Chapter 2: Historical phases in arts and cultural policy-making in Australia

Competing Models of Australian Cultural Policy

Australia has often been depicted as a cultural desert that only recently emerged from a bleak landscape and embraced cultural and creative practice as an important aspect of nation building. David Throsby, writing an overview for the Australian Year Book's 2000 edition (2001), for example, characterises three periods of Australian cultural policy:

- *1900-1967* when explicit policy was virtually *non-existent*;
- *1968-1990* when there was a period of *rapid expansion* of arts and cultural organisations and initiatives; and
- *1990-2000* witnessing further *moderate expansion* of the sector combined with the articulation of a broad cultural policy framework.

According to Throsby, the third period also coincided with an increasing interest in and availability of cultural statistics and the monitoring of cultural trends in the light of policy shifts. Throsby's focus, however, is essentially confined to the last few decades.

By contrast, Radbourne (1993) characterises Australian arts/cultural policy as a five-stage evolutionary process:

1. pre-war concern about the lack of cultural provision;
2. 1945-55 community intolerance about the lack of national theatre;
3. establishment of an 'inspectorate', a specialist bureaucratic organisation (Australia Council 1968–);
4. dynamic reform of cultural administration (1975–); and
5. directive management of cultural policy (1990–).

This is similar to Rowse's (1985) identification of distinctive *support funding strategies* that roughly equate to historical time periods: Voluntary Entrepreneurship, Statutory Patronage, Decentralised Patronage, and Dualism (see also Radbourne and Fraser 1996; Batterbsy 1980; Macdonnell 1992; Withers 1982).

It is argued here that a more nuanced chronology of Australian cultural policy may be more informative and appropriate (see Appendix B.1 and B.2). This chronology would encompass the following developments:

- pre-1900 settler culture emphasising nostalgia and a new beginning;
- 1900-39 state cultural entrepreneurship;
- 1940-54 the era of national cultural organisations;

- 1955-67 organisational patronage (through specialist bodies funded by government);
- 1967-74 policies of growth and facilitation;
- 1975-90 access and equity and community cultural development;
- 1991-95 diversity, excellence, cultural policy and cultural industries; and
- 1996- the review cycle and a return to neo-patronage.

In some cases, it is quite clear that governments pursued contradictory and competing agendas, not only from phase to phase but within phases. Moreover, similar policies have been adopted irrespective of which party was in power or what broad economic and ideological framework they operated within. Although there is a widespread view that Labor governments have been more sympathetic to the arts and culture, the evidence contradicts that view and reveals a much more complex and dynamic policy climate. While, broadly speaking, these depictions of distinct historical phases may be true and indicate a mounting interest, it is arguable that, in fact, Australian governments had from the earliest days a keen interest in arts and culture because this domain was associated with the development of a cultivated people and a national culture. However, in these early days, arts and cultural initiatives were not framed in specific cultural policy terms. Rather, policy interventions were *ad hoc* and *episodic*. To some degree, this situation persists in much of arts and cultural policy-making (cf. Rowse 1985).

Colonial Cultural Policies

Historically, specific events and characteristics made the arts and cultural sector in Australia distinctive. As a small yet dispersed settler society, colonial Australia lacked an esteemed aristocracy and social hierarchy that set the terms of cultural engagement, despite the best efforts of the self-appointed arbiters of taste. The nature of Australian culture was contested. While some yearned for a re-located English culture, others — especially ex-convicts and free settlers — were intent on establishing a non-aristocratic sense of social manners and cultural mores. Indicatively, the first painting purchased by the Queensland Art Gallery in 1896, *Evicted,* by British artist Blandford Fletcher, is described as 'a good example of Victorian social realism' (Queensland Art Gallery 1982:13, 48). It depicted a downcast mother and child unable to pay the rent being cast out of their home watched by neighbours and an unsympathetic landlord. The choice of this painting suggests that, even then, social comment and criticism was considered an important component of the cultural landscape even by the fine art sector.

As early as 1818 the fledgling colony anointed its first poet laureate, Michael Massey Robinson, albeit 'somewhat mockingly' according to Radbourne (1996: 12). Massey Robinson was a convict whose legal training and literary skills resulted in an early pardon. Despite his criminal background, he became registrar

of all legal documents in the colony, a position with considerable benefits and autonomy (Throsby 2001; Clarke 1967). Clearly, the colony was in need of all the administrative skills it could get. As well as possessing legal skills, Robinson had a literary bent that he expressed in odes and poems. These idiosyncratic reflections became the first published literary works in Australia. In 1819, he was rewarded for his services with the gift of two cows. He is, therefore, credited with being the 'first recipient of an arts grant' in Australia (Throsby 2001).

The tale is also revealing in the fact that this status was granted by the colony's Governor Macquarie and not the English monarch. Equally, it was rescinded by his successor, Governor Brisbane. While most of Robinson's poems commemorated royal birthdays and milestones, he also wrote politically inflammatory poems and ballads (for which he was sentenced to Norfolk Island at one point) as well as poems that captured popular sentiments 'of what it meant to be a convict, and … the ardent community spirit which informed Macquarie's Sydney' (Clarke 1967). In short, Robinson arguably set the tone of colonial cultural taste and reflected its desire to assert independence from the English heritage that had established the penal colony and shaped its early civilian character.

While this monograph cannot cover the scope of emerging cultural policy before Federation, it is clear that, beyond the struggle to establish the 'nuts and bolts' of a viable settlement, a considerable amount of energy was spent establishing the connotations of a 'civilised' society through clothing habits, domestic décor, furnishings, uniforms, the acquisition and production of artworks, and so on (see Maynard 1995). There was a profound ambivalence to this quest for civility evidenced by a reverence for the culture of Europe on the one hand and a heartfelt desire to be freed from the shackles of cultural elitism on the other. Perhaps inevitably, this produced a sense of 'cultural cringe' — embarrassment about nascent national culture — a sentiment that persists in some quarters today.

Nonetheless, colonial governments *did* support culture, for example, by establishing state art galleries (the first in Victoria in 1861 followed by New South Wales in 1871, South Australia in 1880, Queensland in 1895, Tasmania in 1887 and Western Australia in 1901). These galleries were given modest annual funds to operate and commence their collections (£550 for the Queensland Art Gallery, £1000 for the Art Gallery of Western Australia and £4000 for the Art Gallery of NSW), bolstered by private benefactions. By the 1950s, annual government support had increased significantly — to £22,000 for the Art Galleries of South Australia and Tasmania respectively, £46,000 to the Art Gallery of NSW and £70,000 to the National Gallery of Victoria (Throsby 2001).

Post-Federation Cultural Policies

Since Federation, the federal government has been committed to cultural support, as part of its mission of creating a national culture across its disparate and sparsely populated continent, through communications networks, media (especially the Australian Broadcasting Commission — the ABC – established in 1932) and in its role as cultural entrepreneur of broadcasts and tours of orchestras, theatre, and performing artists and so on. This role was gradually assumed by commercial entrepreneurs such as J. C. Williamson but the entrepreneurial role of government – especially (but not only) through the ABC – has continued.

The Commonwealth Literary Fund was the first federal grants body (1908) followed by the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board in 1912. As mass media forms developed, the federal government conducted inquiries into radio, cinema and performing arts, concerned as much with potential *harms* as with opportunities (see Appendix B). These concerns came to the fore during the Second World War when the Commonwealth made cultural regulation a priority of wartime policy (banning such things as American popular music – condemned as 'jungle music'[1] – and instituting stringent content controls on the media).

A desire to encourage Australian cultural production was recognised in the establishment of the first Arts Council of Australia – NSW branch (1943), National Archives (1944), National Film Board (1945) and state symphony orchestras (from 1946). There was also a campaign to establish a national theatre and/or arts council as part of the vision for postwar reconstruction (Johanson and Rentschler 2002: 168-9) but the election of the conservative government of Robert Menzies in 1949 put paid to that. Culture smacked of 'socialism'.

Post World War II Developments

Although the 1950s and early 1960s are often described as a 'cultural Ice Age', a number of elite national cultural organisations were set up during this period, including the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust, National Institute of Dramatic Art, Elizabethan Opera Company, the Australian Ballet, Union Theatre Company, Old Tote Company and the federal division of the Australia Council for the Arts (1964). This latter body was to become the key cultural organisation as a statutory authority in 1968, supported by various federal and state cultural organisations, while the states generally preferred using departmental arrangements to manage culture. These cultural agencies were both the product of vigorous *interest representation* and the symbol of a new moment of national culture, elevated in some cases, by the royal imprimatur. Australia was coming of age culturally, but still could not, or would not, sever its umbilical ties with England.

The importance of politically well-connected and persistent cultural lobbyists became a feature of Australian cultural policy both at federal and state level, a feature detailed by Rowse (1985) and Macdonnell (1992). These lobbyists were

assisted by the formation of bodies representing sub-sectors of arts and culture such as writers, visual artists, Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander (ATSI) cultural producers and so on. So, the polarisation of pro- and anti-arts and cultural interest groups persisted and has flavoured subsequent debates about national culture, cultural education and training, cultural development, multiculturalism, indigenous culture and cultural export.

It was at this point that things heated up on the cultural front and an energetic period of growth was facilitated by the Coalition governments of Harold Holt, John Gorton and William McMahon, and capitalised on by the cultural invigoration of Gough Whitlam's Labor government (1972-75) (see Rowse 1985; Macdonnell 1992; Gardiner-Garden 1994). This period saw the combination of an expanded role for the Australia Council, the emergence of specialist artform bodies, inquiries into performing arts, new innovations in the visual arts, film, television, crafts, museums, and in music. This panoply of energetic innovations set the scene for the later focus on access and equity that dominated cultural discourse well into the nineties.

As noted above, the idea to establish an arts council had been proposed much earlier, based on the perceived success of arts councils in Britain, Canada and New Zealand. They were heralded as a way to avoid idiosyncratic forms of patronage and determine cultural support on the basis of peer evaluation and excellence. It was considered that an arts council would be well-positioned to foster the development of national culture based on 'artistic merit' and democratic extension by providing assistance to cultural organisations and practitioners (Johanson and Rentschler 2002). Accordingly, the Australia Council for the Arts was composed of artform boards that evaluated applications for funding on the basis of peer review.

The Golden Years?

The 1960s and 1970s became known as the golden years for arts and cultural development in Australia. Funding across all levels of government rose substantially (see Appendix F) and many new initiatives were supported. It is important to note, however, that numerous initiatives, inquiries, reports and research commissioned under one government were inherited by succeeding governments which then had to respond initiatives not of their making. Consequently, it can be misleading to credit a particular government with responsibility for particular milestones when, in fact, they were initiated by the preceding administration. One example is the establishment of the Australia Council, proposed by Holt but (due to his untimely death) given effect by Gorton. Another is the scene-setting Industries Assistance Commission inquiry into the performing arts, commissioned by Whitlam, hijacked by the hardliners in the Industries Assistance Commission (IAC), and presented to an unsympathetic Fraser (see Appendix G.2 and below).

The invigoration of Australian cultural policy also faced the challenge of reversing the exodus of creative talent to overseas cultural Meccas. By the 1970s, this tendency slowed (although overseas experience and influences remain alluring to up-and-coming artists). It was now possible to envisage an artistic career in Australia. It was also a period of major social debate and change and issues like women's rights, youth culture, multiculturalism, anti-war sentiments, anti-capitalism and anti-colonialism were reflected in the debates about culture during this period. Australia's cultural landscape was transformed. The Australia Council expanded its role through a combination of state patronage and elite nurturing. Funding strategies were set in place. The largest share of funding went to elite organisations while individual practitioners competed for small grants.

Of course, not everyone agreed with this *new* Australia. To many it challenged sacred cows and championed suspicious new credos. Economic conservatives in central government agencies – The Treasury in particular – were especially wary. They tended to regard any expenditure on culture as a waste of public money but were even more alarmed at expenditure on what they regarded as radical and *avant garde* artforms. Moreover, all this new culture was inflating the cultural budget. Why, they argued, should government foot the bill to support creative workers who lacked a 'real job' to produce cultural entertainment for a few? This grumble gained traction in the 1970s as debates about levels of public expenditure and value for money began to influence the climate of policy-making.

Winds of Change

Under the Coalition government of Malcolm Fraser economic conservatism gained ascendancy, heralding a period of public sector restraint and cutbacks in government expenditure. Accordingly, the Industries Assistance Commission (IAC) was asked to investigate government funding of the performing arts sector. The IAC applied an explicitly rational economic model that rejected arguments about 'public good' and 'special pleading', instead viewing the sector as an 'industry' in order to assess its economic potential.

Perhaps surprisingly, the IAC rejected assumptions of cultural 'excellence' espoused by elite arts bodies and adopted a broader anthropological definition of culture incorporating concepts of national and community benefit. In abandoning the 'flagship philosophy' of existing cultural policy and advocating policies that reflected community values and the ordinary culture of citizens, the report recommended three new principles of cultural policy: *innovation, dissemination and education*. This meant re-directing support away from elite cultural bodies and towards objectives that aligned with community expectations and interests. In some ways, these recommendations were thoroughly modern and in line with the cultural sustainability arguments of recent times. Yet, the

report has been 'misrepresented and misunderstood, [and] vilified' (Macdonnell 1992: 142-3), dismissed as *anti-arts*, *anti-patronage* and cast as the incarnation of all that is wrong with what later became known, pejoratively, as 'economic rationalism'.

The 1976 report created enormous controversy for a policy arena that had only recently begun to benefit from government largesse (e.g. Rowse 1985; Parsons 1987). Although the report fitted the new governance agenda of smaller government and self-sufficiency, it created an outcry about the inappropriateness of such a model for the arts/cultural sector. While its recommendations were repudiated by Fraser himself and ostensibly ignored by his government, the report nonetheless set the terms for policy during the next decade.

In a sense, Australian cultural policy became infused with the rhetoric of economic rationalism by stealth through strategies aimed at demonstrating community benefit, measuring performance and evaluating outcomes of government support. The ghost of the IAC report lingered in subsequent cultural policy-making. The intended outcome of the report (to wind back funding of elite culture and facilitate community cultural development) was stymied while the unintended outcome (maintain elite cultural support, impose accountability and shift from program to project and incentive funding) underpinned arts and cultural policy into the late 1990s. Specific developments in cultural policy became a tussle between influential lobbyists and sectoral interests, on the one hand, and instrumental policy-makers and outspoken critics, on the other.

Of all post-federation governments, it was the Labor Government led by Bob Hawke that was, arguably, responsible for the greatest changes in Australia's cultural policy landscape. Initially welcomed as a 'pro-culture Prime Minister', Bob Hawke did not share previous prime ministers' enthusiasms for the opera and the ballet. Rather, his sensibilities leaned more towards sport and everyday culture. He also oversaw an administration which had already undergone major culture changes and was beginning what was to become a long flirtation with managerialism. Governments had to be seen to be responsible in their spending of public money and to demonstrate greater efficiencies in activities they supported.

In the area of culture, Hawke set up inquiries into arts employment, youth arts, cultural statistics, orchestras, government funding, folk life and the indigenous arts and culture industry. This occurred against a broader backdrop of administrative and policy reform across all areas of government activity, centred on measures such as the application of performance measurement, the introduction of market incentives and corporatisation. The effect was the infusion of *facilitation* and *architect* strategies into an arts and culture policy mix that already contained elements of *patronage* and *commercialisation*.

Casting a 'Creative Nation'

These policy modalities continued under Paul Keating's Labor government. Although the so-called 'Keating awards' – designed to support leading artists by generous grants or incomes – attracted most attention, in fact, the most significant policy initiative was the release of *Creative Nation: Commonwealth Cultural Policy* in 1994. *Creative Nation*, arguably, marked the first occasion of an Australian federal government enunciating a clearly articulated cultural policy. In particular, it elaborated Keating's vision of a culture-led economic future in a globalised society (cf. Craik, Davis and Sunderland 2000: 195-196):

> Culture creates wealth … Culture employs … Culture adds value, it makes an essential contribution to innovation, marketing and design. It is a badge of our industry. The level of our creativity substantially determines our ability to adapt to new economic imperatives. (DCA 1994: 7)

The significance of *Creative Nation* lay in its dual emphasis on the national imperative to foster cultural development and the economic potential of cultural activity. It was not confined to the usual exclusive domain of fine arts and culture. Specifically, culture was identified as a key building block of national culture and individual citizenship. *Creative Nation* adopted an expansive definition of culture that included film, television, radio, multimedia, cultural heritage, cultural industries, libraries, indigenous culture, regional cultural outreach and cultural tourism. Initiatives for cognate issues such as education and training, copyright, export incentive schemes, taxation incentives, sponsorship and other facilitation schemes were also addressed. *Creative Nation* also addressed the role of the *Australia Council*, Commonwealth patterns of cultural support, the role of national cultural organisations, the performance and potential of diverse cultural industries, export potential and proposed a raft of new cultural programs and projects.

As a policy document, *Creative Nation* reflected the preoccupations of its time. In contrast to the earlier rhetoric of access and equity, cultural policy was cast in terms of cultural capital at both an individual and industry level. Significant sums were thrown at multimedia 'hothouses', designed to kick-start new generation technologies as cultural industries. Other policies that were implemented included the *Visions of Australia* and *Touring Australia* programs for visual art and performing art respectively, copyright law reform, and a restructure of the Australia Council. In addition, the federal Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA) gained more traction as a policy leader and facilitator. Nonetheless, *Creative Nation* retained its commitment to excellence, now redefined in terms of international standards and success. To this end, national flagship companies came under new funding and administrative arrangements, most significantly through the Australia

Council's *Major Organisations Fund*, the creation of which aggravated cultural interest groups and lobbyists. As a consequence, the Fund was criticised as a return to elitism and favouritism and an abandonment of more prosaic forms of culture.

This policy direction was part of the Labor government's philosophy of targeting under-performing or under-resourced areas by shoring up national cultural organisations as well as facilitating citizen engagement with culture. At the same time, the government was committed to reforming the sector in industry terms stressing the capacity to generate export growth in the global cultural marketplace. This strategy was underpinned by an increasingly sophisticated understanding of cultural practice and consumption, informed by commissioned research. This research also informed the critique and revision of government approaches to cultural support.

The Keating government lost office before it had implemented much of *Creative Nation*. By the end of the Keating government, the arts were rhetorically associated with Labor: cultural practitioners were believed to be of 'left' persuasion while Labor governments were perceived to endorse proactive arts and cultural policy. To some extent (as Appendix B shows) this assumption was a myth, yet it had important consequences for the direction of cultural policy after Keating.

An Alternative Vision for the Arts

Reacting to the 'Arts for Labor' mantra and reflecting their economic rationalist thinking, the Coalition in opposition endorsed a hardline arts policy in 1993 as part of the *Fightback!* portfolio of policies that advocated kneecapping the Australia Council and devolving arts funding to the states (see exhibit 1). This document enthusiastically embraced the tenets of economic rationalism. Cultural agencies were to be cut adrift from the steady drip of public money and forced to compete in the marketplace. Strong adverse reaction to this hardline policy at the 1993 election, especially from influential conservative cultural lobbyists, persuaded the Coalition to reconsider this policy approach and adopt a softer line.[2]

Exhibit 1: *Fightback!* The 1993 Coalition *Vision for the Arts in Australia*

In March 1993, the Coalition opposition released its Arts policy as part of its *Fightback Australia!* platform in the lead-up to the March election. At the time, John Hewson, a committed economic rationalist, was Liberal Party leader and Senator Michael Baume was opposition arts spokesman. *A Vision for the Arts in Australia* was a bold document designed to counteract Prime Minister Paul Keating's underwriting of an expert panel that was developing a Commonwealth statement of cultural policy (*Creative Nation* was published in 1994).

The pressure to re-think arts and cultural policy arose from successive debates in parliament, the media and within the arts community. This policy sought to: clarify the respective roles of Federal, state and local government; redress declining Federal funding to the Arts and Cultural Heritage area; quell controversy about grant funding to trade union organisations; address the perception of inadequate allocation of funds to community arts by the Australia Council; and counter general unrest about the direction of the Australia Council under Rodney Hall's chairmanship. A ghost that shadowed this debate was former opposition arts' minister Chris Puplick's declaration in 1988 that the Australia Council should be abolished. Although this policy was later retracted, the fallout from this statement framed the reaction to the subsequent Coalition arts policy.

The public and media impression of the *Visions* document was that the Coalition was committed to savaging support for art and culture by such measures as:

- shifting funding of national organisations to the Federal department;
- restructuring the Australia Council to redress peer review mechanisms, and provide incentive payments rather than grants;
- shifting the funding of non-national arts organisations to the states;
- underwriting national and international touring programs; and
- enhancing tax incentive schemes to encourage private investment and involvement in the arts.

The policy was also committed to supporting youth arts, folk heritage, popular music and pushing the film industry towards a private sector and commercial underpinning. Rather than repudiating the arts, this policy explicitly confirmed the Coalition's commitment to the arts, and acknowledged the importance of culture in national identity, the pursuit of excellence in the arts and centrality of art and culture in international perceptions of Australia. But it also observed that 'the great bulk of arts

activity in Australia proceeds without the need for taxpayer support' (The Coalition Arts Policy 'An agenda for the arts' 1993). This was perhaps the greatest un-stated threat to the cosy arrangement enjoyed by the arts fraternity with arts funding organisations.

In fact, the *Vision* document advocated a major shift in mechanisms of support from the 'drip feed' model of grants and direct funding to matching funding, tax incentive and audience-oriented forms of support. The policy also advocated a range of accountability, duplication of services and market-sensitive schemes to evaluate the effectiveness of support mechanisms and eliminate the perceived rampant cronyism and cliquey behaviour of grant bodies such as the Australia Council. The document concluded by quoting John Hewson's promise not 'to inhibit the further growth of our arts and cultural industries' but to let 'the arts industry in Australia … thrive and grow' (The Coalition Arts Policy 'Executive Summary' 1993: 11).

Reaction to the *Vision* document was heated and sustained. The arts community was supported by influential media, commentators who condemned the Coalition policy, in particular, its threat to the Australia Council and the statutory independence of the arts. Further controversy raged over the anticipated negative impact of a GST on the arts sector. United opposition to the Coalition policy was sealed by the Government's release of its election cultural policy, *Distinctly Australian, The Future of Australia's Cultural Development* which anticipated a commitment to a comprehensive cultural policy and re-evaluation of arts and culture as vibrant and economically valuable cultural industries. By the time of the election, the arts community had come out strongly in support of the Keating government and was believed to have influenced the election outcome and Labor's victory.

Despite the enthusiasm of the arts community for the government, the next budget delivered little to the sector with funding remaining virtually unchanged. Indeed, Senator Baume claimed that the only increase in funding was to the 'Keating' fellowships. Baume himself had distanced himself from the *Vision* document in the lead-up to the election on the basis of the negative press it attracted and had lobbied unsuccessfully for Hewson to revise the policy. After the election, Hewson took on the arts portfolio himself while Baume continued to profess unease with the Coalition's policy from the backbench and in his retirement.

In all, the significance of the *A Vision for the Arts in Australia* was profound, galvanising the arts community into an effective and relentless lobbying network wedded to increasingly outdated patronage models

> of arts funding and resisting attempts to devise new philosophies and
> mechanisms of support. The fact that the reaction of the arts community
> was based on a misunderstanding of the *Visions* document makes the
> controversial role it has in Australian cultural policy all the more ironic.

When elected in 1996, the incoming Howard government lacked a coherent
cultural policy of its own, so much of the thrust of *Creative Nation* continued
to drive cultural policy at the coalface, though not by that name. Cultural
lobbyists and interest bodies resumed their courting of government. Cultural
agencies continued, somewhat uncertainly, to manage on reduced budgets.
Cultural practitioners continued to be trained and aspire to a cultural profession.
Cultural export continued to be favoured by government although Howard was
less interested in the new 'Asian Tigers' (so enthusiastically embraced by Keating)
and was more at home in re-connecting with Europe and North America. Culture
continued to be supported and the Howard government gradually evolved its
own elite nurturer-cum-architect model that culminated in the decision to build
a new national cultural institution in Canberra, the National Portrait Gallery (of
which his wife was patron).

Meanwhile, *Creative Nation* lived on as an important policy learning tool not
only for state and local governments in Australia but also internationally. The
document shaped the incoming Blair Labour government's arts and cultural
policy in Britain, for example. Its philosophy and strategies were copied by local
think tanks that influenced the *facilitation* and *architect* models adopted by the
UK's Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS 2004). In contrast, there
was a lack of arts and cultural policy direction in the Coalition government in
Australia nationally (see Borghino 1999; Marr 2006; Strickland 2004) and the
sector muddled along at the federal level while the states and local government
became more proactive and innovative (Craik, Davis, Sunderland 2000).
Ironically, the *intent* of the IAC report was at last being implemented.

Cultural Policy for the New Millennium

Over time, the Howard government shaped a new policy framework — virtually
by default. Changing governance requirements, a lack of success in promoting
cultural industries and the rising costs of maintaining and operating cultural
facilities, the difficulty of reconciling commitments to social inclusion versus
cultural diversity, all combined to prompt the government to take (belated)
charge of cultural development.

The Howard government resorted to an aggressive gamble on elite cultural
organisations and, concurrently, promoted a *policy 'attachment' approach* in
which arts and cultural activities would form a part of policy delivery strategies
targeting unemployment, health, environmental sustainability and training

(Gray 2004, 2006). Effort was also invested in producing cultural statistics (e.g. the Australia Council's *Australians and the Arts*, reports by the Cultural Ministers' Council, and reports on cultural participation by the Australian Bureau of Statistics). Although the Howard government's three-pronged approach to arts and culture amounted, to a large extent, to an 'unofficial' policy, it nevertheless carried significant implications for re-shaping the arts and cultural sector.

From 1998, the government initiated, in an ostensibly *ad hoc* way, what became *the review cycle* of major elite cultural forms (performing arts, visual arts and crafts, new media, orchestras, and so on) (Strickland 2004). This approach was engineered by then Minister for Communication, Information Economy and the Arts, Richard Alston, who realised that the major flagship cultural companies 'were teetering on the verge of financial collapse' and needed a 'business' analysis of their performance and potential. A formal inquiry into Australia's major performing arts conducted by Helen Nugent and published in 1999 (*Securing the Future*, also referred to as the *Nugent Report*) provided a rigorous 'warts and all' critique yet, surprisingly, resulted in 'a $70 million injection' into the sector by federal and state governments. According to Strickland (2004: 9):

> The Howard model for arts funding was set: if arts organisations wanted more money from government, they should forgo warm, fuzzy talk and instead build a business case based on thorough research.

Reviews were subsequently commissioned for the following sectors: visual arts and crafts, symphony orchestras, music education, opera, new media, the small-to-medium sector and dance (see Appendix G). Although the Howard government was perceived to be anti-arts, in fact:

> Through its review-driven cultural agenda the Howard government has given the arts greater funding than most governments. Its record for injecting extra funds into the arts is impressive, up there with the Whitlam, Keating, Kennett [Victoria] and Dunstan [South Australia] administrations. (Strickland 2004: 9)

The perception lingered that the Howard government was not favourably disposed towards the arts (Caust 2006; Glow and Johanson 2006) and that, unless a particular sector had secured a review and subsequent special treatment, there was little hope of government largesse for other sub-sectors. Overall, there was no vision for arts and culture – 'no inspiring blueprint for the role culture could play in fostering a dynamic society' (Strickland 2004: 9). Instead, the government placed its bets on the 'Big End' of town – national cultural organisations that were visible, elite-oriented and represented by effective lobbyists.

Elite nurturing was the outcome of the review cycle with a new emphasis on specialist financial shepherding of selected organisations under the Major Organisational Bodies fund of the Australia Council. In 2000, Australian Business

Arts Foundation (AbaF) replaced the Australia Foundation for Culture and Humanities in an attempt to encourage the private sector to support the arts and cultural sector by sponsorship and partnership arrangements. This was an attempt to develop alternate models to government support for the arts (facilitation and architect). While AbaF has received positive coverage, it is still dependent on government support as an agency. Indeed, its budget has grown annually in contrast to many other arts and cultural agencies. Most recipients of AbaF sponsorship awards have gone to the 'Big End' of the culture business and, arguably, exacerbated the plight of small and medium arts and cultural organisations. The new style of arts policy that has emerged from this period has been described as 'a cosy arts-business love match' (Perkin 2006: 19), a combination of elite nurturing, facilitation and architect, or what I have called elsewhere a 'neo-patronage' model of support (Craik 2006; cf. Perkin 2007a,c).

Cultural funding by government has increased throughout the century, especially since the Second World War. This has been the case even in the face of the managerialist and economic rationalist policy formulations of recent governments. However, because of the expanding definition of culture and the expanded role of culture, there is more competition for support and, thus, less is available for particular organisations. Moreover, funding has devolved from federal to state and local governments, especially in certain sub-sectors, such that patterns of support and funding are increasingly a reflection of regional and local priorities rather than national agendas (cf. Schuster 2002; National Centre for Culture and Recreation Statistics 2005; Arts Queensland 2006). The exception is the *Major Performing Arts* program where selected national cultural organisations are funded under special favourable conditions.

The Major Performing Arts Sector Spearhead Policy About-Face

A review of the Major Performing Arts (MPA) companies (Australia Council 2003) purportedly showed that the companies had improved their performance in terms of artistic vibrancy, access and financial viability. In fact, a detailed examination of the data suggests a mixed outcome with annual fluctuations in the number of new works, the proportion of Australian works, participation and measures of effective 'outreach'. Most worrying are the financial results, which show that there are fluctuations in box office income, private sector income and assets while 'aggregate negative net assets have increased by 74%' meaning increasing *deficit*s across the companies in just four years (Major Performing Arts Board 2004: 17). The cost of companies 'doing more' – as required by the 'tied' nature of funding (e.g. touring, commercialising, exporting, etc.) on top of escalating overheads (salaries, training, administration, infrastructure maintenance, etc.) has aggravated financial viability.

Thus, irrespective of performance and auditing requirements, the performance of these companies is continuing to falter at an alarming rate. Costs are outstripping income, repertoire is becoming more conservative and less Australian, and free tickets still artificially bolster attendance figures. Moreover, the reliance on subsidised seats noted in the *Nugent Report* — from $25 per seat in Sydney and Melbourne to $282 per seat in Hobart across all the performing arts (dance, music, opera and theatre) — remains essential to inflate the audience aggregate.

The most parlous situation is in the area of symphony orchestras, which were conveniently omitted in the MPA review but have been analysed elsewhere (Boyle 2006). Boyle concluded that productivity has barely increased, while audiences are continuing to decline (as well as aging and not being replaced by a younger cohort). Indeed, he concluded that 'the classical music attender has become increasingly marginalised' (Boyle 2006: 16). More worryingly, his analysis shows that organisational costs have doubled and, although revenue has tripled, organisations have only been kept afloat because of increasing (compensatory) government subsidy. In short:

> … the various changes in organisational structure have not been effective in addressing the cultural objectives of increasing audience attendance or performance levels. However, they have been more effective in attaining economic objectives of diversifying the funding base and increasing earned revenue opportunities, but not in creating cost efficiencies. (Boyle 2006: 17)

We are, thus, left with a conflicted situation in which major performing arts companies are beneficiaries of a special arrangement for funding and support that is both ineffective and monopolises the limited resources of key cultural administrative organisations such as the Australia Council and DCITA. Meanwhile, instrumentalist *policy attachment* strategies sit uneasily alongside *elite nurturing* approaches, such as that embodied in the MPA funding strategy. Furthermore, cultural statistics provide evidence of the organic and dynamic nature of cultural participation, consumption and production that challenges the underlying philosophy of much arts and cultural policy.

A consequence of these developments is that management of the MPA funding protocols now forms an increased proportion of the activities of the Australia Council to the ultimate cost of other artforms and support functions. It has, as a result, become a more insular organisation: inward looking and resistant to external scrutiny or engagement. Moreover, the Australia Council resists innovation and is perceived to be out of touch with developments in newer and competing artforms (Gallasch 2005; Glow and Johanson 2006; Marr 2005). Perhaps the siege mentality exhibited by the Australia Council arises from it arm's length approach. More likely, it arises from the fact that the Council is in direct

competition with DCITA for the role of leading cultural agency for, indeed, many of its roles and functions could easily be absorbed by the department. In short, the Australia Council may be — as an agency structure — out of synch with arts and cultural policy today and the needs of cultural development in the future (cf. Craik 2006).

A major restructure of the Australia Council in 2005 was designed to address some of its perceived failings (Australia Council 2005a, b). At the heart of the restructure was the decision to abolish two of its artform boards: Community Cultural Development and New Media Arts. Yet, this was an odd decision given that these two boards were:

> The newest and least conservative. Both these boards evolved to get around the failures of the old structure, which had become too anachronistic. (Marcus Westbury, artistic director of Melbourne's Next Wave Festival, quoted by Dimasi and Paech 2004)

Former Deputy Chair of the Australia Council, Lex Marinos, observed: 'They are effectively taking away the opportunity for local communities to partake in their cultural expression.' He also called the move 'retrogressive', and added, 'I'd like to think if a sensible debate can be had, there is a possibility to reverse the decision that is disadvantaging a lot of Australia' (Dimasi & Paech 2004).

The abolition of two innovative artform boards certainly seemed to contradict the stated intention of the restructure, namely to position:

> … the Council as an 'arts catalyst', an agent of support and change for the arts in Australia, and a more flexible, well-informed and responsive organisation … designed to engage more Australians in the arts, deliver the arts to more Australians, and help shape a more vital and sustainable arts sector. (Australia Council 2005b)

Despite the optimism of then CEO, Jennifer Bott, and then Chairman, David Gonski, there is little evidence that the restructure has achieved its aim of:

> Moving away from a rigid model of grants and services towards one with far greater flexibility and more about innovative ideas and partnerships. (Gonski quoted in Australia Council 2005a)

Rather, it might be argued that the 'new look' Australia Council is further alienated from its clients and the broader arts and cultural community of interest — not to mention from public opinion and media analysts. The restructure was more about *bureau politics* than policy reform. In short, the Australia Council's fortress mentality and isolation within the cultural sector suggest that it is a victim of the lack of direction in the policy arena. The appointment of Kathy Keele, former CEO of AbaF, as the CEO of the Australia Council, reflected a desire of the government to consolidate the 'neo-patronage' model and 'forge closer

ties with the business community as a way of generating cash support for the low-income sector' (Perkin 2007b: 44. See also Keele, 2005).

Perhaps there is a need to create competition among cultural agencies to offer a range of support strategies for which cultural practitioners and organisations compete. This has occurred with the decision to fund a new building for the National Portrait Gallery in the parliamentary triangle of Canberra. This Gallery now challenges the pre-eminence of the National Gallery of Australia, the National Library of Australia and the National Museum of Australia as having the 'right' to stage definitive exhibitions of visual art that reflects national culture.[3]

From Incremental Creep to Interventionary Strategies

Arts and cultural policy under the Howard Coalition government can thus be characterised as a shift from 'incremental creep' to multi-pronged interventionist program involving four initiatives. The first was the 'review cycle' of sub-sectors in trouble; the second was the 'cosy arts-business love match' between businesses sponsoring or partnering with cultural organisations; the third was the return to 'neo-patronage' in the form of special assistance to selected major national cultural organisations under the Major Performing Arts program; and the fourth was the advocacy of 'eco-culture' or instrumental policy attachments between culture and adjacent sectors. This platform of policies has the potential to radically re-cast the arts and cultural sector and the terms of government engagement with the sector. Yet, so far, this new vision has not been spelled out and *ad hoc* 'back of the envelope' policy-making remains. So, despite all the changes in policy models, strategic planning, accountability and rhetoric, the arts and cultural sector still has no clear policy road to follow.

ENDNOTES

[1] There was a moral panic that 'black' American music would incite the passions of impressionable young (female) Australians particularly where American troops were stationed in Australian cities such as Brisbane.

[2] Pauline Hansen's One Nation party was also perceived as a threat and litmus test of popular opinion in Australia and she, too, proposed radically cutting arts and cultural funding.

[3] An example occurred in 2004 when there were exhibitions of leading Australian women artists held simultaneously but independently by the NGA (Grace Cossington Smith), NPG (Thea Proctor), NLA (Olive Cotton) and NMA (Margaret Preston). Another case of competition leading to dynamism occurred in Brisbane when the Museum of Brisbane was established in 2001. There was heated opposition from the Queensland Museum to the creation of this 'upstart' that quickly gained a reputation for innovative exhibitions, outreach programs and community engagement. This forced the QM to initiate a major overhaul of its program and permanent exhibitions (although this seems to have produced major changes in the building, its new exhibitions and activities are as staid as before).