

The Role of the Intellectual in the Australian Economy

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In 2002 Raewyn Connell and Julian Wood produced an article in the *Journal of Sociology* called, “Globalization and scientific labour: patterns in a life-history study of intellectual workers in the periphery.” The theme of my article is a critical question of why the role of the intellectual in the Australian economy is ignored or minimised. There have been many articles in the *Journal of Sociology* which have skirted around the question, but Connell returned to the question in 2006. The answer can be comprehensively answered by examining the cultural criticisms made by Donald Horne in the 1960s and by examining the sociology of philosophies from Randall Collins in the 1990s. The Australian academy has not come to grips with understanding the answer to the question why the role of the intellectual in the Australian economy is ignored or minimised. If it were the case of such change, Australian universities would be in total revolt against current higher education policies.

To begin with Raewyn Connell and Julian Wood in 2002, and a few key statements (168):

Through the 20th century, intellectuals and intelligentsias have been key figures in debates about hegemony, about the sociology of knowledge, about the ‘new middle class’ under capitalism and the ‘new class’ under communism, about technology and about post-industrial societies (Connell, 1997a).

Thus, one would assume that the role of the intellectual in the Australian economy is to point out where the economy is making problems in social hegemony and the sociology of knowledge, and the many outcomes for the new middle classes.

The world integration of economies, technologies, communications, political and military systems is now so far advanced that it is no longer useful to analyse any local ‘society’ in isolation from the whole. (168)

Buch (2022a) refers to this as “comprehensive education,” and the Australian universities’ and Australian government’s obsession with ranking is what is misleading the political decision-making:

The rankings do not tell the reader the information on the precise field of studies each may wish to engage: course themes and topics, the reputational work of the specialist researchers, and the skills of the teachers. The idea of rankings is competition, and this is where the stupidity sets in. Education is not competition. In competition there is a first, second, third, etc. Education never works like that for comprehension. Reductive-thinking economists are stupid in their competitive obsession. (Buch 2022b)

The literature on reading and comprehension bears out the evidence, such it must be wilful ignorance among academic players (Hidi 1990: 550):

Bernstein (1955), in an early and isolated study on reading comprehension and interest, also emphasized that interest is derived from the characteristics of the reader, factors inherent in the text, and the interaction of the two. This interactive view forms a common basis of much of contemporary interest research (e.g., Fink, in press; Hidi & Baird, 1986; Prenzel, Krapp, & Schiefele, 1986; Renninger, 1990; Renninger & Leckrone, in press).

Ackerman (1991) demonstrates there is no theoretical conflict between these interdisciplinary conclusions and “The Role of Disciplinary Knowledge” in “Comprehension and Composing”, and for “Reading, Writing, and Knowing”. This is nothing new since John Dewey (1913) published on interest and prejudice in the early twentieth century.

In 2002 Connell’s and Wood’s conclusion was (169):

World-systems theory and economic investigations of globalization tend to emphasize that power is concentrated in a centre, ‘core’ or ‘metropole’ – basically, the rich, capital-exporting countries of North America and western Europe, plus Japan, which broadly correspond to the centres of the old colonial empires (Hirst and Thompson, 1996)...(169)

An ‘industrial sociology’ approach to culture and intellectual life is not currently the most fashionable, but it has solid bases. Ethnographic studies of intellectual workers’ workplaces, such as Latour and Woolgar’s classic *Laboratory Life* (1979), provide rich information about daily work routines and their connections to intellectual formulations.

Studies of the intellectually trained workforce, such as the ‘Arena thesis’ (Sharp, 1985) in Australia, and Kleinman and Vallas’s (2001) account of the rise of the

‘knowledge worker’ in the US economy, illuminate the changing nature of intellectual work, its changed place in the economy and the distinctive social relations it embodies... (171)

Specifically, four ‘objects of knowledge’ were defined: nature (the natural world and ‘second nature’, technology and cyberspace), accumulation (economic processes and development), social relations (human interactions and institutions) and knowledge itself (including its storage and interpretation)... (178)

With English-speaking countries, the UK and USA, as the dominant economic powers of the 19th and 20th centuries respectively, their language as a medium of commerce and technology is a profound shaping aspect of globalization which while often acknowledged is nevertheless easy to forget. Even the Web, whose role in current scientific communication is discussed below, is a text-based medium and is heavily biased towards English.

...Most of our respondents are unselfconscious about this stark cultural and economic bias. It does not occur to them that there is anything problematic here...(187)

...it is possible in the periphery to set up satellite centres of metropolitan science. The obvious problems are that, given the small size of the Australian economy, and shrinking public investment in higher education, this can only be done in a few fields. Concentrating funding on an elite group of participants in world science would have the effect of locking the majority of Australian scientists out.

If we were to sum-up the role of the intellectual in the Australian economy it is:

- 1) the core ideas are those of urban sociology. The majority of Australians live in coastal rim cities and towns. These are sites of imperial thinking;
- 2) we still live in the industrial legacy, and it maybe impossible to become ‘*postindustrial*’, completely;
- 3) the idea of a ‘knowledge worker’ in Australian economy is very misunderstood;
- 4) ‘objects of knowledge’ have to be integrated in subjectivity;
- 5) language is the basic mechanism of control, *social control*;
- 6) we live in a world of wilful ignorance; and
- 7) Australia should not be locking the majority of Australian intellectual scholars out.

Connell (1979) had been thinking on this cognition histories and sociology for some time and yet the knowledge was mostly ignored.

Connell came back to this question in 2006. She (2006: 5) concluded that “...the impact of the neo-liberal market agenda, which in reshaping institutions and labour processes tends to make traditional intellectual identities unsustainable.” A year later, with June Crawford, Connell (2007: 187) was relating the role of the intellectual to “involvement with technology, autonomy, and involvement in the organizational world”, with questions of convergence. Hence (188):

In previous articles in this journal and elsewhere, our research group has argued for a different approach to understanding intellectuals and cultural dynamic.

...Clearly, in understanding intellectual labour, it will be important to know about employment conditions, control and autonomy in the workplace... (202)

One reason is that such an understanding of intellectual work lingers among intellectual workers themselves. Our data on the importance of ‘autonomy’ are particularly relevant here; a high level of perceived autonomy goes together with satisfaction in the work. On the one hand, this reflects the traditional demand for scope to exercise expert judgement. On the other hand, it reflects the individual appropriation of opportunities and resources that are collectively created.

The point here is that the role of the intellectual in the economy has changed, and changed **negatively** since it has reduced out the traditional values. Connell’s key idea here is “Mapping the intellectual labour process.” This is what Randall Collins had already accomplished in 1998. West (2006: 215) explained:

In *Interaction Ritual Chains* Collins elaborates on his previous insights and ambitiously proposes a bold conceptual template for a radical microsociology. Where other scholars have moved to span or overcome the micro–macro dualism, Collins holds the line that situational analysis is the starting point for any adequate sociological analysis. The problem with such theories, of course, has been their inability to adequately explain the reproduction of social life in structural forms. Collins attempts to address this by emphasizing the centrality of interaction ritual, proposing that within it we can find the nodes of a social structure. In doing this he draws Durkheim’s comments about the indispensability of ritual and the role of symbols in the conception of society. To this he not only

adds Goffman's insights about ritual in everyday life but also dimensions of conversational analysis, sociology of emotions and rational choice theories.

In Australia this Collins' process of mapping moved into balancing the macro and micro theories, and this is what Buch (2019, 2021, 2024) does as an intellectual who is hypo-marginalised in the Australian economy, both unemployed and underemployed during his career.

This brings us to the mostly-forgotten insight of Donald Horne (1964; print 2009) during the 1960s: that Australian social and economic policy has depended upon the global conditions in the luck of whatever the state-of-affairs have been at the time; with no historical foresight. So effective has been the dumbing-down of Australian culture that Horne was forced to again explain the thesis as the *Death of the Lucky Country* (1976). Much of Horne's sociology is 'solid,' 'sound' in logic, because he brought personalism to his social observations (2022). It is a Collins' like combining of the micro and macro thinking.

Ryan Cropp (2023: 275, 277) gives us an image of a Horne today out-of-touch with the current crop of Australian public intellectuals, and, while that is true, Cropp also infers the spiral historiography, in that, Horne's vision and argument for a healthy democratic culture is still very relevant (256). The role of the intellectual in the economy will always spiral but the **upward lift** is to contract or otherwise employ the intellectual.

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