TELEVISION FUTURES IN AUSTRALIA

Tom O'Regan

In this paper I discuss "Television Futures in Australia" and social science's attempts to describe that future. In the first part of the paper I note characteristics of the discussion of television futures drawing attention to the communicative positions of the various industry players and their resulting debate cultures. I also insist on the role played by mundane actions of agents in the broader television milieu. In the remainder of the essay, I discuss some characteristics of television generally not in dispute identifying the ways various agents—industry and social scientists alike—apprehend the future by projecting alternative uptake scenarios. In one way or another all these questions come back to questions surrounding Australian content which I want to pose in the first instance not so much as a question of content regulation as a question of distribution of cultural discounts in program formats.

COMMUNICATIVE POSITIONS AND DEBATE CULTURES

Talk about and planning for the future of television in Australia is, in a banal way, what people in the television industry do all the time. Regulators, policy makers, industry analysts, private and public communications companies are, like journalists, oriented to the future—all are in various ways involved in managing or what John Hartley would call disciplining the future. Sometimes this talk is self-consciously about "the future of television"—say when David Court[1] is writing in an openly speculative manner in his Content Letter about the new 'broadband paradigm'; at other times—and most importantly perhaps—the future of television is made in the routine actions, practices and rhetorical posturings of all those involved in television's supply side. People are here less concerned with the big picture than with making small scale decisions—like what computer format and programs to buy, when to move to digital video editing etc. Or to take another example, for industry players, activists and regulators The *Broadcasting Services Act* functions as a point of reference and blueprint of sorts for their actions taken in the present and is integral to future planning in the short to medium term. The Act takes bets on the makeup of this environment as it in turn helps shape that environment. Social scientists studying regulation, industry and policy are—because of the orientation of their subjects—naturally concerned with the future too.[2]

Those engaged with managing television's future each create strategies for dealing with the future which not only represent the future but influence the shape of that future by providing settings of a legislative, industrial, political, critical and yes rhetorical character. "Rhetoric" is important here since every one of the above agents seeks not only to be persuasive but to be authoritative. Each is involved in developing and expanding their communicative positions. These positions are their

stock of capital—cultural capital and influence—to be exchanged amongst each other. Some of these communicative positions are in conflict and some not. And some seem relatively autonomous from what they seek to describe. Their interaction forms the various debate cultures which set agendas for the producer and distributor side of television which includes government regulators implicitly interested in this supply side as part of their future orientation. I think social scientists should be interested in these debate cultures and should not—as they currently do too quickly take sides in them. They should treat them as a resource to be investigated rather than a topic to partisanly describe a field.

To an extent, television's future is shaped by the interaction and negotiation of these different communicative positions and the debate cultures they spawn. I say "to an extent" for two reasons. Communicative positions are by definition rhetorical and discursive simultaneously exceeding and failing to apprehend what they purport to describe because they—like any plan of action—can only represent their objects in particular limited capacities and are therefore necessarily incomplete.[3] So too there is always the crucial question of audience uptake of the program, the service, the media platform and so on that tempers, distorts and "decides" these plans. But this is an asymmetrical relation as the audience has in a real sense no voice and function as a player in the formulating of these plans: they are the consumers. (Sometimes this public has attempted to be incorporated through public interest provisions providing for public participation in the planning processes. But this involves members of the public as citizens; and citizens are not audiences. Crudely: as a citizen I deplore Microsoft's hegemonic position in global software markets, as a consumer I am this year making the move over to Microsoft Office from Nota Bene, dBase, pine and kermit. Social scientists writing in the name of public interest often forget this difference.)

In sum, discussion of television futures is an occasional activity. It consists of self-conscious discussions of television futures in the communicative positions and debate cultures of public talk on television futures. And it consists of the range of ordinary—sometimes small, sometimes large actions—taken for contingent reasons which inevitably give shape to the media environment.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TELEVISION OF THE FUTURE
1. Loss of Broadcast Television Audiences to New Television Services
We know we are in for change. We know that broadcast television will lose some of its audience to pay-TV and pay-per-view (although this will affect the VCR market more than the broadcast TV market). We know that there will be more free to air broadcast television stations in larger markets. We know that some television will be free-to-air, others will be supported by subscription payments and advertising and others will be paid for entirely by the user. We know that more television will erode some of the traditional basis for Australian content on free-to-air by slicing some advertising revenues from free to air television. We know that pay-TV will encourage various forms of national and international integration which preserve some local identifications and set them in an international frame whether in the

currently contested Super League format or in the attenuated format of "international" features and documentaries with Australian creative input. Further down the line we know that there will be a mix of delivery platforms—mass distribution and switched platforms. We know that computer related entertainment will mean not only another VCR like challenge for the use of the monitor as in Supernintendo but also another platform for published and audio-visual information in the CD Rom and Internet. And we know that the bases for regulation are changing to accommodate a mix of television and service types and an abundance of services. This is putting pressure on traditional forms of regulation limiting entry and competition, imposing service obligations and the like.

None of this is, I think, in any dispute. What is in dispute is when, how and what should be the responses to it? In some periods of technological change epochal rhetorics emerge and futures become open to greater public, industry and regulatory dissection. Particularly when we are in the dying days of one century and moving into another people talk of new scenarios. Salvific and distopian rhetorics accrue to the new platforms and services (James Carey and John Quirk call it 'the mythos of the electronic revolution'[4]. This is so for the net, multimedia and the multichannel universe just as earlier it was true for the VCR, television, radio and the cinema. Carolyn Marvin shows, it was also true of the precursers to these media platforms in electric light shows and telegraph radio formats.[5]

If you read David Court in a 1994 Content Letter you will feel this sense of urgency and of a new beginning.[6] He talks of the new 'broadband paradigm', 'the end of mass media' and a 'new configuration of the relationship between creators and consumers'. He reminds readers that in the late 1940s Australian cinema admissions 'peaked at around 150 million per annum or nearly 20 admissions per year per capita' while in 1993 they hit a 'post-television peak of 54 million, or roughly 3 admissions a year'. It seems that firms and regulators need to make preparations now, right this instance ... or bang you go from 20 to 3; or worse still you 'look backwards to the old command model of free-to-air TV, where content was dictated more by the needs of its financiers—advertisers and governments—than by the desires of consumers'.

I am much more sanguine about this. If we look at the cinema story closely a somewhat complicated and banal (not tragic) story emerges. The cinema gradually lost audiences over a 40 year period: it innovated formats, the drive-in, the multiscreen and more lately suburban multiscreen to remain competitive in the face of a competitor which did something it could not do—bring audio-visual images into the home. So yes perhaps in 40 years broadcast television will be a shadow of its former self; just as in 40 years radio is a shadow of its former self (or is it?). My point is that broadcast television will lose its audiences slowly in part because the new television services are add ons to an already well defined media landscape. Is it appropriate for regulators and service providers to anticipate change which may be ten to twenty years or more out and use this to regulate an immediate future horizon of the next 1 to 5 years?

I also think that the most epochal changes in 20th century communications landscapes are not those occurring in the present. My candidate is radio broadcasting

in the 1930s. Radio brought communications into the home well before the telephone became a domestic instrument. Everything else has simply been an addition and extention to radio's basic paradigm. Radio was 'the fourth dimension of advertising' for Frank Arnold, director of development for the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), in 1931:

> For years the national advertiser and his agency had been dreaming of the time to come when there would be evolved some great family medium which should reach the home and the adult members of the family in their moments of relaxation, bringing to them the editorial and advertising message. .. Then came radio broadcasting, utilizing the very air we breathe, and with electricity as its vehicle entering the homes of the nation through doors and windows, no matter how tightly barred, and delivering its message audibly through the loudspeaker wherever placed... In the midst of the family circle, in moments of relaxation, the voice of radio brings to the audience its program of entertainment or its message of advertising.[7]

The second most important change was the introduction of television in the late 1950s and 1960s because it brought audio-visual entertainment into the home transforming interior design, increasing people's viewing of movies such that by the early 1990s 97% of movie viewings were in the home and people watched ten times more movies than they did in the 1940s.[8] Pay-TV, pay-per-view, interactive games are simply variants on these familiar technologies. W. Russell Neuman's 1991 projections based on his MIT research for Time, Warners, the Washington Post *et al.* is much more sanguine about the 'future of the mass media', predicting

> a pattern of common-denominator and publicly centrist mass communications. The new media will not change this, in the main.[9]

Social science has a useful task to perform to slice through the hype to show just how traditional and interchangeable radio, television and new television services are with their remarkably similar formats and programming circulating between each. It can note the contextual and distribution characteristics of services rather than be taken by the different platform or transmission characteristics which seem to keep apart, for example, the cinema, the VCR and pay-per-view or see html as something fundamentally new.[10] One of the reasons for the periodic revival of interest in Harold Innis' work is that his arguments were based on the distributive function rather than the contingencies of the "poetics" of the platform used.[11]

2. The New Environment of Overlapping Service Areas
We know that television in the future will consist of overlapping service areas. There will be commercial broadcasters (so-called 'free to air' services) operating in a geographic local service area (for example, Perth or Country Queensland), there will be satellite and cable delivered national pay-TV services, and there will be international services transmitted by high-powered satellites from outside the country operating largely outside Australian regulatory sanction. Overlapping service areas bring new problems: regulators have less control. Corporate control over the system is more mobile and shifting than in the past leading to less predictable combinations. And there will be different mixes of local, national and international geographical scales within and between these services.

But it is not that there will be new geographical scales added—after all the basic

parochial international model most services will follow was set in the 1840s with *The News of the World*. It is that within and between services there will be different combinations of geographical scales.

Free to air television relied upon the development of a local service area and controlled the services beamed in to that confined area. In the present and into the future what counts as the local service area has become blurred as additional television services and the new television technologies permitted a mix of local, regional, national and internationally organised service areas. These service area mixes are occurring alongside a differently organised set of commercial interests, market orientations and regulatory controls over service delivery.

What are some of the consequences? Ian Hayne in his 1995 paper 'New Technologies and Broadcasting Policy' for the Communications Research Forum makes the point that the larger service areas with their 'very wide geographic coverage' permit 'marginal program formats' to be offered' 'allowing 'small percentages of penetration' to yield sufficient customers to sustain viability'.[12] In other words the bottom tier in terms of audience share in the short and medium terms—niche broadcasters—will be the major force pushing for international integration. He also suggests that Australian commercial broadcasters in the face of international competition 'will seek to have the programming obligations currently imposed on them lifted, so that they are not placed at a competitive disadvantage to foreign services'.[13] Programming obligations which include Australian content regulations will be under pressure from broadcasters to maintain market share in the face of competitors. The argument here is that with niche broadcasters operating outside Australian regulatory purview chipping away at audience shares broadcast television will be in its turn forced to seek greater international and national integration.

I want to draw something else from Hayne's discussion. This is the preoccupation with broadcast television and the removing of obstacles to it being competitive in the new environment. One of the great differences between the new television services in the US compared to Australia is that in Australia regulators have gone out of their way to protect the interests of free-to-air broadcasters at the expense of pay-TV and other new television services in advance of their operations. In the US it was and still is the other way around.

3. The Perceived Regulatory Anomaly of Australian Content and Competition Policy

Hayne goes on to note that regulation of broadcasting through the *Broadcasting Services Act* is partially at odds with national competition policy. For Hayne the broadcasting industry has specific rules while other industries are subject to the 'general competition policy framework'. Consequently the 'Broadcasting Services Act could one day be be subject of review on competition policy grounds' if 'Hilmer is adopted in its entirety'. This would affect planning, licensing, ownership and control including cross-media ownership. Note how Australian content provisions can be seen as anti-competitive too as 'in the internationally competitive market that seems likely to develop, program quotas may have the effect of imposing a cost disadvantage on Australian broadcasters'.[14]

There is a clear tension between the older technologies of regulation and new ones based on a competitive regulatory agenda. Between, on the one hand, competition and, on the other hand, service obligations, between competition and Australian content. Politicians and policy makers distinguish competitive markets and cultural expression—'social and cultural considerations' — as potentially incommensurate goals .

Now all of these terms were with us in the past especially in the opposition to Australian Content provisions in the 1960s and early 1970s from the industry body, the Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations (FACTS).[15] But, from an historical perspective, it is clear that Australian content provisions were a major force in modernising Australian television through facilitating networking and the creation of relatively efficient national markets for programming. They also conferred power in the Australian television system upon the nascent networks. So too equalisation—the process of bringing additional commercial stations to regional Australia in the 1980s—was promoted on social and cultural grounds but was also a network creation and ownership and control policy.

Today Australian content operates under the aegis of social and cultural regulation as distinct from market regulation freeing up entry of new players and creating a more competitive environment. Australian content regulations now thwart industry modernisation. Communications and cultural policy making is driven by what are now seen as two relatively separate and separable governmental ends whose conflict and shape is to be pragmatically determined. But it is policy making that is constructing these apparently incommensurable ends needing to be reconciled. And there are always going to be those principled critics—the intellectual fundamentalists for the market and for culture—who can now step into the breach to prosecute one of these ends as a matter of their exclusive policy.

How does policy studies consider this scenario? I do not think policy studies has served us well. Generally the future and present of Australian television are contained in a story of actual and potential loss as social and cultural considerations are seen to be defeated or under threat by market forces, the Coalition's 1996 electoral success, economic considerations favouring deregulation or political decisions designed to curry favour with the Kerry Packers, Rupert Murdochs and Conrad Blacks. The principle of free television and community service obligations appears compromised by user pays and light regulation; the citizen is in danger of being eclipsed by the consumer; public interests and, in some accounts, the public sphere itself by private interests; and public economics by economic rationalism.

Take the essays in the edited collection of Jennifer Craik, Julie James Bailey and Albert Moran, *Public Voices: Private Interests. Australia's Media Policy.* Jo Hawke considers the *Broadcasting Services Act* to have 'privatised public interests' by 'relegating "the public" to the role of consumers'.[16] Tim Dwyer claims there has been a 'sea change in regulatory stances ... from predominantly social and cultural modes, to more narrowly focused modes which are based on the prevailing industrial regulatory discourses'.[17] Toby Miller claims the *Broadcasting Services Act* is seen as a 'victory for economic theory over industry policy, cultural policy, interest groups and lawyers'.[18] This is a privatised future: privatised public spaces, priva-

tised utilities, market driven commercial television with lower barriers to entry and lighter regulation, marginalised national broadcasters, evaporating social and cultural values—divided estates of the information rich and the information poor. This is a distopian future for Australian television.

In some of its guises, this work calls on an older narrative all too familiar in the humanities and social sciences. And this is to confer value on those considerations to one side of the economy—either not fully integrated, economically marginal or a consequence of market failure. "Social" and "cultural considerations" provide an escape from the transnational fully-blown and profane capitalist economy towards a more respectful social and cultural terrain characterized by community, co-operation, social values, and an economy on a human scale. Barbara Herrnstein Smith sees such ideals as a 'recurrent impulse' given the centrality and 'inexorability of economic accounting in and throughout every aspect of human . . . existence'.[19] To contest the market is to endorse human, social and cultural potential to the side of economic calculation. My problem with this is that economic calculations are productive of human, social and cultural potential too.

But, at other times, policy studies accounting for work is a straightforward consequence of the sharply defined distinction between the market and social and cultural considerations in regulatory policy itself. Policy studies takes at face value the communicative position of regulatory policy to construct the need to balance as a matter of statecraft competitive, social and cultural considerations which are identified as opposing ends. Contemporary regulatory policy making also redescribes broadcasting policy purposes through its utilisation of economic terms and concepts. Economic rhetoric, in its turn, constructs "public interest" considerations—social and cultural considerations to the side of and as potentially antagonistic to commercial and economic considerations of the market. With these oppositions so explicitly mapped out in regulatory terms it isn't surprising that social scientists deploy the classical culture/commerce split. It is also a convenient language for activists to adopt—to draw the picture more extremely to aid the development of appropriate publicity images for their respective campaigns. Policy studies is making here a response to the very conflict embodied in governmental objectives and the clearly stated recognition of inconsistency and contingent deal making in that policy development.

4. The Unprecedented Defining of "Who the people of Australia are"

Cultural and social considerations in broadcasting are also defining in an unprecedented way who the people of Australia are and in what their interests might consist. The older provisions never specified who Australians were except in the most general terms. Cultural diversity in the Australian content standard once simply meant a diversity of program formats. With the 1989 mainstreaming of multiculturalism cultural diversity in broadcasting policy started to also mean ethnic and racial diversity.

One of the four objectives of the 1989 Australian content standard is to 'recognise the diversity of cultural backgrounds represented in the Australian commu-

nity'.[20] With Brian Johns' appointment to head the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), with the presence of SBS, and with the official and popular mainstreaming of multiculturalism putting pressure on the commercial broadcasters—multicultural considerations in policy development are likely to become more not less important.

Whether or not multicultural provisions and gender issues move out of their current educative functions—which provide limited opportunities for activists and government bodies such as the Office of Multicultural Affairs and the Australian Film Commission to publicly pressure broadcasters through shaming them on their multicultural and gender record — what is certain is that governmental policy is problematising areas of Australian life, in Ian Hunter's terms inspecting it 'in the light of what it might be'.[21] This has been a feature of all Federal governments from the 1970s on.

What relationship is there between competitive deregulatory agendas and these moves to problematise the Australian? It seems to me too easy for social scientists to quarantine social policy innovations in the areas of multiculturalism, gender and age from deregulatory economic agendas. Might they not be "twinned" in some way rather than be just the social conscience of Liberal Democratic Labor governments in the 1980s and early 1990s.

5. The prospective change of the import local programming mix

Finally and perhaps most importantly the relation between imported and local programming is going to change. In *Australian Television Culture* I argued that Australian television should be thought of as a medium sized English language television service.[22] It was not, contrary to the erroneous belief produced by comparing it to the USA, Japan or the UK, a small television market—there are many countries in the world with less people than Australia. Its size set upper limits to what was possible in local production and mandated a substantial import profile particularly in the area of drama. Its English language character made it a member of the most powerful language community in the world which aided cultural exports and its close political, historical and cultural relation with the two nodal points in the English language meant that its locally produced television faced stiff competition from British and American television just as that television shaped more than any other international television player the character of Australian television. I saw this as neither a matter of cultural imperialism nor monocultural bias but a natural consequence of who Australians (mostly) are—their membership of the English language cultural system, their demography and their status as the people of a New World polyethnic society like the US and English Canada and to some extent the UK.[23]

So an important and defining relation in Australian television was between Australian content and cultural imports particularly from the US and to a lesser extent the UK. And most pertinently for my discussion here I argued for a competitive and synergistic relationship holding between Australian and imported content with this relationship being a defining characteristic of Australian television's double face.[24] Television in the future will—as its past history has already demonstrated—

redistribute indigenizing and localising dynamics. I want to conclude this paper with a discussion of the prospects for imports replacing local product in the Australian marketplace by considering the extent of the cultural discount operating in Australian television.

Colin Hoskins and Rolf Mirus see all imported programming facing 'barriers' when crossing national borders.[25] They importantly argue that the critical distinctions between markets lie in the extent of the cultural barriers imports face in different markets. I want to adapt their vocabulary as a measure in part of cultural similarity and so find in the US, English Canada and Australia lower cultural discounts for the circulation of programming.[26]

The existence of low cultural discounts for English language programming within English language markets has not created a significant market in the USA for non-US programming; yet such a significant market has been created in Australia, New Zealand and Canada and to a lesser extent the UK. In the US, low language-based cultural discounts do not lead to imports because the size of the US market ensured that indigenous competitors made this low cultural discount count for much in ratings terms. In other markets with equivalent kinds of language-based cultural discounts program imports do correspondingly better because their market size does not permit competition from indigenous programs to reach the stage where it would count in ratings terms. It is therefore possible that international programs may attract higher levels of cultural discount than those obtaining between US and other English language programming yet the countervailing effect of market size and development ensures that such imports achieve an ongoing presence on TV schedules. This combination of size and cultural discount helps explain the particularity of the Australian market. Its reliance upon English-speaking imports— the extent that US programs account for an estimated 34% of transmission time[27] — can be explained with reference to the higher cultural discounts available to non-English language production (this makes for less diversified import sources for high rating programs than obtains in Germany or France); whilst its more extensive 'import' share can be explained by reference to it being a medium sized market unlike France and Germany's large market size.

If the extent of the cultural discount determines the origins of imports such discounts also affect the kinds of program available for import. That is, certain kinds of programs will attract lower cultural discounts than will others from the same source. This suggests that those programs which form the bulk of the international TV trade are those which attract the lowest cultural discount. This is not entirely so. Countries like Australia may import programming which has a higher cultural discount (like drama) because of the cost to them of producing the programming in question; yet may downplay program imports in genres for which a lower cultural discount applies (like in some information and sports programs) because of the comparatively cheaper cost of developing indigenous alternatives and therefore the greater the extent of domestic competitiveness developed in the sector. Clearly certain program genres cost more to produce than others - this is particularly so for high cost drama genres - and this cost factor will have a bearing upon what kinds of programming will be internationally traded. Local presence in high cost program-

ming will tend to be less achievable in small to medium sized TV markets than in larger core TV markets. But just because a program is high cost it does not mean that it will 'travel'. The sporting rights to the televising of American football makes it a high cost program to US networks yet the international interest in that program is not as great as for American golf and tennis tournaments.

That certain program genres and individual programs within a genre travel better across national and linguistic boundaries than others do has some importance to the formation of TV markets. Australia, an import market, has typically relied upon drama programming more on its schedules than has Britain - a market in which local production has historically dominated programming genres. This is also historically the case; in 1970, for example, Australian commercial stations dedicated 49% of TV time to drama while their UK commercial counterpart devoted 30.5%.[28]

But clearly some programming travels everywhere irrespective of market size. Possibly the most successful 'international' programs have been international sporting events (such as the Olympics and the soccer world cup) and international news events (such as the 1991 Gulf War). In terms of international circulation this is followed by blockbuster Hollywood movies and after that series and serial drama and selected documentary programming (like nature series). This suggests that international news feeds, international sporting events, and special events like the concerts attract possibly the lowest cultural discount followed by blockbuster movies, drama series and serials, and documentary programming. The escalation in the TV rights for the Olympics is a clear indication of their value to TV schedules internationally.[29] But the appearance of blockbuster movies and drama series may have much to do with their considerable production price tag which inhibits copy. This suggests that program importing in all but the very largest markets are a consequence of a balancing of cost factors and cultural discount. Thus drama programming - traditionally a high cost area - may circulate as much because of the barrier of cost to local production substitution as because of its inherent 'circulateability'. Thus paradoxically, higher levels of cultural discount may accrue to programming which constitutes an important and ongoing part of international programming. Therefore it is important to understand that programming circulation in particular genres involves a trade off between the costs of a local equivalent and the availability of international programming attracting low to medium cultural discount. Thus it is possible that programs attracting the lower levels of cultural discount need not result in high levels of imports as the marginal cost associated with a local program may afford greater levels of local participation and therefore ratings opportunities in that program category (this appears to have been the case in sports and magazine style information programming).

Certain program genres are more amenable for indigenizing processes and will consequently erect larger 'natural' barriers to imported programming than others. News, current affairs, and quiz and game shows present one such 'natural monopoly' situation for local production. Demand for 'parochial' news will always outstrip demand for international news services. Certainly international news services including magazine style segments occupy an important place within local news service so long as the local newsreader and presenter frames these news serv-

ices thereby providing a local appropriation. To be successful international news services tend to require placement within locally constructed windows. Only in extraordinary circumstances such as the Gulf War will this placement become unnecessary. International information and magazine style programming are used but always as part of a framing program rather than an identifiable program in its own right. Because such programming fails to attract 'brand' recognition lower prices are generally paid for it. This is even more so for quiz and other infotainment programs. In both these categories export opportunities exist at the level of program concept sales rather than programs sold. Such program areas on Australian TV, protected as they are by 'natural barriers', have attracted the lion's share of local production funding. The high barriers naturally erected by such programming genres also explains why the most extraordinary kinds of industry featherbedding in Australian TV can be found in these programming genres as announcers, journalists, comperes and personalities can achieve inflated wages not available in other programming formats.

Sport is another category in the Australian context where local production has a considerable advantage over imported product. Regular sporting events cause a consequent bleeding of funds in that direction. Domestic sporting competitions - both regional and national - provide valuable and long-term coverage opportunities and high ratings. Here the national and the international enter into a symbiotic relation. International sporting events do attract considerable audiences as great as and sometimes in excess of local sporting programming - but they have to be a Wimbledon, an Olympics and a World Cup. These sporting events attract a low cultural discount not available to more regular sporting fixtures in overseas countries. This is reflected in the vastly different costs to say Australian stations for international event programming such as the Olympics, and tennis and golf tournaments compared to the much lower prices paid for the routine sports coverage of events such as the British soccer competition, American basketball and football. These football programs will never be able to compete with Australian Rules or the national Rugby League competition. Certainly in recent years an audience for American football and American basketball has been created; but this is a consequence of the successful formation of an Australian national basketball league as a TV event and the emerging importance of a national baseball league.

Yet international sports do have an important place with regular sporting competition emerging as a more important international presence in competitive TV environments. Such thinking was behind the Australian Rugby League's enthusiasm for an Auckland and Perth team in an expanded competition; and behind Rupert Murdoch's later Super League proposals. International sporting programming can carry local audience constituencies with them if competitive local teams are present or international sporting personalities. Sporting audiences for programming are so typically made up of dedicated and not so dedicated followers with a large ratings gap accruing to this difference.

Drama by contrast to sport and news and current affairs tends to encourage a more competitive market between local and imported programming. There are in this program category nowhere near the same 'natural' barriers to imports. Not

surprisingly it is this area in which much of the international trade in TV programs concentrates; equally unsurprisingly this tends to be an area where regulatory and subvention action favouring local drama production is at its most intense. In Australia and the UK and Germany drama is the programming category where international programming tends to dominate program schedules. It will tend to dominate both broadcast time and viewing time (broadcasting time means transmission hours; viewing time how many are watching a particular program). Drama does not tend to have the same levels of funding support from local TV; nor is it able to secure the same extent of audience fealty.

In medium sized markets like Australia's and Canada's local drama programming is a local supplement to the imported fare. In large TV systems like the UK the aim is import substitution to the extent of rough parity between local and imported programming in the genre; and international participation in program production for local and international audiences. Because of the importance that exports have in terms of maintaining a comprehensive schedule in medium and small markets - any decisions relating to programming will be designed to have a marginal effect. That is it will be designed in such a way as to not prejudice the basic role that such imports serve in the formation of the service. Program regulation and government production subsidies in Australia and Canada encourage the allocation of local program resources in areas like drama and therefore ensure a wider diversity of local participation in TV genres than might otherwise be the case. In this sense they do not represent direct attacks upon import shares of the market so much as limitations upon program expenditures in 'infotainment' and other categories and upon the prices paid for program imports.

This discussion suggest there is a trade-off between possible ratings points and program production costs that affects Australian TV scheduling decisions. Not only do local programs have to rate a few percentage points better than imported programs to survive on local schedules, but also the higher cost local programs need to acquire even more ratings points than do lower cost local programs to survive. Very clear thresholds for local production exist in Australian TV. Imports are resilient not only in particular program categories but to the service as a whole.

The new television services will work with these dynamics. This suggests that the "threat" to Australian content may not only come from the well publicised area of drama but in those specific areas of sport, documentary and infotainment programming which provide significant scope for international television programming to make significant inroads. It also demonstrates complex dynamics of competition and complementarity between local and imported programming. It is well to remember in this context with Wildman and Siwek that Hollywood circulates in international markets because of national differences.[30] But we should also remember that this national difference counts in Australian content's favour too.

These dynamic relations between local and imported programming, cultural discount and marginal advantage need to be considered carefully. If we are to move productively beyond the sterile dichotomies of culture and commerce we need to refine our understanding of cultural dynamics as economic dynamics and vice versa. And that seems to me to be an important task for social scientists.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. David Court, 'Booting up the information economy', *EBR: The Content Letter*, 4, 1994, p.1.
2. See Stuart Cunningham, *Framing Culture*, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, 1992.
3. Jeff Malpas and Gary Wickham, 'Governance and failure: on the limits of sociology', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, 31 (3), 1995, pp.37–50.
4. James Carey and John Quirk, 'The mythos of the electronic revolution', in James Carey, *Communication as Culture*, Unwin Hyman, Boston, 1989, pp.113–141.
5. Carolyn Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New*, Oxford University Press, 1988.
6. *op. cit.*, pp. 1, 2, 4.
7. Quoted by Daniel Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1982, p.77.
8. Court, *op. cit.*, p.1.
9. W. Russell Neuman, *The Future of the Mass Audience*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1991, p. 172.
10. See George Landow, *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1992.
11. See James Carey, 'Harold Adams Innis and Marshall McLuhan', in N. Rosenthal *et al.*, *McLuhan: Pro and Con*, Pelican, Baltimore, 1972, pp.270–308; Ian Angus and Brian Shoesmith, *Dependency/ Space/Policy. Continuum*, 7 (1), Centre for Research in Culture and Communications, Perth, 1993.
12. Ian Hayne, 'New technologies and broadcasting policies', *Communications Research Forum*, Bureau of Transport and Communications Economics, Sydney, October 1995, p.21.
13. *ibid*, p.13.
14. *ibid*, p.25.
15. Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations (FACTS), *Facts of Australian Content in Television Programme Schedules*, FACTS, Sydney, 1970.
16. Jo Hawke, 'Privatising the public interest: the public and the Broadcasting Services Act 1992', in J. Craik, J. James Bailey and A. Moran (eds), *Public Voices: Private Interests. Australia's Media Policy*, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, 1995, p.40.
17. Tim Dwyer, 'Pay TV policies: Are Audiences the "users" who will pay?', in Craik, James Bailey and Moran (eds), *op.cit.*, pp.102.
18. Toby Miller, 'Striving for difference: Commercial radio policy', in Craik, James Bailey and Moran (eds), *op.cit.*, p.100.
19. Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1988, p.112.
20. Australian Broadcasting Tribunal (ABT), *Oz Content An Inquiry into Australian Content on Australian Television*, Vol.1, ABT, Sydney, 1991.
21. Ian Hunter, *Rethinking the School*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1992, p.46.
22. Tom O'Regan, *Australian Television Culture*, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, 1993, pp.10–13.
23. *ibid*, pp. 87–91.
24. *ibid*, pp.57–79.
25. Colin Hoskins and Rolf Mirus, 'Reasons for the US dominance of the international trade in television programmes', *Media, Culture and Society*, 10 (4), 1988, pp.499–515.
26. Hoskins and Mirus argued that because the US had the least imported programming proportionally producers outside the US faced in the US market the highest cultural discount. This seemed to suggest that the US erected cultural barriers to the circulation of overseas programming where they needed to account for the economic incentives to indigenize — sometimes at significantly greater expense than to use cheaper English language imports.
27. Television Business International, *World Guide*, TBI, 1990, p.508.
28. FACTS, *op.cit.*, p.10.

29. Steven S. Wildman and Stephen E. Siwek, *International Trade in Films and Television Programs*, Ballinger Publishing, Cambridge, Mass., 1988, p.37.
30. op.cit., p.8.