Australian Arts: Where the Bloody Hell Are You?
Australian Arts in an International Context

Proceedings of a Symposium held at the University of Sydney on 8 December 2006

Edited by John Clark, Peter McCallum and Ian Maxwell
Introduction by Ian Maxwell
## Contents

**Acknowledgments** ........................................................................................................... v

Introductory Essay: Advocating Australian Arts.........................1
   *Ian Maxwell*

**Session 1: Australia’s International Profile** .................................................. 23

Introduction.......................................................................................... 24
   *Ian Maxwell*

Panel discussion ................................................................. 25
   *Ian Maxwell, Daryl Buckley, Marguerite Pepper, Bernice Murphy*

**Sessions 2 and 3: International Opportunities and Success Stories** ........................................... 51

Introduction: Success in Operation, but Whither Policy?............ 52
   *John Clark*

Asialink and Overseas Cultural Policy....................................... 56
   *Alison Carroll*

Musica Viva and the International Scene.............................. 63
   *Mary Jo Capps*

Overseas Activities of Australian Dance................................. 71
   *Jennifer McLachlan*

foldingsuccess....................................................................................... 74
   *Tess de Quincey*

The Biennale of Sydney 1973-2006........................................ 87
   *Paula Latos-Valier*

Supporting International Activity:
The Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council................. 98
   *Anna Waldmann*

Feature: Australia at the Venice Biennale ......................... 105
Writing to the World: Successful International Exchange Collaborations

Michael Campbell

Session 4: Does Australia Need an Advocacy Council?

Introduction: Enhancing Support for Australia’s International Arts Profile

Peter McCallum

The Goethe-Institut – a Model for Australia?

Klaus Krischok

Artbank

Jackie Dunn

International Advocacy for Australian Arts and Culture

Rachel Healy

The Australia Council and International Advocacy

Jennifer Bott

Afterword

Peter McCallum

Notes on Contributors
Acknowledgments

The editors would like to thank the following people involved in the symposium and the preparation of this publication:

The steering committee for the symposium – Eril Baily, Michael Halliwell and Brad Buckley (who also chaired session 2);

Phillip Jones, Director of the Research Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences (RIHSS);

All the presenters on the day, and the contributors to this volume for responding so readily to some tight deadlines;

From RIHSS – Yasmin Tambiah, Dina Mura and Rowanne Couch;

Madeleine McCallum for the rapid turnaround on the transcription work;

Nicholas Haskins, from RIHSS for his sustained work over many months; and finally,

Marilyn Harris for driving the project from its inception, and for her tireless, guiding and steady hand on the tiller throughout the process.
Advocating Australian Arts
Ian Maxwell

In its submission to the Senate Inquiry into the nature and conduct of Australia’s public diplomacy, Asialink, an organisation committed to promoting Australia-Asian engagement, reports that

Australia spends just 17 cents per capita on cultural diplomacy, compared to Germany which spends approximately $3, and the UK, which spends an impressive $19 per capita.¹

Throughout Asia, the submission continues, governments are increasingly ‘recognising the importance of international public diplomacy – and investing accordingly’, a situation that is leading to the ‘disturbing trend’ of the ‘increasing under-representation of Australia in significant regional events’.² The report cites figures from three biennales in 2006 – Singapore, Shanghai and Taipei; only one Australian artist contributed to each of the first two (out of a total of 94 and 93 artists respectively) and none to Taipei (out of 39).

Asialink arrived at its figure of 17 cents per capita (presumably per annum) by aggregating funding through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the Australia Council, and a number of unnamed ‘bilateral agencies’, the comparison being made with Germany’s Goethe-Institut and the British Council, respectively.³ The comparison is not quite fair; the Australia Council’s remit is oriented in the main towards domestic practice, whereas the Goethe-Institut, to some extent the British Council, and others such as the Alliance Française and Spain’s Cervantes Institute are primarily focused upon the promotion of national cultures abroad. However the Australia Council does recognise and struggles to support internationalisation within severe budgetary constraints, as I will

² ibid.
³ I note, too, that given the Australia Council, as I show below, claims to have spent some $7.4 million on international activities in 2005-2006, Asialink’s figure of 17c per capita does appear to be something of an underestimate.
show below. And while the Federal Ministry for the Arts and Sport and DFAT each maintain a handful of programs oriented towards internationalising Australian arts, there is no way in which we might speak of an adequate coordination of, let alone a concerted address to, the international advocacy of Australian arts. When Artslink further reports that the Chinese government has to date funded over 120 Confucius Institutes in almost 50 countries – the intention is to establish 1000 such institutes by 2020 – we might be forgiven for asking the question of just how adequately Australian artists are served by comparison.

The Senate Inquiry has focused some attention on these questions, within the rubric of ‘public diplomacy’. The terms of reference for the Inquiry direct it towards, inter alia,

(a) the extent and effectiveness of current public diplomacy programs and activities in achieving the objectives of the Australian Government;

and

(d) the need, and opportunities for expanding levels of funding for Australia’s public diplomacy programs, including opportunities for funding within the private sector.¹

There is the real chance that the Inquiry will reach conclusions that may look like providing opportunities for artists in the name of ‘cultural diplomacy’: ‘expanding levels of funding’, even when tied to ‘including opportunities for funding within the private sector’, is the form of words likely to attract attention in the arts sector. Some caution, however, is advised.

To assist prospective submissions, the Inquiry offered three definitions. Public diplomacy seeks to ‘promote the national interest and national security … through understanding, informing and influencing foreign publics and broadening dialogues …’ (United States Information Agency); it involves ‘government sponsored programs intended to inform

or influence public opinion in other countries’ (the U.S. Department of State); and may include:

[w]ork aiming to inform and engage individuals and organisations overseas in order to improve understanding of and influence for [Australia] in a manner consistent with government medium and long term goals [and] government sponsored programs intended to inform or influence public opinion in other countries (from Lord Carter of Coles’ Public Diplomacy Review, UK, 2005).5

Naren Chitty’s submission to the Inquiry concedes that much of the talk about public diplomacy looks like ‘winning hearts and minds’: ‘all this’ he concedes, ‘looks like public relations.’6 Quoting a paper published by the Missouri-based Center for Media and Democracy, Chitty, professor of International Communications at Macquarie University, suggests that ‘certainly there is a view that … “[P]ublic diplomacy is a euphemism for public relations by governments.”7 Rather than offer an alternative to such a view, Chitty’s paper instead explores the emergence of the concept of ‘soft power’ within the discourse of international relations. He describes the role of the ‘third sector’ – including philanthropic and not-for-profit organisations and ‘civil society’ – to provide ‘noopolitik’ alternatives to the realpolitik focus of the first sector (government, media, academia) and second sector (the corporate world).8 The neologism ‘noopolitik’ derives from what Chitty calls the ‘noosphere’, defined as the ‘global web of thought’ emerging under the conditions of the digital age.9

8 Chitty, pp. 10-11.
Another submission, from management trainers and consultants Media Gurus (“Communications for the 21st Century”)\(^{10}\) argues that through the Arts and cultural relations field … Australia has definitely enhanced its position and undertaken vigorous activity in promoting itself overseas. The same applies with positioning at the various international Trade Fairs and expos.\(^{11}\)

Media Gurus recommends ‘targeting’ countries with ‘specific messages’, so that those engaging in public diplomacy have a clear idea of the outcomes needed and hence a benchmark too of evaluating whether or not that diplomacy is working.\(^{12}\)

It is a slippery slope: from what Asialink sees as the ‘impressive’ outlay of some governments on a rather neutral sounding ‘cultural advocacy’, through to benchmarked outcomes, targeting specific countries with a view to influencing public opinion in support of the medium- and long-term goals of government. Is this what we want? What price the thousand-fold increase in spending that would put Australian cultural diplomacy on a par with that of Germany?

***

‘Australian Arts: Where the Bloody Hell Are You?’ was a one-day symposium addressing a key issue: should Australia have an advocacy body of some sort, responsible for the dissemination of Australian culture internationally? The obvious models for such a body are the great European institutions: the *Alliance Française*, the *Goethe-Institut*, The British Council, and more recently the Cervantes Institute and the looming leviathan, the Confucius Council. The urgency of the question, however, is driven less by the cultural-imperialist agendas undergirding the great European colonial powers (including the nationalist agendas of preserving languages in the face of the lingo-imperialisms of English and Chinese) than by the post-modern anxieties of losing market share in a globalising cultural economy.

---

\(^{10}\) See http://www.mediagurus.com.au/

\(^{11}\) Prakash Mirchandani, Media Gurus, untitled submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Nature and Conduct of Australia’s Public Diplomacy, p. 2.


\(^{12}\) Mirchandani, p. 3.
The title of the symposium, of course, riffs on this anxiety, citing a controversial advertising campaign mounted in mid 2006 by Tourism Australia – a campaign that resorted to bikini-clad models and evocations of matey bonhomie and natural theme-park to pitch the country to potential travellers.\(^\text{13}\) It was a campaign in which, amidst the images of camels, kangaroos, coral reefs, deserts, crashing surf, golf clubs golden-skinned anglo children and bikini babes, culture (let alone cultural diversity) was absent beyond a fleeting image of Indigenous dancers in front of – inevitably – Uluru, and the silhouette of the Sydney Opera House against the backdrop of New Year’s Eve fireworks cascading from the deck of the Harbour Bridge. Our title was less a call to visibility of what is a vibrant cultural sector, than a reference to the twin problems of, first, that sector’s relationship to dominant narratives about Australia, and second, the perceived vulgarisation (both literal and figurative) of cultural practices when confronted with the apparent implacability of ‘market forces’.

In planning the symposium, we came up with a number of subsidiary questions around which to frame our thinking and subsequent discussions. These included:

- How do global cultural flows impact on Australian arts practice?

\(^\text{13}\) The campaign – which cost a spectacular $180 million to produce and to roll out – was initially banned in the U.K, where its use of the vernacular fell foul of decency guidelines. The *Adelaide Advertiser* reported in December 2006 that, notwithstanding the bonus publicity the campaign garnered in the U.K. as a result of the controversy, 2.3% fewer tourists from the U.K. visited Australia in 2006 than in 2005. The numbers from two other markets targeted by the campaign, Germany and Japan, were even worse, down 4.7 and 5.7% respectively. Scott Murdoch “What did we get for $180 million?”, *Adelaide Advertiser*, December 6, 2006: http://www.news.com.au/adelaidenow/story/0,22606,20878967-5006301,00.html.

As we go to press, Tourism Australia has released figures indicating that while the number of visitors to Australia remained static in the year since the campaign was launched, those who did come spent more money: an extra $1.8 billion. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported on March 8th that this “windfall was due to increased spending and longer stays rather than a massive boost in tourist numbers, which the Australian Tourism Council says is a cause for concern … ATC Managing Director Matthew Hingerty said Australia had not increased its market share at a time when international travel globally was growing at its fastest rate ever.” http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2007/03/08/1173166848974.html.
• What funding is available for international arts practice and research?
• What are the opportunities for international cultural exchanges and experience, and what practical strategies can be employed to make them work?
• Does Australia’s current international profile best serve the interests of Australian arts and culture?

I will return to some of the thinking informing these questions below. First, some preliminary comments.

The event was planned to canvas a range of perspectives, from those of individual artists, companies and organisations producing or showing cultural work outside Australia, to representatives of government and funding bodies both from this country and beyond, to leading figures from the corporate world – ideally those of a philanthropic bent. Our intention was to learn from those who have successfully developed and sustained international profiles, across a range of arts disciplines, not so much so as to evenly represent all artforms, but to encourage a dialogue between forms. As speakers were confirmed and the program took shape, we decided upon four separate panel sessions. The first, chaired by myself, was to lay out key issues, and took the form of a mediated discussion with Daryl Buckley, artistic director of ELISION, Marguerite Pepper, an independent producer, and Bernice Murphy, Director of Museums Australia.

This was followed by a session titled ‘International Opportunities for Australian Artists’ in which representatives from a range of funding and production organisations laid out a partial picture of the kinds of resources already available for supporting arts and cultural practices engaged with international production, including marketing, exchanges and collaborations. The speakers in this session were: Mandy Thomas, former Executive Director, Humanities and Creative Arts, for the Australian Research Council (ARC); Alison Carroll, Director of Asialink Arts Programs; Anna Waldmann, Director of Visual Arts and Jennifer McLachlan, Director of Dance, from the Australia Council.

After lunch, we heard a selection of what we called ‘success stories’ – accounts from a practitioners and organisational representatives including Mary Jo Capps, General Manager of Musica Viva; dancer-choreographer
Tess de Quincey; Paula Latos-Valier, retiring Managing Director of the Sydney Biennale; and dancer/choreographer/librettist/director-turned Brisbane Writers’ Festival director Michael Campbell, each of whom has achieved and sustained international practice.

Finally, we assembled a panel discussion, with representatives from the Goethe-Institut, Artbank, the Sydney Opera House and the Australia Council, to reflect upon the potential pitfalls and political risks associated with thinking through a national arts and cultural advocacy body. The contributors were Jennifer Bott, Chief Executive of the UNSW Foundation and former CEO of the Australia Council; Jackie Dunn, Senior Curator for Artbank; Klaus Krischok, Director of the Goethe-Institut, Sydney; and Rachel Healy, Director, Performing Arts at the Sydney Opera House.

As the program came together, and as the day itself unfolded, we found ourselves reframing the key question, not least in response to news emerging from Canberra of, first, the Senate Inquiry into Australia’s Public Diplomacy, to be convened in January 2007, and rumours of a burgeoning interest within the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts in funding Australian cultural outreach.14 Perhaps the question was not so much whether Australia should have an international cultural advocacy agency, but a more specific inquiry into the form that such an agency, agencies, or support should take. This assumes that there is, axiomatically, merit in some form of coordination at the level of federal government of the promotion of Australian cultural production in the context of a rapidly globalising cultural economy. In turn, this leads us to some reflection upon the implications for practitioners that might flow on from such support.

***

The nature of the global cultural economy bears some preliminary interrogation. On the one hand, it is relatively easy to understand that cultural economy as, simply, an economy: that is to say, as a field of relations understood as operating with the logics of any marketplace. The task of an advocacy body, on such an understanding, would be to place the Australian cultural product favourably within that market, so as to

---

14 The Inquiry will make its recommendations in April 2007.
increase market share and, as a result, to increase the profitability of that product, presumably to the benefit of the producers. This logic is familiar to the point of being a contemporary orthodoxy: art and culture take their value from the market, rather than from either any intrinsic worth, nor from any set of autonomous, intra-aesthetic criteria; culture consists of units to shift at as high a price, and with as low overheads as possible, as part of the only game in town: GDP. Even purportedly arts-friendly economic discourse – I am thinking here of Richard Florida’s discourse of the ‘creative class’ – understand cultural and artistic work, in the final analysis, in terms of a purportedly pure economic value.

However, more nuanced understandings of globalisation take issue with the tendency of economic-driven accounts to reduce all aspects of cultural practice to a single logic. Such alternative accounts take note of, and attempt to preserve the significance of, inconsistencies, contradictions, disjunctures and differences in the unfolding of contemporary global phenomena. They will observe the taking up of cultural materials in a diverse range of localities, and the processes of indigenisation or what some commentators refer to as ‘glocalisation’ which seem to militate against a straightforward global trajectory towards homogeneity – whether that homogeneity is that purported under the rubric of ‘the market’, or that of a perceived cultural imperialism on the part of dominant powers.

One such model is that proposed by Arjun Appadurai in 1990. Appadurai argued that any understanding of the complexity of the evolving world cultural economy needs to take account of the relationship between five relatively autonomous dimensions of global cultural flows: ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes and ideoscapes. Each, he suggests, are ‘deeply perspectival constructs’¹⁵ rather than objectively given relationships. Individuals, communities, societies, corporations, nation-states, navigate the fluid landscape constituted by the fluid irregularities of the various -scapes as their effects interact. Thus, ethnoscape refers to the increasingly mobile, shifting populations of travellers, expats, refugees, migrants, guestworkers and so on. Technoscape is the global configuration of technologies, high and low, distributed according to complex relationships between ‘money flows,

---

political possibilities and the availability of both un-and highly skilled labour’. The model acknowledges economic effects under the rubric of financescape, recognising that ‘the global economy can still be described in terms of traditional indicators’, but

the critical point is that the global relationship between ethnoscapes, technoscapes and financescapes is deeply disjunctive and profoundly unpredictable, since each of these landscapes is subject to its own constraints and incentives (some political, some informational and some techno-environmental), at the same time as each acts as a constrain and a parameter for movements in the others.\(^\text{16}\)

Such a model can help us not only to recognise and understand local resistances to purported market imperatives, but challenge us to develop policy that resists the reduction of complexity to a straightforward economics. For example, dimensions of ethnicity and religious beliefs, or kinship structures in contemporary Iraq are irreducible, even impervious to, the logics of late capitalism, as Bush is fast discovering. And while it may well be a fantasy of neo-conservatives and economic fundamentalists (of both right and left political stripes) that things like ‘culture’, ‘kinship’, ‘religions’ are mere epiphenomena, ones which sufficient cash incentives will wash away, the fact is that they are not: people are prepared, consistently, it would appear, to forgo their best economic interests in favour of such imponderables.

The two other -scapes about which Appadurai writes are the mediascape and ideoscape, each concatenations of images: the first constituted by both the ‘distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information … and to the images of the world created by these media’; the second to the ‘image-centred narrative-based accounts of strips of reality … out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives’.\(^\text{17}\)

The significance of these last two -scapes is their capacity to ‘refract’ the effects of the others, and in so doing, to produce ‘social imaginaries’ (a notion Appadurai has taken, in part from Lacanian psychoanalysis) – an extension of Benedict Anderson’s seminal characterisation of nation-states

\(^{16}\) Appadurai, p. 8.
\(^{17}\) Appadurai, p. 9.
as ‘imagined communities’.18 These social imaginaries are the aspirations, hopes and dreams of all people, framed upon the interplay of ethnoscape, financescape and technoscape through the lenses of mediascape and ideoscape. On this account, nations, the states that take the name of nations, the cultures that those nation-states purport to embody, are not just discursive categories, but are sustained in modes of belief, aspiration and practice. Any understanding of the global must take these aspirations – this understanding of human beings as relating to their world through their capacity to imagine their futures – into account. The contention is that these imaginings are not reducible to the utilitarian assumptions that undergird most economic models.

Further, for Appadurai, the asymmetrical distribution of technologies, the mysterious, often occluded and unpredictable flow of capital and its effects, the enhanced mobility of people themselves across the globe, refracted by a mediascape, defies any single, reductive logic. Rather, the world cultural system, as it emerges under the conditions of instantaneous communication and the ever-accelerating movement of peoples, cultural materials, consumer goods, capital and so forth, is becoming more and more complex, and in a sense, developing in ways that are counterintuitive to traditional understandings. Appadurai expects contradiction, disjunction and difference.

Now, lest this seem arid intellectualising, it is worth reflecting upon how such a model might inflect our understandings both of just how it is that artists contribute to our worlds as we imagine them, and how those contributions may or may not act in synchronisation with the effects of the various –scapes as they interact with each other. The extent to which artists’ work can be reduced to economic value, notwithstanding the very real economics of both mass production that drives popular art and the logics of scarcity that structure the top end of the arts market, is itself debatable. This is not to argue that artists are all autonomous, that somehow they work in splendid isolation from economic realities; nor that they produce art in glorious aesthetic abstraction. Rather, it is to argue that the contribution of artists is not merely to represent existing states of being – to hold up a mirror to nature, as it were – but to conceive of as-yet-unimagined ways of being.

It is the case, of course, that many artists do not pursue economic gain beyond that sufficient to help them to maintain their practice. The capital for which artists compete is, perhaps, more frequently, reputational. It is critical, again, to understand that the economy of that competition between artists, although it is, certainly, an economy, is not reducible to the economy (nor, necessarily, does it invert that economy). On the other hand, those very artists can strategise as well as any venture capitalist when it comes to addressing grant criteria, or reframing their project to satisfy the altruism of a philanthropic trust. In other words, artists are very good at playing the game in front of them when it suits them. I will return to this below.

It is also from Appadurai’s model that we took, for the symposium, the rubric of ‘global cultural flows’ with which to speak about the nature of cultural exchange in the age of mass communication, rather than simply using the shorthand term ‘globalisation’. The most compelling advantage of doing so is to frame the complex state of the world not merely as a monolithic process unfolding as an implacable force of nature, as it were, but as a decentred, dynamic ebb and flow (and sometimes drought or spate) of intentions, opportunities, effects and repercussions.

Such a model radically destabilises our confidence in a worldview built upon the nation-state as fundamental organising principle. To an extent, market economics, no less than the Marxian alternatives of last century, are predicated upon the assumption of the historical inevitability of the transcendence of nationalism. On the other hand, the nation has proved remarkably resilient as an organising, and indeed, ontological category for thinking the world. This can be seen, to a great degree, as the effect of the conflation of the concepts of nation and state, nation-state and culture, national-state culture with ethnicity, ethnic-state nationalism with culture and religion and so on. The ravelling up of this cluster of concepts produces ahistorical terms of affiliation with which individuals and collectives identify and around which they organise their communal beings. When we attempt to think about the relationship between terms such as society, art and the arts, we end up in very difficult territory. This difficulty is manifest in the apparent self-evidence of the referent in our title: ‘Australian arts’. Just what this means, and what our investment in it might be, bears some reflection – as does the invocation of an ‘us’ for whom it is a concern.
Indeed, as one of the co-editors of this collection has suggested, under the present conditions of the world system, all nations are not equal: we have moved far beyond the ideal of a world community constituted of a series of more or less equivalent sovereign states, different from each other in degree, rather than in fundamentals. Rather, there is a hierarchy of ‘ecumenes … cultural continua … nation-states penetrated by global cultural phenomena … non-state cultural enclaves … fragmented quasi-states … and various further categories of non-state units which have an international activity’.19 This complexity, masked by the simplistic catch-all globalisation, constitutes no small part of the appeal of ‘soft power’ and cultural diplomacy.

The anxiety about the fading pre-eminence of the nation-state in a rapidly complexifying new world system is increasingly influencing strategic thinking at government level, as the convening of the Senate Inquiry into public diplomacy suggests. At the same time, the use of cultural production as a public relations resource for the nation-state is not new. It is a commonplace to understand organisations such as the British Council, the Alliance Française, the Goethe-Institut and even the Australia Council as artefacts of political – that is, state – expediency, rather than as being driven by a disinterested commitment to abstract notions of art. Culture, as construed in such terms, is always national culture, even if that national culture is somehow articulated by or instantiated in pure aesthetic terms. The Goethe-Institut and the Alliance Française have their origins in imperial competition, simultaneously promoting colonial interests and playing to a domestic constituency, reassuring it of its own (national) moral superiority; the British Council in a wartime propaganda unit, and the Australia Council in the explicit nation-building agenda of Menzies and his advisor, Nugget Coombs. It would be naïve to not acknowledge that these organisations are themselves bound up in the logics not only of nationalism per se, but those logics that attempt to identify nation with state with culture. When we ask whether ‘we’ should have an arts advocacy body to act in the name of ‘Australia’, we are buying into some complicated ideas about nationalism, statehood and culture. It is only

proper to take pause, and to consider the alternative: that nation, state and culture do not map onto each other as easily as might be assumed.

And while the Australia Council has been set up at arm’s length from government, and the assessment of proposed arts projects is in the hands of peers, we are all too aware of the willingness of the state, and in particular of some governments to exercise what amounts to reserve powers in the process of allocating funds – a willingness exercised, as we have seen in recent years, in the field of research funding in the higher education sector – a field in which state priorities, claimed for the ‘nation’, set the agenda for research. One concern that arose throughout our symposium was that of the status of the artist, and of art practice, when it is drawn into the service of the state, under the rubric of, for example, public diplomacy. Put simply, were a body set up to advocate for Australian artists internationally, what strings might be attached?

Again, this is not abstract theorising. In practical terms, and as the various speakers at the symposium attested, artists do not necessarily identify themselves in nationalist terms. The social imaginary in which they understand themselves as working – and this is particularly the case for those whose work does move them and their practice across international borders – is not composed of competing nation-states so much as of a community of peers, united by shared aspirations (and, indeed, by competition for resources, regard, status). Artists work with, and often for, their peers around the world, on the basis less of an exchange of national culture than on that of the forms within which they work. For such artists, the descriptor ‘Australian’ is just that: a description of their origins, rather than a substantial statement of their identities. In the extreme case, an artist might be willing to fly a flag of convenience – just as, for example, academics are becoming increasingly adroit at framing their own research projects in terms of national priority criteria.

A national body advocating and providing incentive for, and potentially funding Australian-based artists to participate in global arts and cultural exchanges would need to be established in cogniscience of these understandings. Artists do not necessarily identify with the nationalist (let alone political) aspirations of governments, but will gladly take advantage of any opportunities presented to them. This does not make them mercenary, nor does it suggest that artists are intrinsically either oppositional/resistant, nor entirely amoral. Rather, artists are frequently
playing a different game: a game that transcends the limits of nation and state. An advocacy body would need to be clear that it had that game, and those aspirations, firmly in its sights, and be prepared to support artists on those terms, rather than in terms of a nationalist agenda. In so doing, it would need to recognise the essential arbitrariness of the term ‘Australian’: its role would be to support artists who (simply) happen to be in and from Australia, rather than supporting the exporting of an Australian product, or of performances, projects, artworks and so on that purport to represent ‘Australian-ness’.

***

So, what of that 17 cents per capita spent on ‘cultural diplomacy’? Just how much is invested in advocacy for and promotion of Australian arts internationally? In its 2003 Foreign Affairs and Trade Policy White Paper, ‘Advancing the National Interest: Australia’s Foreign Affairs and Trade Policy White Paper’, DFAT reported that the nation spent $138 million in 2001–02 ‘promoting awareness of Australia Overseas’, broken down as follows:20

Table 1 Expenditure on Promoting Awareness of Australia Overseas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austrade</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Education International</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Film Commission and other</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio Australia</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invest Australia</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC Asia Pacific TV Service</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia Council</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Tourist Commission</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilateral Councils</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFAT/Australia International Cultural Council</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The accompanying text illustrates the familiar slide from disinterested aspiration to the intrinsic value of art to the calculation of the value of cultural output to the bottom line:

The Government strongly believes in the value of promoting Australia’s artistic and cultural achievements to international audiences to showcase the talents of our vibrant and diverse society. Aside from its intrinsic value, the promotion of Australian art and culture is a practical policy to advance our national interests by fostering respect for Australia and its accomplishments. The target audiences are those who might affect our interests, such as key government and business.21

As always, the numbers are a bit rubbery. The Australia Council’s own report for 2001-2 two notes $5.67 million spent on international projects, of a total spending of $117.64 million a bit less than the 5% of $138 million reported by DFAT ($6.9 million).22 The proportion of Australia Council funding directed towards ‘internationalisation’ has remained fairly consistent from 2001-2002, as the following table illustrates:23

Table 2
Australia Council spending on Internationalisation Activities, 2001-2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total spending ($m)</th>
<th>Spending on ‘international activities’ ($m)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001-2002</td>
<td>117.6</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-2003</td>
<td>126.6</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>132.3</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2005</td>
<td>125.3</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>142.8</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

23 This table has been compiled using the Australia Council Annual Reports for 2001-2002 (pp. 122 and 125); 2002-2003 (p. 51); 2003-2004 (p. 59); 2004-2005 (p. 69); and 2005-2006 (p. 67). All figures are indicative; since 2002-2003, they have been presented in pie-charts with, most recently, the following caveat ‘These figures contain some estimates … Comparisons with previous years should be made with caution’. Nonetheless, reviewing the more detailed ‘Analyses of Grants Paid by Location of Activity’ in each report (see, for example, in 2005-6 pp. 83-84) confirms the validity of the figures sufficiently for the purposes of this argument: that around a twentieth of the Australia Council’s spending is directed toward international work. The Annual Reports are available as pdfs at http://www.ozco.gov.au/.
In its submission to the Senate Inquiry, the Australia Council reports that in 2005-6 it supported 423 grants for projects in 45 countries (in 2003-4, by comparison, the figures were 319 grants for 52 countries).24

The achievements of the Council are remarkable, and worth reporting. In 2005-2006, the Dance, Theatre and Literature Boards spent $800,000 each, or 11% of their budgets, on international activities;25 while Music spent $1.1 million, or 15%,26 and the Visual Arts and Craft Board $2.1 million (28%). These figures include over $140,000 through the Dance International Market Development Strategy.27 The Literature Board spent nearly $200,000 on publishing Australian authors’ work in collaboration with foreign presses, 28 and the Major Performing Arts Board spent $151,000 supporting international touring.29 The ‘International Pathways’ project of the Music Board spent $356,216;30 the Theatre Board $291,182 through the ‘Playing the World’ initiative;31 and the Visual Arts/Craft Board over $1 million on overseas presentation and on skills and art development.32 Over three and a half million dollars was committed to International Development, including $759,598 towards the Australian presence at the Venice Biennale 2005,33 and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board invested heavily in the Australian contribution to the musée du quai Branly in Paris ($836,000) as well as over $350,000 on other international presentations, and initiatives.34

26 Ibid
The list starts to look impressive until you step back and add it all up: bear in mind the total figure: $7.4 million. This is hardly surprising; the Australia Council is mandated to facilitate access to the arts for all Australians, and given its budgetary stasis, is hard-pressed to cater for domestic and regional needs as it is. At the same time, demand for support for international work is increasing dramatically: to take one example: the total budget for the Music Board’s ‘International Pathways’ in 2005 was ‘around $400,000’; in the first round of that year, 9 proposals out of 19 submissions were supported, with $104,00 granted of a requested $259,130. The second round in 2006 received 41 proposals, requesting $550,291; seven were successful, receiving a total of $80,730. The trend is familiar: a dramatic increase in the number of applicants competing for a decreasing amount of money. 35 Theatre workers stumbling across the ‘Playing the World’ webpage – the ‘flexible funding process to assist theatre artists and companies with exportable work to develop sustainable international markets and audiences’ – find this, in bold:

PLEASE NOTE: Due to limited availability of funds, no further Playing the World applications will be accepted until June 2007.
(20 Feb 2007)

Again, it is important to note that this is not, of course, to criticise the Australia Council, which achieves extraordinary things in difficult circumstances. The reality is that, politically, there appears to be little traction in the arts. At the federal level, the Minister for the Arts, the Queensland Senator George Brandis, has only enjoyed the portfolio since late January 2007, and at the time of writing has not yet had the opportunity to construct a website, let alone release any policy on the arts. A search of his predecessor’s archived website, however, reveals little address to the advocacy of Australian arts internationally, beyond celebratory press releases about the involvement of a handful of Indigenous Australian artists in musée de quai Branly in Paris.

On the other side of the House, Peter Garrett finds himself juggling shadow responsibility for the Arts and for the Environment, and it is not

hard to imagine where, given the tenor of the times, his energies are focused. Even so, Garrett was quick out of the box to launch a preemptive strike on the new Minister, releasing a media statement on January 23 noting the Howard government’s failure, over the ‘past five years … to … develop a sustainable arts policy.’ In the absence of such a policy, consulting the Liberal Party’s platform document, ‘The Liberal Way’ we find blandishment: ‘maintaining our quality of life is contingent upon … [inter alia] fostering a high quality of achievement in the arts . . .’ and so on. By contrast, the ALP released an Arts Policy Discussion Paper in mid 2006 specifically addresses internationalisation:

Labor believes the scope for Australian artists and their work to find and establish outlets overseas is huge and remains significantly untapped. New digital art, Indigenous art, novels and non-fiction, and some medium sized specialist touring companies have all made significant inroads.

Labor will ensure that there is adequate recruitment, training and appointment of cultural officers with broad arts experience to Australian embassies abroad, and that cooperation and communication between DCITA and DFAT in relation to arts, including cultural exhibitions, export markets and skill sharing, is enhanced.

Labor will consider establishing an international arts information database detailing Australian artists’ work and international programs, trade fairs and exhibitions to enable better information flows concerning Australian artists and international activities.

The proof of these particular puddings will be in the eating, should Garrett get his turn on the Treasury benches.

Themes from the symposium

Perhaps the most significant achievement of the symposium was to provide an opportunity to hear from both artists and from those intimately involved in the day-to-day work of making arts. A handful of

38 It is probably worth noting, in passing, that commentator and blogger Andrew Bolt made the effort to critique the symposium for failing to include artists, rather unfairly accusing us, the organisers, of staging yet another gab-fest for administrators, academics and the like. “Reread the list of speakers scheduled to discuss Australian art” he suggests; “[n]ow identify the person who actually earns an income from making art, as
key themes emerged, both from the invited speakers and the floor. Two can be framed as tentative recommendations; three others as broader critical reflections upon the general question of what it takes for Australian artists to engage internationally.

The tentative recommendations were that, first, internationalisation needs to be understood not simply in terms of moving artists and art works offshore, but in terms of exchange: the flow should be inwards as well as outwards. Time and again, speakers stressed that the presence in Australia of artists, festival directors, and, yes, bureaucrats from the great arts centres of Europe, America and Asia are absolutely critical to establishing the kinds of personal relationships and familiarity with work upon which long-term and sustainable international collaborations are possible. It must be acknowledged that the Australia Council and others are well aware of this, and fund as generously as is possible, a genuine exchange. The concern is that in the enthusiasm for an export model, based upon an orientation outwards, we lose sight of the inwards.

Second, and perhaps as a dimension of the first, there was strong support for the propositions that any advocacy body should prioritise its domestic constituency: that it should ‘report back’ to domestic artists not merely to trumpet high-profile successes, but to build competencies and to share knowledge. This is an important distinction: too often, it was suggested, we only hear only of the big splashes; valuable failures are quickly forgotten and rarely analysed. Further, it is important that successes are understood in more sophisticated terms than the familiar ‘coming of age’ jingoism that seems to be the default media story of most Australian cultural enterprise. That is: in terms of thought, strategy, long-term commitments and, indeed, trial and error, rather than the narrative of a putatively inherent Australian quirkiness, down-to-earthiness or youthful opposed to talking about it, hanging it, paying for it, arranging it, scheduling it or advising on it”. Aside from the fact that such a claim draws a false distinction – many artists find themselves, of necessity, in administrative and bureaucratic roles as they go about the business of making their own work possible; many administrators, bureaucrats and arts entrepreneurs have personal biographies as practitioners – Bolt just got it wrong. Panelists Daryl Buckley, Tess de Quincey, and Michael Campbell, I am sure, would be more than happy to present their credentials as artists to Mr Bolt were he interested. See ‘Actually, it’s a hell of a show without Punch’ Herald-Sun Andrew Bolt Blog: http://blogs.news.com.au/heraldsun/andrewbolt/index.php/heraldsun/2006/11/P15/, November 28, 2006.
spirit overcoming the smug self-sufficiency of old Europe, the brazen
cultural power politics of the North Americans, or the inscrutability of the
mysterious east. There are no useful lessons in such narratives; our
domestic arts workers deserve better.

I have already touched, throughout this essay, upon the perhaps more
‘conceptual’ themes that emerged throughout the day. These themes
constellate around what I suspect is a generalised anxiety about – or
perhaps lack of understanding of – the nature of artistic practice, both in
terms of just what is involved in the day-to-day (and year-to-year)
discipline of being an artist, and how the arts articulate to societal systems
increasingly unsympathetic to arts practices. Perhaps the most striking
issue to evolve from the accounts offered from the panellists was about
time: in particular, the specific temporalities of artists, and the disjunction
between these temporalities and those of bureaucracies and those of
governments. Artists express frustration at the mismatch between, on one
hand, the calendrical exigencies of the funding cycle, and on the other, the
slow-burn extended time-frames of practice.

Most state funding organisations work on annual financial year funding
and reporting cycles. The difficulties of this for companies, which have to
work on multi-year business planning cycles, has long been recognised:
triennial and Major Performing Arts funding are responses to the need for
mid- to long-term planning, and the need for strategic thinking. Negotiations with overseas artists, companies, agencies and governments
exacerbate these kinds of problems, requiring both relatively long funding
cycles and the capacity to respond quickly to opportunities as they arise.

Governments, of course, work within election cycles; the dearth of policy
from the federal government will, at least hopefully, be addressed in the
months leading up to the Federal Election later in 2007. The
marginalisation of the arts lobby – arguably the result of the assumption
that the arts vote does not swing – somewhat blunts the effects of the
electoral cycle upon arts funding; nonetheless, there is a certain
disjunction between the political and bureaucratic cycles of which artists
and arts organisations are all too aware.

Most importantly, however, it was stressed throughout the day that artists
work with far longer timeframes, and within constraints that sit uneasily
with the annual cycle of funding, or the vagaries of politics. Careers, and
particularly careers based around collaborations, need to be planned over
years, if not decades. Artistic collaborations may bear fruit only after several years of careful work preparing, developing skills, creative development, rehearsals, false starts, showings, failures, debriefings, revisions and so on. Again, the problems are exacerbated when the practice is trans-national, and for all the accelerations that are the legacies of the digital age, some things cannot be rushed. Any program aimed towards facilitating the internationalisation of Australian arts – an internationalisation predicated upon sustained (and sustainable) artistic exchange, rather than the placement of artistic product in an export market – must be responsive to this fundamental need for time.

Second – and this has been the theme informing much of this essay – our speakers articulated the disjunction between the agendas, responsibilities and allegiances of the various ‘players’: artists, politicians and various state and quasi-autonomous bureaucracies. Where politicians are seen to be responsive to their various constituencies – electoral, lobby group, international – bureaucracies tend to be understood as being bound by political and fiscal pressures, and suspected of being bound to homo-social reproduction: prioritising the status quo, and presumably their own comfortable salaries. Arts workers, on the other hand, tend to understand their responsibilities as being to their work, to their artform, and to their colleagues and peers, whether those peers are in the next suburb or 12,000 kilometres away. Artists are not inherently anti-nationalistic (and of course some artists are nationalistic); however, they are, first and foremost, artists, interested in their artform, and willing, as I suggested above, to take advantage of opportunities as they arise. The risk is, of course, that a model for the advocacy of arts premised upon ideas about cultural or public diplomacy will not only not necessarily serve artists with reference to the demands of their arts, but that it will always be shot through with the disjunction between the state and the artists whose voice the state seeks to enrol to its own aims. This disjunction will ensure an inherent instability that will run the risk of subverting those aims. Potentially, this is lose-lose, neither serving the aspirations of artists, nor those of their political masters.

Third, relationships between artists are, at their most fundamental, local, personal relationships, even when they are enacted electronically, across vast distances. The nation is perhaps the least useful and efficient medium through which these kinds of relationships might be nurtured. Indeed, this is the argument of the City of Melbourne’s submission to the Senate
Inquiry into Public Diplomacy: ‘cities are forming the key elements of the framework of a new changing and more interconnected global geography.’ The submission argues for the directing of federal and state money to the local level, and collaboration between cities. Similarly, the UTS Centre for Local Government observes that ‘local government across the world is playing an increasing role in international relations … [there is a] trend for cities and regions to deal directly with each other rather than rely exclusively on connections via national and/or provincial governments,’ noting a number of bodies doing this kind of thing in Japan, Korea as well as in the UK and Canada.

Over the pages that follow, we have assembled a selection of dialogues, papers and materials presented on the day of the original symposium. The first section is an edited and revised transcript of the first session, chaired by myself, in the course of which several of the key ideas referred to above were broached, discussed and tested against anecdote and personal experience. The next section consists of a sampling from the second and third sessions of the day, covering both the kinds of resources available for international arts practice, and accounts of ‘successful’ international practices. John Clark, who chaired the third session, has edited this section, framing it with a brief introductory essay. Finally, Peter McCallum has brought together documentation of the day’s final session, which sought to weigh up the relative virtues and pitfalls attending to the idea of a central advocacy council.

---

