

Introduction

Over the course of the 1990s, culture in Australia regularly appeared as front-page news. There was a series of high-profile debates on major policy questions and ongoing controversies surrounding issues of public concern in the media. Arguments over the introduction and regulation of pay-TV and, more recently, digital television; reports and then legislation on the parallel importing of music CDs and the similar issue of foreign-published books, which remains unresolved; the politically volatile question of media ownership, raised in turn by politicians and proprietors; the Mansfield Report into the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (1996) and the ever-present threat of budget cuts, commercialisation or political interference which that organisation faces; the restructuring and policy reorientation of peak bodies such as the Australia Council, the National Gallery, the Australian Opera; the Nugent Report into Australia's Major Performing Arts Organisations (1999); debates over the Americanisation of Australian cinema, which were revived by the opening of the new Fox Studios in Sydney; attacks on arts funding which were linked, by conservative politicians, to attacks on multiculturalism and Aboriginal funding; and the prolonged 'cash for comment' episode in which leading talkback radio personalities were revealed to have accepted money and other gifts from private businesses in return for favourable commentary – these are just a few of the issues which brought culture out from the weekend supplements and into the daily headlines.

Many of the particular issues which emerged in this period provided the occasion for debates over wider questions which are also the recurring themes in *Culture in Australia* – the threats (or promises) of increasing commercialisation, globalisation and digitisation. Each term contains, and so to some extent conceals, a wide array of diverse economic, institutional, technological and cultural tendencies which, as the essays in this volume show, must be critically examined and disaggregated rather than lumped together into simple negative or celebratory generalisations. Many public commentators see commercialisation increasing in every sphere of culture, from sport to public art galleries to public television; many see governments as less and less committed to regulation or public subsidy, and more and more to market forces or 'consumer choice'. Increasing commercialisation is often linked to the economic and political force

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of 'globalisation', which has been a persistent debating point for those concerned to defend a national culture or national cultural industries, for those demanding more regulation from government and, simultaneously, for those demanding less regulation. Digitisation, through the convergence of different media technologies, promises to redefine the boundaries between the different media industries, to break down national economic barriers, and thereby to make unprecedented demands on government policy making. In each area there are new challenges to established ideas of national culture, the role of the state in protecting or promoting culture, and the values and rights linked to citizenship, cultural expression and cultural participation.

Over the last two decades what we understand by 'culture' – in government, in the universities, in the cultural organisations and industries themselves – has changed in very significant ways. It is now commonly argued by arts organisations that culture is not merely an elite or marginal activity but 'necessary and integral to the vitality and diversity of contemporary Australian society' (Stevenson 2000, pp. 1–2). Governments have acknowledged the force of such arguments by committing themselves to major policy statements in the area and to public subsidy of a range of cultural organisations and cultural forms. By the same token culture is now recognised to be 'big business', a major sector of the Australian economy in terms of employment and gross domestic product. Cultural organisations making their case to governments can no longer rely, and probably no longer wish to rely, simply on arguments for the virtue of culture 'in itself'. As Stevenson suggests, 'as an industry sector, the arts are required to generate economic and symbolic wealth and contribute generally to national prosperity' (2). Cultural tourism is increasingly supported as a promotional strategy – in some cases a survival strategy – on national, regional and local levels. Cultural diplomacy has been embraced by Austrade, the federal government's international trade promotion body. Arts bodies such as the Australia Council talk not just in terms of artistic excellence or individual creativity but also in the language of professional development and industry expertise.

In short, policy-makers, producers, practitioners and analysts have become accustomed to understanding culture in terms of the *cultural industries*. This once-negative term, introduced to indicate the mass-produced and therefore inferior nature of 'mass culture', is now used positively as a way of acknowledging that culture is not simply a matter of individual creation and private consumption but the product of complex institutions, sophisticated technologies and specific economic relations. Culture is no longer understood merely as a private good but as something of national economic and social significance, a public good.

In the same process, culture has come to be seen increasingly as a major focus of *policy*. The intervention – and investment – of local, state and federal governments in culture has increased dramatically since the early 1980s despite 'economic rationalism' and chronic funding shortages in particular cultural

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spheres. If governments have, in some instances, been less inclined towards direct public subsidy, other forms of investment, for example in new cultural centres, new festivals and awards or heritage sites, have become a significant and commonplace part of a government's portfolio. Two understandings of culture which recur in the policy environment, culture as a set of economically-significant industries and culture as a national, public good, have been both complementary and contradictory at different times and for different cultural domains.

Over the longer term, the story of culture becoming an object of policy concern has been one of expansion, of government extending the reach of policy into new areas of culture whether by way of regulation or subsidy. Museums, art galleries, radio, cinema, television and rock music, as well as opera and classical music, newspaper and book publishing, the internet, advertising, sport and tourism – all are now routinely taken to be within the sphere of a government's concern. In the commercial sphere, the federal government has continued to regulate in areas such as media ownership, censorship and import restrictions. Although, in some of these areas, the tendency at present is towards deregulation, this will most likely emerge as a restructuring of government cultural policy rather than its demise.

There have also been major shifts in the terms and conceptual frameworks through which culture has been studied in the universities. The end of the 1990s saw the completion of the process whereby cultural studies moved from a marginal into a significant, if not central, place within universities, often displacing or settling in alongside more traditional disciplines such as English or communications. These relationships have often been hostile, as cultural studies was seen to be the vehicle whereby strange new theories and topics were introduced into the humanities curriculum. Although unease about cultural studies has not entirely disappeared, it is now commonplace to find studies of television, popular music, advertising or museums, not just in cultural studies departments but also, say, in literature or history departments. Cultural studies has successfully extended the kinds of texts which are seen to be culturally significant beyond the traditional literary or historical genres to include popular culture forms and practices; this has, in turn, helped to alter the ways in which literature and history themselves are studied. Cultural studies – at least in some of its current manifestations – has also moved beyond its own earlier critical concern with reading cultural texts in 'ideological' terms (in order to discern those forms and practices which affirmed or, alternatively, resisted dominant ideologies). It has shifted towards more empirically based, but no less theoretically informed, interests in cultural institutions, cultural industries, audiences (or cultural publics) and cultural policy. *Australian* cultural studies has been at the cutting edge internationally of the emergence of the study of cultural policy or culture and governmentality (Bennett 1998; Cunningham 1992; Cunningham and Turner 1997). Many of the authors represented in this book have been at the

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forefront of these developments, and the essays collected here reflect, and reflect upon, these new concerns for the study of culture and cultural institutions.

The kinds of changes in the public presence of culture which we have just outlined are the result of shifts not only in the understanding of what we mean by culture but also in the actual structures and 'situation' of culture in Australia. As suggested, the contexts within which culture is produced, circulated and received are undergoing significant change as a consequence of the increasing globalisation of cultural flows, changing conceptions of the appropriate role of governments in the cultural sphere, and the strong tendency to make the arts and cultural sectors behave like private markets. Another factor, in part a consequence of the globalisation and expanding commodification of culture, has been the way that the boundaries between 'high' and 'low' cultures have been significantly blurred – a process that began to accelerate in the 1960s but more especially in the 1980s and 1990s. The point is not that cultural markets and value-systems are no longer structured through this division, or that traditional high cultural forms no longer carry prestige. Rather there has been a series of 'cross-overs' between the different domains in terms of markets, technologies, institutions and values. As John Frow has argued, high culture is now 'fully absorbed within commodity productions ... Within the overall cultural market high culture forms a "niche" market – but this is also true of many, increasingly differentiated, low cultural products' (Frow 1995, p. 23). The nexus between culture and class – while still important – has to some extent been dissolved by the broad reach of popular culture forms such as pop music or television. Rather than designating clear differences between different cultural forms, then, 'the terms "high" and "low" represent a division that is operative within all cultural domains' (25). Contemporary 'high art' creative practice is typically marked by a combination of genres or styles, and by transgressive sorties into low culture forms, while cinema, television and rock music have been seen as providing 'flagship' cultural achievements for the nation (as in the closing ceremony of the 2000 Sydney Olympics). Elite and publicly subsidised forms such as ballet and dance have become the vehicle for social critique, especially in relation to issues of race and national identity.

The blurring of high and low cultures has been a general phenomenon, but it has had specific local effects in Australia which has witnessed something of a renaissance in both high culture and popular cultures since the 1970s, in cinema, television and popular music as much as in literature, the visual arts, dance and design. Moreover, the dynamics at work at both ends of the 'cultural scale' are closely interrelated; indeed it would be possible to argue that it has been the force of new developments in popular culture which has largely driven the changes in the traditional high culture domains. The centrality and pervasiveness of the media – both the 'old' and the 'new' media forms – in shaping and reshaping the broader field of culture in Australia inevitably becomes a major issue in many of the essays which follow.

The recent changes in Australian culture have also been at the level of the cultural institutions. Since the mid-1980s, in literature and the visual arts, in the film, television and music industries, and in the performing arts, a mature, sophisticated cultural system has come into being defined by the presence of established and (within limits) diverse local production and distribution industries, a differentiated (though relatively small) local market, an established (though never secure) regime of government regulation and intervention, and a professional (if not always user-friendly) infrastructure of agents, critics, administrators and media. Of course, this will not always translate into enthusiastic markets, quality product, or continuous careers and institutions. Australian culture remains structurally weak in its relation to overseas, especially American, cultures. Nonetheless, there is now a substantial 'ecology' of Australian film, television, music, literature, dance and so forth – cultures which, however fragile, now have their own local dynamics, their own diversity and density, their own 'self-sustainability'.

In all of these fields, and despite the threats associated with words such as 'globalisation' or 'Americanisation', cultural institutions and cultural practices in Australia have developed a new relationship to international cultures, in ways that suggest that the international need not always be understood as the opposite of the local or the national. Because of the new 'density' of Australian culture described above, overseas culture is no longer something that Australian creators or audiences feel they need to import or 'catch up with' in order to remedy an essential lack in the local culture. Australian culture is itself an international culture (just as Australia is, in many fields, a culture exporting nation). The international, as it were, is now here as well as there, inside as well as out. There is a sense in which Australia can now be seen as *exemplary* rather than merely supplementary, as in the old colonial metaphors; exemplary, that is, of a post-colonial, multicultural or postmodern nation. Although much of the optimism associated with the Keating years has dissipated since 1996, this new vision remains as something that Australian artists, writers, producers, performers, critics and historians can make known to us.

However, despite the positives for Australian culture and cultural institutions in this situation, a great deal of public discourse about culture in Australia over the last decade has been characterised by stories of decline. The launch of the Keating Labor Government's *Creative Nation* policy in October 1994 represented, for many, a high point in public recognition of the value of the 'creative industries'. It drew together a range of diverse, and potentially contradictory, ways of defining and positively valuing cultural activities: a sense of culture that was broader than the 'arts' alone; an industry/economic argument for culture's significance to the nation; an argument based on national identity defined in terms of creativity and national independence; a cultural export/cultural diplomacy argument; and a vision that linked culture and national identity to the new electronic multimedia technologies. The Coalition Government elected in

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1996 has generally been seen as less committed to a national cultural policy and to the support of public cultural institutions such as the ABC or the Australia Council, both of which have suffered budget cuts. More generally, the pressures of commercialisation and globalisation are perceived to have redoubled their force with the combined effects of deregulatory policies, 'borderless' telecommunications and media technologies, and multinational economics (corporate takeovers and foreign ownership threaten local cultural industries just as much as other industries). Another area of concern has been with audiences, reflecting changes in the make-up of the varied publics for different kinds of culture in Australia. There has, for example, been uncertainty about the constitution of a 'national audience' – whether such a thing still exists and, if it does, what its relation is to ethnic minority or Indigenous audiences; there is an ongoing tension, for the makers and marketers of culture, between mass and increasingly differentiated publics; and there are competing claims in the policy area as concerns with 'access and equity' or 'diversity' are balanced against the criterion of 'excellence'.

The essays presented in this book address the cultural, institutional and industry changes, the policy debates, and the tensions, threats and controversies outlined above as these have emerged in specific cultural domains or industries and in the discourses surrounding them. While taking full cognisance of the vulnerabilities and structural weaknesses of the Australian cultural industries, the individual essays generally take a more cautious, even cautiously optimistic, view than that expressed in the crisis-filled stories of cultural decline. By breaking down a simple, general narrative of Australian culture into its smaller component parts, into its institutional, industrial, generic or policy dimensions, the stories and analyses that emerge present a more complex, nuanced and dynamic picture. Each essay highlights particular issues or themes which have emerged as critical in the area of culture being examined, issues selected in order to show the contemporary dynamics and historical pressures shaping its institutions and practices – for example, international production in the cinema, the parallel importing issue in the music industry, or commercialism in public broadcasting.

The book has its origin in a workshop organised by the editors on behalf of the Australian Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy as a part of the Reshaping Australian Institutions program of the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University. The focus of the workshop, as of the present volume, was on Australian cultural institutions, the changing pressures and possibilities that are reconfiguring their practices, and how these practices are perceived and evaluated. It is important that we not only understand cultural institutions and practices but also understand how they have been understood – by practitioners, publics and policy makers. Our concern, directly and indirectly, has also been to review the 'state of the discipline' and to question the adequacy of popular and academic understandings of contemporary Australian culture; this focus remains a guiding principle in the present selection of essays.

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The essays collected here represent a selection of the papers presented at the workshop plus a number of others commissioned subsequently in order to address both a range and balance of issues and cultural domains. *Culture in Australia* does not aim to be exhaustive in its 'coverage' of culture in Australia. Our aim, rather, is to highlight the changing circumstances of Australian culture and of the cultural industries in Australia – and the changing ways in which these have been understood – by focusing on key areas where significant shifts and challenges have occurred: cinema, popular music, visual art, tourism and leisure, literature, public broadcasting, youth cultures, sport, multiculturalism, heritage, museums, Indigenous media and regional cultures. In addition there are essays which take a broader or longer historical view of, for example, issues concerning the emergence of public cultural subsidy in Australia (Tim Rowse on the evolution of H.C. Coombs' policy thinking), academic interventions in cultural debate (Graeme Turner on the changing meanings of the 'popular' in cultural studies), and the unequal distribution of cultural tastes and access (in the analysis of class and culture by Tony Bennett, Michael Emmison and John Frow).

Culture in Australia is organised into three parts corresponding to the three key terms of the book's subtitle – policies, publics and programs. Part 1, Policy and Industry Contexts, covers four key areas of contemporary Australian culture which have been particularly open, or vulnerable, to internationalisation and globalisation: cinema, popular music, the visual arts and tourism. In each area, there have been major shifts in the institutional or industry context over the last decade such that policy, although crucial in shaping each field, has in some ways been struggling to keep up. The tensions which are traced in these chapters, between globalisation and national or local cultures, between market forces and public subsidy or protection, and between national and Indigenous or post-colonial discourses, describe the themes for many of the essays in the following two sections. They also describe the themes that emerge in Tim Rowse's historical account of H.C. Coombs' attempts not only to formulate but to institutionalise a national cultural policy. In an historically significant manner, Indigenous cultures became inevitable and problematic for a line of cultural thinking that began very differently, with notions of a common national culture in which Aboriginal cultures were scarcely an issue.

Part 2, Australian Culture and its Publics, interrogates the ways in which culture, although often conceived as a 'whole way of life' or a national characteristic, is unevenly and unequally distributed across increasingly differentiated publics in Australia. The essays reveal both gains and losses as cultural institutions shift in order to accommodate changing publics – to broaden audiences or to 'niche market' more effectively or, quite often, to attempt to do both at once. The high/low culture distinction has shifted ground but is still pervasive in organising culture – in distinguishing, for example, between different television genres and audiences, and in distributing cultural competencies or participation

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in, say, sport, music or reading. Class, age and gender continue to play decisive roles in organising different patterns of access to cultural resources and in organising both media representations and policy responses – for example, in the area of youth cultures. Essays in this section also consider how notions of the public or the popular have been deployed in cultural criticism, for example in understanding literature's social and institutional significance or in the complex shifts in how cultural studies has defined the 'popular' in 'popular culture' and used it as a critical concept.

Part 3, Programs of Cultural Diversity, focuses on the intersection between Australian cultural policies and the emphasis, both from within communities and from government, on cultural diversity. Policies and institutions governing multicultural, ethnic minority or Indigenous cultures were placed under increasing pressure in the second half of the 1990s by very public attacks on 'special interest' funding from the One Nation Party, certain Coalition politicians and some prominent journalists, and by the general tendency towards private market rationales. Policies and programs formed around notions such as multiculturalism, heritage and Indigeneity have all been reconfigured but remain unsettled, contentious areas of policy formation. Indigenous issues, above all, are central – both inevitable and unsettling – to any stories of national culture. At the same time, regional cultures have emerged as an element of cultural diversity in Australia. The promotion, perhaps even the invention, of local cultural characteristics and traditions has been embraced as a means of sustaining distinctive cultures (and economies). The threat, again, has most often been seen to come from globalisation, although, as Robin Trotter shows, some regional cultural organisations have turned globalisation to their own advantage.

This final emphasis on a dynamic relation between the opportunities and threats, the structural weaknesses and the strengths which characterise the institutions of culture in Australia is a recurrent and connecting theme in the essays comprising *Culture in Australia*. They all argue for readjustments to common ways of understanding culture in Australia. Their analyses resist both a triumphant nationalist or globalising rhetoric. Equally they resist the over-generalised stories of doom and gloom that see Australian culture disappearing under the combined pressures of commercialisation, privatisation, internationalisation and Americanisation. Each suggests the multi-dimensional aspects of culture, and of different cultures, in Australia, demonstrating how textual, institutional, technological, economic and policy aspects all bear on the production, circulation and evaluation of cultural products and practices.

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Part 1

Policy and Industry Contexts

Introduction

Since World War II and especially since the late 1960s in Australia there has been a quite remarkable development of both cultural industries and cultural policy. In cinema, broadcasting, music, literature and the visual arts the complex structures of a mature cultural system with institutional continuity and diversity – an infrastructure of producers, workers, artists, agents, publicists, markets, critics, fans and so forth – came into being relatively suddenly in the sixties and seventies. A number of these developments were ‘policy-led’, most spectacularly in the case of the Australian cinema revival which was dependent upon federal government assistance through the Australian Film Development Commission and then the Australian Film Commission, more quietly through assistance to Australian writers through the Australia Council’s Literature Board. In other areas, such as the visual arts, the developments were primarily ‘market-led’ – in this case through the burgeoning of private dealer galleries – although a shift towards more contemporary Australian art in the buying policies of major government institutions was also critical.

Except for the government’s commitment to the ABC, federal cultural policy before the war was largely a matter of regulation, for example through the control of broadcast licences in radio or censorship regimes. During the war, a gradual shift in emphasis emerged through discussions within government and among intellectuals of proposals for a national cultural council. As Tim Rowse indicates in Chapter 5, much of the energy in this discussion was devoted to proposals for a national theatre. The war had been interpreted not merely as a military challenge but as a challenge to Australia’s culture or ‘civilisation’