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Stuart Cunningham and Elizabeth Jacka

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Australian Television



International Mediascapes

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*for Jo, Ben and Hugo  
and  
for Katherine, a constant television companion*

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Australian Television

AND

International Mediascapes

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and

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**CAMBRIDGE**  
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## Preface

*Neighbours*, a cheap and unpretentious suburban soap opera that took some time to build audiences in Australia, has been an unprecedented success in Britain, reorienting television schedules, opening the way for a much closer co-operative relationship between the British and Australian industries, and creating a whole social field of audience and fan response around it. *The Flying Doctors*, with its outback community spirit, was perceived as a model of social democratic values in The Netherlands, where it was voted most popular imported program in 1992. If we listen to concern expressed about the commercialisation of European or New Zealand television, we hear that Australian models of commercial programming are as worrying as United States models, and are simple recycled versions of the hegemonic master texts of the dominant exporting nation. Such impacts on mass audiences or intellectuals are complemented by beguiling examples of Australian television's power to charm all sorts of different sub-communities: *Neighbours* has been mined for its use in developing English-language skills (as a kind of *Sesame Street* for older persons), in Mauritius; lesbian and gay communities on the west coast of the US made *Prisoner Cell Block H* a cult hit; and audiences in the Midlands of the United Kingdom campaigned for its retention when it was in danger of being pulled from the schedule in 1990.

These are some of the ingredients we wish to mix into a study of Australian television in the international market-place. Media, communications and cultural studies research has not developed robust traditions for bringing such peripheral cultural and industry contra-flow into visibility. At the same time, the traditional paradigms for understanding cultural exchange and domination have come under increasing strain in recent years. In a rapidly globalising and diversifying world they have seemed less and less capable of describing the ramifying patterns that characterise contemporary audiovisual culture, and of accounting for

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audience negotiation with dominant meanings and products. Most theorists of globalisation have tended to over-emphasise the centrality of the US in the audiovisual industries and to be preoccupied with audience negotiation of the dominant US product. They have viewed cultural exchange through a peculiarly metropolitan prism.

During the 1980s and 1990s, Australia developed a sizeable international profile for its film and television product – what the French felicitously call *l'audiovisuel*. With blockbusters like *Crocodile Dundee* (1986) and its US-backed sequel, and *The Piano* (1993) and *Schindler's List* (1993), Australian or Australian-connected films consolidated the international reputation first established in the 1970s. In this book, however, we are concentrating on product made for television. We do this for a variety of reasons. While film and television drama are for most intents and purposes two parts of the same industry, the methods of studying them have developed different protocols because of their different modes of consumption. Television finds itself embedded in the routines of everyday life for the great majority of people, while film continues to be an occasioned and occasional activity, with foreign film particularly finding its audiences across a much narrower stratum of international communities. Thus, television programs are much more appropriately understood as product – produced, acquired and screened not for their intrinsic or individual worth but for their ability to fill schedules, to 'feed the monster'. Whereas it is appropriate to study the international circulation of foreign films as discrete aesthetic objects, for that is precisely how they are marketed across the world's art-cinema circuits, the same protocols are impossible to apply to television programs. Also, while there is now a substantial literature on the careers of Australian films overseas (Hamilton and Matthews 1986; Lewis 1987; O'Regan 1988), this is the first book to bring together the collective international career of Australian television.

Our study examines both the international and the domestic aspects of the phenomenon of Australian program export. We first of all consider it in relation to international debates on globalisation and so-called 'borderless markets', on convergence of technologies and ownership across communications media; on market structure including theories of post-fordism; and on cross-cultural exchange (Chapter 1 and Chapter 2). In doing this, our work can be regarded as an extended and carefully situated case study of an audiovisual producer and exporter on the periphery of world trade flows, which has nonetheless come to exert an impact and profile disproportionate to the size of its industry and its domestic market.

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In this, Australian program export is an excellent illustration of the contemporary multi-directional flow of contemporary world television trade (Chapters 6–11).

In tracing the reasons for this, we are led to the other side of the equation – the domestic structure and operations of the Australian television industry (Chapters 3–5). We concentrate primarily on patterns and developments since the mid-to-late 1980s, when the story traced by Elizabeth Jacka and Susan Dermody in *The Screening of Australia* (1987; 1988) and in *The Imaginary Industry* (1988, Parts 1 and 2) ended. There are obvious patterns of internationalisation which pre-date this as a starting point – it would probably be fair to say that Australia has had an in-built orientation to export for most of the history of the film industry, and certainly since the mid-1970s in television.

The decade we have studied, 1985–94, represents new departures in the process of globalisation of audiovisual industries. By globalisation we mean an ever greater process of inter-linking once separate industries, trans-border program consumption and the diversification of cultural exchange, with many more sources of cultural expression gaining the attention of international audiences. The dominant themes of this period include the changing policies governing audiovisual support mechanisms, for example the Australian Film Finance Corporation's demands for 'market attachment' (usually overseas) for projects it funds; the growth of co-productions and co-ventures as the norm for high-budget drama and, increasingly, documentary; the financial crises of the commercial networks, which accelerated the need to seek off-shore finance for an ongoing production slate; and the domestic policy debates that have shifted to reflect Australia's growing transparency to economic, political and cultural internationalisation.

What of our method in our approach to these themes? We seek to present a middle-range approach that integrates industry and cultural analysis and is informed by contemporary debates in political economy, media, communication and cultural studies, sociology, and policy studies about globalisation and cross-cultural communication. Chapter 1 begins by canvassing these debates, while Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 use industry analysis to introduce the international and domestic context within which Australian television operates. The main players are profiled in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

The question of how cultural and reception analysis can be adequately performed on the careers of Australian programs in several major overseas territories is examined in Chapter 1. The results are followed through in

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Chapter 3 and in Chapters 6–11, where we examine how the television systems and culture of various major territories act as the prism through which Australian programs are filtered. Throughout this part of the book, detailed discussions of the international careers of programs and services such as *Neighbours*, *Sylvania Waters*, *The Flying Doctors*, *Paradise Beach*, *Beyond 2000*, *Brides of Christ*, *Shortland Street*, *Mini-Dragons* and Australia Television, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's international satellite service, demonstrate the industrial and cultural specificity of reception contexts for television that is Australian or has crucial Australian connections. Finally, in the concluding Chapter 12, we use cultural policy studies approaches to examine the effects of internationalisation on the domestic mediascape.

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## Abbreviations

ABA	Australian Broadcasting Authority
ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ACDO	Australian Cultural Development Office
AFC	Australian Film Commission
AFI	Australian Film Institute
AFM	American Film Market
APEC	Asia Pacific Economic Council
ARD	Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Öffentlichrechllichen- Rundfunkenstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
ATV	Australia Television
A&E	Arts and Entertainment
BARB	British Audience Research Board
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BIG	Beyond International Group
BTCE	Bureau of Transport and Communications Economics
CBC	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
CER	Closer Economic Relations
CIRCIT	Centre for International Research on Communication and Information Technologies
CIT	Central Independent Television
CNBC	Cable National Broadcasting Corporation
CNN	Cable News Network
CTV	Canadian Television
DASET	Department of Arts, Sport, the Environment and Territories
DITARD	Department of Industry, Technology and Regional Development
EC	European Community
EFSA	Export Film Services Australia

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ESPN	Electronic Sports Programming Network
EU	European Union
FCC	Federal Communications Commission
FFC	Film Finance Corporation
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
HBO	Home Box Office
IIR	Institute for International Research
ITN	Independent Television Network
ITV	Independent Television (Network)
MIPCOM	International Market for Television, Video, Cable and Satellite Films and Programs
MTV	Music Television
NATPE	National Association of Television Programming Executives
NBC	National Broadcasting Corporation
NHK	Nippon Hoso Kyokai
NIP	National Interest Program
NOS	Nederlandse Omroepprogramma Stichting
NZOA	New Zealand On Air
PBS	Public Broadcasting Service
QTV	Queensland Television
RAI	Radio-televisione Italia
RCC	Roadshow Coote and Carroll
RCTI	Rajawali Citra Televisi
RTE	Radio Telefis Eireann
RTM	Radio and Television Malaysia
SBS	Special Broadcasting Service
SIN	Spanish International Network
SMATV	Satellite Master Antenna Television
SNS	Subscriber News Service
STB	System Televisyen Berhad
SVT	Sveriges Television
TBI	Television Business International
TCI	Tele-Communications Incorporated
TVNZ	Television New Zealand
TVO	Television Ontario
TVRI	Television Republik Indonesia
TVS	Televisi South
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States [of America]
YTV	Youth Television
ZDF	Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen