictions in the way it has dealt with the technological infrastructure-content relationship (2005: 24–5).

But policy discourse, particularly that which has travelled so extensively so quickly as creative industries, tends towards the contradictory in its assemblage of differing evidence bases, interests and explanatory schema. (I called this 'ideas-thick' rather than 'ideas-rich' in *Framing Culture* (Cunningham, 1992: 35).) It is the interactions amongst the contending elements that determine whether a policy discourse can be said to have useful or deleterious effects – effects which should not be presumed in advance.

In the course of our ongoing work on the international trajectory of creative industries discourse in the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation, we gathered some 1200 reports, policy announcements, government speeches and programmes published or commissioned by governments, major NGOs and inter-governmental national organizations such as UNESCO which deal with creative and/or cultural industries. This search also included documents related solely to a particular sector such as film or design that made mention of creative and/or cultural industries policy. The publication dates range from 1998 to 2006, but most were published, written or commissioned in the 2000s. A search was also made of 235 government websites at national level. Comprehensive searches of state/provincial level websites were not made (due to the very large number), unless a particular state was found to have relevant policy documentation through more general web-based searches. While most of the documents are published, a very small number are unpublished consultancies and not publicly available.

From the initial 1200 documents about 120 key documents were identified as specifically dealing with government research and/or policy containing the terms Creative Industries, Creative Economy or Creative City. This core excluded documents relating to the UK. The core documents were then analysed for evidence of the discursive lineage identified by Garnham, while taking into consideration local contextual factors.

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The two key variations that obtain between Garnham's version of the UK discourse and its adaptation elsewhere is, first, a dramatic shift from an alleged top-down, central government-directed, triumphalism. In almost all instances of its take-up elsewhere it has been more tentative and exploratory, allowing for more regional variation, and adaptive to local circumstances. It is the very lack of certainty (pace Garnham's 'It assumes that we already know, and thus can take for granted, what the creative industries are, why they are important and thus merit supporting policy initiatives' (2005: ??)) that has meant constant definitional wrangling, regular

recasting of what counts in the creative industries – in general, a productive ferment, rather than preordained certainty.

The most telling key variation is that the ‘unquestioned prestige that now attaches to the information society and to any policy that supposedly favours its development’ (Garnham, 2005: 20) is quite unevenly engaged. When it is, it takes two forms. In the first, in developed countries, it is often to take the CI discourse beyond the cultural and media sector and into digital content and the creative economy fields. In the second, in developing countries/global south, it is to leverage support for the development of basic infrastructure, the ‘unquestioned prestige’ of which absolutely cannot be taken for granted but it still very much in the process of being laid in. We can broadly and roughly identify four main global variations on the creative industries theme as it has travelled around the world: US, Europe, Asia, and the global south. The term creative industries is employed sparingly in the United States and, despite some variations (cf. Caves, 2000; Mitchell et al., 2003), the broad sectoral field embraced by the UK definition remains resolutely divided into arts and culture on the one hand and the entertainment/copyright industries on the other. And to the extent there is ongoing adoption of the discourse, it is very much in the former, arts, domain. In the major deployment of the term, by Americans for the Arts, there is an explicit exclusion of ‘computer programming’.

As might be fully expected of any process of adaptation of a discourse originating in the Anglosphere, European variations on the creative industries tend to stress a greater degree of communitarian benefit and strategies of social inclusion than is evident in UK settings. It is the social and cultural uptake of ICT as much as its potential as an economic driver, that receives attention.

Our policy document analysis of Asian regions is consonant with Kong et al.’s (2006) careful tracing of the way creative industries discourse has been adapted to the local contexts of China, Singapore, 348 Global Media and Communication 3(3) Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, China and India. Kong et al. show that creative industries work in intermittent, sometimes incoherent or contradictory ways, and emphasize especially the role of national socio-economic and political circumstances. This, it would seem to me, is a sign of dynamism, not of a failure to attain the standards of a Platonic ideal of a rational-comprehensive policy model. In the light of Garnham’s argument, Kong et al. show that, of these Asian nations, only Hong Kong explicitly includes software and computing as a key sector of the creative industries. In Singapore, for example, the discourse has been used to begin to displace, or at least supplement, the prestige of ICT –which has hitherto held unquestioned sway in a city state known for its normative technocracy. ‘Creative industries’ has come to mean a quite radical emphasis on creative thinking and problem solving and a challenge to time-honoured Confucian educational models and a new inscription of the prestige of the artistic endeavour.

The creative industries discourse in South America, South Africa, the Caribbean and countries like Brazil, and of course in the attentions of such supranational bodies as UNESCO and UNCTAD, is one which must engage with cultural heritage, poverty alleviation and basic infrastructure, as preconditions for gaining leverage. In the global south, the discourse can be used to leverage support for the development of basic infrastructure, both cultural and ICT – the ‘unquestioned prestige’ of the latter absolutely cannot be taken for granted.

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