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editorial — culture, nation, policy

Born of different moments and exhibiting different trajectories of colonial expansion, Canada and Australia nonetheless share in common the struggle to conceive of themselves as 'nations', and to think of themselves as 'having a culture' which delineates and defines that 'nationality'. This struggle for nationality is routinely waged, however, in both societies, by social and ethnic groups which have been from the moment of colonial impact, or have since become, dominant in the settlement of these societies: it is a struggle for 'a nation' and for 'a culture' which is often fought quite independently of the struggles of conquered Aboriginal peoples whose own claim is that *they* are the authentic founding peoples of the two societies.

In this issue of *Australian-Canadian Studies*, therefore, there are at least two points of emphasis *connecting* the Australian and Canadian experience. We are interested in pointing out the ways in which questions of cultural identity, and cultural policy, have been so insistently pursued over the years within the official culture of both societies. Much of this effort and initiative in identifying specifically national cultural forms derives from the importance of distinguishing the culture of these new nations from their European legacy. But of equal importance in recent times has been the concern to resist the intrusion of more recent expressions of imperialism and colonialism, based largely in the United States, via the overwhelming influence of the international mass media, and the threat which they pose to a stable idea of nation and national identity. We take this project of construction of a national identity to be a major theme in the recent preoccupation of the two societies with national celebrations, highlighted for Canada by a series of exhibitionary shows (such as Expo 67), and soon, the new Canadian Museum of Civilization and, of course, in Australia, by the Bicentenary itself. (See the piece by Tony Bennett in this issue.)

But the second most pressing common feature of the two societies is the active presence within them of the Aboriginal peoples themselves. Nowhere is the issue of national identity and culture so 'problematised', perhaps, as in the debates and initiatives taking place within Canada and Australia over cultural policy generally, and, more specifically, in the spheres of museum and heritage policy. There is a pressing sense, in both societies, of a real collision of interests between the need of the settler populations to forge a national identity in a fast-moving, and perhaps post-modern, globalising economy - and the demands of the Aboriginal peoples to take an active part, certainly in the representation of *their* culture in museum and heritage complexes and other contemporary sites of cultural display, but also in the larger processes of *national* policy-formation. Thus urgent contradiction is now emerging clearly both in Australia (in the form of the demonstrations against the Bicentenary) and in Canada (in the form of an active

reaffirmation by Indians, Inuit and Métis of their demands for self-determination). As such, it is manifest not only in respect of land claims (the Lubicon peoples of Alberta have recently declared themselves an independent nation), but also in respect of questions of representation (the demonstrations held against *The Spirit Sings* exhibition, discussed by Ian Taylor in this issue). In this context, our choice of a lead theme for this issue of *Australian-Canadian Studies* was all but pre-determined. In different ways, the four leading articles of this issue - by Ian Taylor, Valda Blundell, Henrietta Fourmile and Adrian Marrie - amply demonstrate the ways in which, in both Australia and Canada, the dark side of the process of constructing a national cultural inventory consists in the cultural dispossession - both legally and representationally - of others.

This journal is dedicated, of course, not only to explorations of commonality of 'experience' in the settler societies of Canada and Australia, but also the analysis of real differences. We are powerfully aware of the absence, in this issue, of any scholarly cultural analysis of the current situation in Quebec and, indeed, in the relation of French Canada as a whole to the larger social formation of 'Canada'. In it vitally important, we believe, to understand that the linguistic and cultural politics of Canada have a markedly different inflection from the policies of multiculturalism discussed in this issue for Australia by John Gatt-Rutter and Colin Mercer. Though there is a multicultural mandate in some federal government policy in Canada (most notably, in the Department of the Secretary of State), it is overwhelmed, in nearly all respects, by the commitment to a bilingual Canada, organised in and through the two official languages of French and English. It is impossible for us to ignore the quite fundamental division of 'Canada' into what Hugh MacLennan, in his classic novel of the 1950s, called *The Two Solitudes*. 'Having a culture', historically, has meant something quite different in Quebec than in the rest of Canada: for Québécois, the threat to nationhood came not so much from Europe or America as from within.

To place an emphasis on this point of difference in the trajectory of nation-formation and national policy is no idle historical reflection. Language issues (and a resentment of Quebec's particular version of bilingualism) are currently boiling up throughout the Canadian political confederation and may yet unpack the Meach Lake agreement struck by Prime Minister Mulroney and the provinces (in order to bring Quebec fully into the Constitution) in 1987. Perhaps even more importantly, these issues may have a telling and unforeseen effect in the response of a country with a relatively weak sense of nationhood to the Free Trade Agreement recently completed with the United States. Certainly, in some spheres of cultural policy and activity (such as film, as discussed in the polemic in this issue by Peter Harcourt), the consequences seem quite baneful. Where in Australia the moot point, with respect to film, is whether the needs of domestic audiences will be compromised if the continued success of the Australian film industry comes to depend on the export of national stereotypes for overseas consumption (the *Crocodile Dundee* factor); in Canada, the issue is whether very much will survive at all of the tradition of socially critical film, initiated both in

French and English Canada by the National Film Board in 1939. Studio D ('the Women's Studio') continues to produce important statements for audiences outside mainstream cinema, but, in the meantime, Denys Arcand's *The Decline of the American Empire* is sold (especially in the United States) as a sex satire.

There are many other points of difference between Australia and Canada, especially in the late 1980s, and especially with regard to the currency of 'nationhood', that require analysis and which are touched upon, but no more, in this issue. We think, in particular, of the labourist and radical traditions that are so central a part of the lexicon of Australian nationhood and wonder if these might not prove to be a more fertile, 'pliable' ground than the conservative and agrarianist source of some Canadian nationalism and/or the continuing ability of the *Canadian Liberal Party* to represent itself, at moments of strife, as the nationally-unifying, reforming 'Governing Party'. There is no equivalent in Canada, at the national level, of the Australian labour and social-democratic tradition, a circumstance which profoundly affects the political inflections of nationalist rhetoric and imagery between the two countries.

These, then, are some of the issues (and points of comparison and difference) explored in this special cultural policy issue of *Australian-Canadian Studies*. Jointly edited by the Institute for Cultural Policy Studies at Griffith University and Carleton University's Centre for Communication, Culture and Society, it offers what is hoped will prove a useful set of resources for readers interested in both the similarities and differences between the ways in which the matrices of culture/nation policy are currently organised in Canada and Australia.

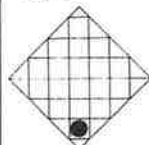
The collection does not, however, aim to be systematically comparative, and certainly not mechanically so. Rather than obliging Canadian writers to take account of parallel policy debates in Australia, and vice versa, contributors were invited to write about those fields of cultural policy formation they were most directly and intimately familiar with within their respective national contexts. Of course, in some cases, direct contrasts and parallels are drawn: John Shepherd and Jennifer Giles compare the prospects for the emergence of a distinctively national sound in Canadian popular music with their assessment of the situation prevailing in Australia, while Jennifer Craik draws on Canadian assessments of the experience of Vancouver's Expo 86 in appraising the political repercussions of Brisbane's Expo 88. For the most part, however, contributors have focused on either Australian or Canadian issues and debates - although we have, as editors, sought to ensure that all contributions will be equally accessible to both Australian and Canadian readers. We hope that this issue will be provocative and also, importantly, that it may come to inform continuing practical struggles over issues of nation and cultural policy.

**Tony Bennett
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John Harp
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**ICPS
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The Institute for Cultural Policy Studies was established in 1987 to promote the development of cultural policy studies and research in Australia. Affiliated to the Division of Humanities, the Institute is designed to provide a context for collaborative work between scholars from different disciplines interested in furthering the development of Australian cultural policies. In providing contexts for publicly debating the implications of such policies, it will promote the exchange of information and research between scholars, cultural policy planners and administrators, and the representatives of organisations affected by cultural policy outcomes. In fostering collaborative relations with similar research centres in North America and Europe, the Institute will also bring a comparative perspective to bear on Australian debates in the cultural policy sphere.

PURPOSES

- To prepare grant requests and secure contracts for research from public and private agencies and organisations.
- To promote public debate on cultural policy matters by sponsoring and organising conferences and seminars.
- To develop a programme of scholarly publications.
- To promote postgraduate work in cultural policy studies

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- ★ *Literary Policy* ★ *Museum and Heritage Policy* ★ *Popular Culture* ★ *Tourism*

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