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Cultural wars in an Australian context: challenges in developing a national cultural policy

Josephine Caust*

*School of Culture and Communication, University of Melbourne, John Medley Building,
Parkville Campus, Melbourne, 3010, Australia*

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In March 2013, the Australian Federal Labor Government released *Creative Australia*. This document was described as the first national Cultural Policy statement in 20 years since the publication by a previous Labor Government of *Creative Nation* in 1994. However, within 6 months of the launch of this new policy, a Coalition (Conservative) Federal government was elected in September 2013. Up till now, Coalition Governments have rejected the need for a national cultural policy, so the future for *Creative Australia* may in fact be both contested and limited. Indeed, during the previous Federal Coalition Government a ‘cultural war’ erupted between the government and artists and intellectuals, over the latter’s desire for an Australian cultural policy. This paper addresses questions around the process of developing this new national cultural policy, why it occurred, and what future it might have now there is a new Coalition Federal Government in power.

Keywords: cultural policy; Australia; arts; politics

Background

When the Australian Government released *Creative Australia* in March 2013 it was the culmination of a long campaign by notable Australian artists and intellectuals asking for a national cultural policy. This campaign ignited a cultural war between artists and intellectuals and the then Coalition Federal Government in 2005. From 1996 until 2007, the Australian government was led by the Coalition Parties under Prime Minister John Howard. The Coalition Government was adamant that Australia did not need a cultural policy as such. Cultural economist David Throsby argued that John Howard, the then prime minister, was holding onto a 1950s view of Australia and Australians where Australia was still identified with Great Britain (Throsby 2005). He also believed that successive governments had not understood the nature of the arts and were ‘reactive’ in their response rather than considered and committed to a cultural vision. Throsby therefore proposed that a national cultural policy would enable a deeper understanding and better long-term planning from all players, incorporating more than the arts in its scope (Throsby 2006). However, Throsby’s notion of a cultural policy was not a statement handed down from on high but,

*Email: Jo.caust@unimelb.edu.au

... the opening up of a broad ranging discussion of the role of arts and culture in our society, and the forging of a new cultural accord between government and people. (Throsby 2006, p. 32–33)

So Throsby, while wanting a cultural policy from government, argued for a process whereby as many people as possible were involved in the development of that policy. Matarasso and Landry (1999) make the point that,

... the creation of policy through a real partnership between a cultural ministry, its constituency and the wider public offers major advantages. (Matarasso and Landry 1999, p. 21)

Certainly there might be an expectation of greater community ownership if the process to develop a policy is ‘consultative’ and that it might reflect a broader range of views than those residing in a Government office.

While the desire for a new cultural policy was noted as one of its priorities by the incoming Labor Party Government in 2007 and further reiterated after the holding of the National 2020 Summit in April 2008, actual outcomes did not occur until their second term of government in 2010. In August 2011, a *Cultural Policy Discussion Paper* was released by the Federal Labor Arts Minister and feedback and responses were invited from whoever was interested by October 2011. Several hundred individuals and organizations responded to the invitation to engage¹ (including this author). These responses were then posted on an online site for others to view. But in the lead up to the Federal Government May Budget in 2012 it was announced that the final release of the new cultural policy would not occur until later in 2012. In fact it was not until March 2013 that the new policy, *Creative Australia* was announced. It was suggested in the media that this was for two reasons: one was because there was no money allocated to a cultural policy in the 2012 budget and in addition, the number of reviews about the arts in the interim had complicated the process (Boland 2012). However, like the earlier version of Creative Nation (1994) the finalization of this process occurred against a backdrop of political instability. In September 2013, a new Australian Federal Coalition government was elected. Thus, the life of this new national cultural policy is likely to be limited, unless it is also owned by the incoming Coalition government. It could be useful to consider then what is understood by the term ‘cultural policy’, what is meant by the Australian version of it and what might be its future?

Understandings of ‘cultural policy’

Making a statement about one’s culture can be interpreted as a symptom of nation building (Alasuutari 2009). But from making a cultural statement to formulating a cultural policy, there is an implication of an intervention, if not expectation, of how ‘culture’ should be interpreted and delivered. Indeed, an autocratic government might use a cultural policy as a statement of how the nation’s people should behave and how information can or cannot flow. So rather than the notion of a cultural policy being a benign but positive affirmation of a nation’s distinctiveness, it can also reflect a climate of oppression, censorship, and control. Matarasso and Landry (1999) devised a set of measures and questions positioned on individual spectrums, for the reader to determine where they placed themselves in the context of seeing

cultural support as the total responsibility of the state or at the other extreme of spectrum where the state had no role to play in supporting culture. Their exercise was intended to clarify different understandings of the relationship between the state and arts and culture, given the complexity of these issues.

In a western democratic state the model of an interventionist and controlling framing of cultural policy presents dilemmas that can become a source of polarization in political terms. In the culture wars of the 90s in the US views were expressed for instance that arts and cultural support by government intrinsically supported left wing, élitism, and anti-religious views as well as imposing a form of cultural engineering (Miller 1997). This raises the question of where the role of government begins and ends; is it operating from a model of a ‘nanny’ state, or at worst, functioning as a ‘big brother’ in fields around social and cultural behavior? In certain contexts the representation of a nation’s cultural policy is interpreted, not by what is said, but by its actions. Another interpretation of a statement of a nation’s culture is also seen as a symbol of the state recognizing the failure of the market to protect aspects of its culture; that is the notion of the ‘public good’. As Williams noted the Arts Council of Great Britain was established in 1946 for several reasons including ‘... an intervention in the market’ (Williams 1989, p. 143). In this model, the state finds ways to intervene to protect its cultural and artistic activity from being swamped by market forces which may primarily focus on commercial return.

More recently, Government support for arts and culture has been seen as an old-fashioned approach (Cowen 2000). McGuigan (2005) notes that if a government is involved with culture then it is no longer doing this for the public good, nor for the intrinsic value of culture; instead it is for the economic benefits of cultural engagement. So that,

... cultural policy ceases to be specifically about culture at all. The predominant rationale for cultural policy today is economic ... (McGuigan 2005, p. 238)

An instrumental approach to arts and cultural policy has been noted by several observers particularly in the context of the United Kingdom (Belfiore 2004, Holden 2004, McGuigan 2005, Gray 2007). Belfiore comments on the approach of ‘evidence based’ policy-making where there has to be evidence of efficiency, effectiveness, and value backed up by clear quantitative data, reflecting a New Public Management approach (Belfiore 2004). Gray comments that,

... governments have increasingly become attached to the idea that arts and cultural policies need to justify their existing levels of state support not through reference to the artistic or cultural benefits that they produce but, instead, to their contribution to other policy concerns altogether. (Gray 2007, p. 209)

Gray concludes that the challenges in developing a cultural policy that is not instrumentally focused, lie in arts and culture’s inherent weakness to make other forms of argument which justify state support in an economically focused climate.

Holden (2004, 2009) has attempted to articulate other ways of describing culture to address this dilemma. He has argued that the older model of culture sets up a ‘binary’ model where there is an implicit assumption that there is a tension between high and low, élitist or populist cultures etc. His argument is that culture is now an ‘interrelationship of spheres’ represented by ‘home-made’, ‘publicly

funded’, and ‘commercial’ culture (Holden 2009, p. 449). In Holden’s model these three spheres are all interconnected but different. In the cases of the ‘commercial’ and ‘publicly funded’ culture he says there are gatekeepers who decide what is going to be supported or produced; whereas in ‘homemade’ culture the viewer or participant decides themselves what they value or want. Holden notes for instance that *Youtube* provides one forum for this. Holden’s view is reflected in this statement by Eltham and Westbury:

... cultural policy cuts across many government portfolios and encompasses a vast swathe of everyday life. It’s as much about the rock band at your local pub as it is about the Sydney Opera House, as much about popcorn during the movie as chardonnay after the ballet. Cultural policy is about what you can and can’t watch on free-to-air TV or view on the internet, whether you can exhibit photos of naked children in an art gallery, or when and where a band is allowed to play. (Eltham and Westbury 2010)

A key point then in the Australian context is whether those on both sides of government see cultural policy in this broad framing or if it is seen primarily as the field of cultural policy that the government has some mandate over; in Holden’s nomenclature, that which is ‘publicly funded’.

The Australian scenario

The contextualizing of culture and the arts has been a contested field in Australia particularly with the embrace of an industry model by then Federal Labor Government in the late 80s (Parsons 1987, Horne 1988). The arts sector was resistant to the use of an ‘industrial model’ for several reasons including its implications for funding, expectations of arts activity, preference for quantitative evaluation measures, and the possibility of an increasing emphasis on bottom line expectations (Anderson 1992, Brook 1995, Brokensha 1996). However, other commentators saw an industry framing as a way to make the ‘arts’ more accessible by giving it a more democratic and less élitist context especially when it put the arts into a broader framing of the creative or cultural industries (Bennett 1993, Cunningham 1994, Bennet and Carter 2001). As the Labor Party was seen as the party of the trade unions and ordinary people, an industrial approach to the arts was seen as a way the Labor Party could embrace the arts rather than seeing them as the field of the privileged. In addition, it was argued that it would be easier to attract government funding given the capacity for potentially exportable cultural or creative industries to attract profits, hence representing a worthwhile national ‘investment’ rather than a subsidy or ‘hand-out’ (Bennett 1993, Cunningham 1994).

Thus, from the 90s on, the language used to describe the arts changed in Australia culminating in the publication in 1994 by then Federal Labor Government of *Creative Nation* where supporting the arts as an industry was directly connected with the possibility of economic gains (Stevenson 2000, Caust 2003). When the government changed from the Labor Party to the Conservative Coalition under John Howard in 1996, the arts and cultural policy discourse shifted again. This time the arts sector/industry became framed as ‘businesses’ with similar approaches to governance and which potentially could generate profits (Caust 2010). This led to the undertaking of a major review of arts funding (Nugent 1999) and a separation at the funding level of major performing arts organizations from other

organizations and artforms. While O'Connor *et al.* (2009, p. 5) note that 'The arts are, or can be, big business' the conceptualizing of *all* of the arts as businesses may be problematic. Where does arts practice that is purely experimental fit in this framing?

Debate and discussion about the definitions and usefulness of the terms 'cultural' or 'creative' industries in relation to the arts still continue to the present. For example, should the arts be framed within an 'art for art's sake' context or should they be seen in an instrumental context when arguing about the merits of receiving funding? (Glow and Johanson 2006, O'Connor *et al.* 2009). This is also reflected to some extent in understandings of cultural policy as noted above and the relationship between understandings of commercial and popular culture (O'Connor *et al.* 2009, Eltham and Westbury 2010). It is argued though that support of funding for high arts activity primarily, is an élitist approach and is no longer consistent with other forms and understandings of modernity (O'Connor *et al.* 2009).

As noted earlier there were calls from artists and intellectuals for a new cultural policy for Australia from the early part of this millennium. During the Howard years from 1996 to 2007 as noted earlier, a 'cultural war' waged between artists and intellectuals on one side and, on the other side, conservative politicians and some media commentators. The Howard Coalition Government's approach to the arts was seen as essentially 'reactive' so that if a perceived problem arose then a review was undertaken, resulting in a bit more cash or downsizing, or an industry restructure, without any serious conversation about what was needed or what was really happening (Throsby 2005). Conservative commentators reacted strongly to Throsby's criticism by attacking arts activity and artists in general. Janet Albrechtsen, a regular commentator with *The Australian* (Australia's only national daily newspaper) and a then member of the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) Board labeled the need for a cultural policy as 'McCarthyism' and attacked the artists and intellectuals who wanted it. In Albrechtsen's analysis, artists and their 'academic handbags' were all left wing apologists who were lucky to get any money from the taxpayer and if they continued to complain, there was an implied threat that they may not get any more in the future (Albrechtsen 2006, p. 10).

A major pre-occupation of the Howard era was the ABC, the national broadcasting authority. The Coalition Government replaced all members of the ruling board of the ABC including the Chair, to ensure a more conservative agenda became the dominant influence at the leadership level. Even so, there was still concern that the organization continued to reflect a so-called 'left wing' agenda. So the one staff elected member of the Board was also removed, making the Board entirely government appointed (McNicoll 2006). Even so media critics of the ABC continued attacking the organization, commenting for instance that,

The problem with the ABC is that anyone the federal government sends to change its culture ends up as a captive of its culture ... In various ways, the ABC is promoting a one-sided, anti-traditionalist interpretation of contemporary Australian reality. (Gray 2006, p. 12)

Gray asserted that the Coalition Government appointed Board members had also become 'captive' to what he interpreted as a 'left wing, alternative' culture permeated by the ABC staff (Gray 2006). He argued that the organization was fundamentally sick from within and needed a complete staff upheaval before it

could change its content. This environment of conflict and oppositional cultural views informed the approach of the Labor Government when they took leadership in late 2007. On his election in late 2007, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd undertook two major initiatives to change the government response to significant events.

Firstly, in February 2008 he gave a National Apology to the Stolen Generations.² These were mostly indigenous people who had been forcibly removed from their birth families by previous governments and churches because they were of mixed ethnic heritage or because they were deemed 'at risk'. This Apology was seen as the first step in shifting the negativity of the Howard period towards the creation of a more inclusive and fairer Australian society (Wright 2008). Secondly, Prime Minister Rudd organized a national forum called the *Australia 2020 Summit* in April 2008. The summit was intended to be bi-partisan and was attended by representatives from all sides of the political fence. There were 10 areas of focus at the summit and for each area, 100 people were chosen (after public application) from around the nation, to explore their area over a weekend. One of the ten areas of focus was described as *Creative Australia* and 100 people from the arts and cultural sector were chosen by the government to meet together and address this topic which was co-chaired by the actress Cate Blanchett. As an outcome of this process, a list of priorities was drawn up by the participants that, in their view, could contribute to the development of a Creative Australia. One of their priorities was the development of a 'National Cultural Strategy' which placed arts and culture centrally within the Australian policy framework and asked for measurable outcomes in terms of creativity from all government portfolios.

Following the *2020 Summit* a ministerial arts advisory group was established by Prime Minister Rudd to advise the Minister for the Arts on the way forward. The first Minister for the Arts under the new Labor Government was Peter Garrett, a rock musician and lead singer from the band *Midnight Oil*. Garrett was brought into the government as a famous Australian but he had little experience as a politician.

However, from early in his tenure Prime Minister Kevin Rudd had management issues within his own party and lost much of his internal support. After an intervention by the Labor Party faction heads, Rudd was replaced as Prime Minister by Julia Gillard (his then deputy) in mid-2010. Under Prime Minister Gillard a new Minister for the Arts was appointed in 2010. This was Simon Crean, a former leader of the Labor party, who seemed to bring more focus and energy to the portfolio than Garrett. Working with the Advisory Group and the Arts Office, the Minister developed the *Cultural Policy Discussion Paper* which was published in August 2011. However, he was unable to publish the final document, *Creative Australia*, until March 2013. So after an election promise made in 2007 to the cultural and artistic community, and a public commitment by Prime Minister Rudd at the *Australia Summit* in 2008, it took another 5 years before a Cultural Policy was published by the Labor Government in 2013.

Why did it take so long for the Labor Government to put a cultural policy/strategy in place? The answer to this is likely to be complex. While both Prime Ministers Rudd and Gillard publicly embraced cultural and creative individuals such as actress Cate Blanchett, their actual personal commitment to arts and culture was limited. Indeed, Rudd was highly critical of an exhibition of photographer Bill Henson's work in mid-2010 and argued for its banning, despite the fact that he had not seen any of the work and was reacting to media hyperbole. The concept of

'Freedom of Expression' which had caused problems during the Howard Coalition era resurfaced and gave permission for the publication of extreme views in the media and elsewhere. So even under the Labor government, anti-intellectualism and devaluing of cultural difference re-emerged and was not publicly discouraged. It was noted in the media that,

Australian politicians rarely champion culture. Partly this is because of its complexity: by its nature, culture defies definition and measurement, and its priorities cut across a vast range of authorities. (Croggan 2013)

Perhaps, it is naïve to hope that an arts and culture agenda has any mainstream appeal in most countries but in Australia it could be said that very few politicians on either side of the political agenda take the area seriously. Certainly the Labor leadership dramas would not have assisted the efficient development of a national cultural policy.

After the release of the *Cultural Policy Discussion Paper* in 2011 the Federal Government commissioned an external review of the Australia Council. Two consultants, neither of whom had an arts background but were on boards of arts organizations, were employed by Minister Crean to undertake the review. They published their review in May 2012 for public comment and response. In their report, Trainor and James queried the continued relevance of the Australia Council Act as it was presently stated and noted that,

The National Cultural Policy is an opportunity to update the Council's purpose to ensure that it is clearly defined, enabling the Council to respond to changes in the arts landscape, and to clarify what is meant by the importance of 'excellence' as the primary measure of Australia Council funding. It is vital that the Council's purpose aligns with and contributes to the implementation of the National Cultural Policy's goals. (Trainor and James 2012, p. 13)

This recommendation was a major change in approach to the Australia Council which had been more or left alone over the 40 years of its existence, in terms of its operations and purpose, by both sides of government. Any previous reviews of the Council had been conducted by the Council itself not by an outside body. The review recommended a more direct engagement and influence by the Minister of the day in the practice of the Council. This was seen as a major change from previous practice and caused concern in the arts community in terms of how it might be implemented (Eltham 2013b, Stone 2013). In particular, Trainor and James argued for agreement between the Minister and the Council on a joint Strategic Plan for the Council. They cited the example of the Canada Council's approach as an example of how this could work successfully. In particular, they recommended a change to the governance of the Council with new Members and Chair appointed by the Minister on the basis of skills required by the Council. Until this time, the Council had a series of Artform Boards made up of peers from each artform who determined funding decisions for that artform. The report recommended that the Council abandon the separate Artform Boards internally as well as ceasing the practice of the Artform Board Chairs being automatic members of the Council. Instead of the Board system, they recommended that the Council use an hoc jury system, again modeled on the Canada Council approach, to determine funding outcomes. This last recommendation raised the most concern in the arts community because it

removed specialized artform knowledge from within the governance structure of the Australia Council. The authors' note in commentary after the release of their review that,

We looked to examples overseas. In particular, we were impressed by the flexible model used by the Canada Council for the Arts, which allows for wide diversity in peer assessors with rolling peer juries. (James and Trainor 2012 *The Australian* online)

They also recommended that the Chief Executive Officer of the Australia Council be appointed by the Council but in agreement with the Minister and that the Council receive 'top up' funding to address the gap between what was funded and what should be funded (Trainor and James 2012, p. 22).

Generally, the recommendations of Trainor and James Review were put in place before the demise of the Labor Government. Various groups and individuals protesting about the changes made submissions to the government and to the Parliamentary Committee that addressed the change in the Act that governed the Australia Council. There was concern for instance that the new Act failed to protect freedom of expression, community arts, or indigenous arts and undermined the principle of peer assessment (Stone 2013). Nevertheless, Parliament went ahead and changed the Act governing the Council in June 2013, the Australia Council was restructured as recommended and the Artform Boards were disbanded and a new Council was appointed.

Creative Australia

In March 2013, *Creative Australia* was released. *Creative Australia* presented five goals which it saw as the cornerstone of its strategy for the future. The first goal placed the recognition and celebration of the culture and artistic practices of the Australian Indigenous people at the forefront. This was a change from the *Cultural Policy Discussion Paper* and reflected a desire to locate indigenous culture in a central place. The second goal was focused on reflecting and celebrating the diversity of Australia's population. The third goal focused primarily on the importance of artists and the arts to society. The fourth goal made a link between culture, society, and the economy and the fifth goal focused on the embracing of new technologies, linking them with innovation and new knowledge in the creative industries. Only the third goal focused primarily on arts practices. The concept of 'excellence' was mentioned in the context of the arts connected with the need to tell Australian stories. The fifth goal really differentiated this statement from *Creative Nation* as it focused on the development of new technologies.

The document then set out a pathway for how each goal could be realized and located these under three major themes:

- Modernize funding and support.
- Creative expression and the role of the artist.
- Connect to national life for a social and economic dividend.

The first theme was addressed in the earlier restructure of Film Funding to converge it into one organization, Screen Australia, and the recent review and

subsequent restructure of the Australia Council (see above). A significant new amount of funding was promised (A\$75.3 m) as well as the return to the Australia Council of the Regional Touring Program and the Visual Arts Strategy that had both been located previously with the Federal Department in Canberra (Another A\$61.8 m). Six Performing Arts Companies were nominated to receive additional funding of A\$9.8 m to assist them in the telling of Australian stories. The Policy also recommended the establishment of a National Arts and Culture Accord, which would put in place an agreement between all levels of government in terms of financial and cultural responsibilities.

To deliver the second theme new funding was announced for the nation's elite training institutions (A\$20.8 m), as well as a national commitment to comprehensive arts education in the school curriculum. In addition, this theme was connected to the completion of a National Broadband Network where all Australians were meant to have access to a reliable network (a major challenge in Regional areas given low populations and the distances involved). New funding was announced for contemporary music practice (A\$3 m), digital platforms for screen and television (A\$10 m), and the establishment of a new fund for Digital Game Development (A\$20 m).

The third theme was addressed through new support for both the Indigenous Community Language Program (A\$13.98 m) as well as additional support for the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support Program (A\$11.26 m). In this theme were also located schemes such as the Resale Royalty Scheme (a method of reimbursing of visual artists when their work is resold at a higher price than it received originally) and support for further development of the Creative Industries Programs. This included the establishment of new research and education centers in various locations around the country, generally attached to existing universities or training centers. Further support was announced for the National Collection Institutions (A\$39.3 m) to improve their outreach and access. There was mention here too of continued support for International Programs, particularly those connected with Asia but there was little detail here, nor any new allocation of funding. This disappointed those who were engaged in nurturing this relationship and indicated that cultural thinking in relation to Australia and its position internationally still had a way to go before it left its European heritage behind (Carroll and Gantner 2012).

Response

In terms of the structure and content of *Creative Australia*, the thematic approach embedded in the document followed by practical allocations is somewhat confusing in terms of framing. Having both goals and themes seems a little bit of 'overkill'. In particular, there are inclusions in the second and third themes that could be included in either. Structurally it might have been simpler to just frame the document around the original five goals. As noted earlier the *Cultural Policy Discussion Paper* was released for discussion and feedback in August 2011. While the overwhelming majority of responses to the 2011 *Cultural Policy Discussion Paper* which informed the *Creative Australia* document were from the arts community, reference to the arts community was reduced in *Creative Australia*. Nevertheless, the first sentence of the document preamble by the Minister began,

A creative Australia will celebrate its artists and recognise the excellence of our cultural wealth. (Crean in *Creative Australia* 2013, p. 3)

A difference between *Creative Australia* and the previous Creative Nation (1994) was that the former document acknowledged the importance of the arts in terms of the economy, while the latter document argues the importance of creativity and culture in everyone's life. While it notes the role of government in facilitating that creativity, it is also seeing this process as a partnership with individuals and organizations in the community. In *Creative Australia's* introduction it says,

Culture is more than the arts, but the arts play a unique and central role in its development and expression ... *Creative Australia* now recognises the centrality of creativity and culture across the whole of society and all of government, and identifies ways government can enable it to flourish. (*Creative Australia* 2013, p. 9)

There are certainly some mixed messages in *Creative Australia* when it tries to connect different aspects of culture. Bennett described this as, '... culture as specific forms of artistic and cultural expression, and cultures as ways of life' (Bennett 1997, p. 173). Perhaps this shift towards seeing culture in its broader sense was an outcome of sustained criticism from various quarters that saw arts policy as traditionally conflated with cultural policy. For example, Eltham and Westbury had stated in the lead up to the development of a policy that,

One of the biggest problems is that the current framework views cultural policy almost exclusively in terms of *arts funding*, rather than the much bigger area of *cultural regulation*. (Eltham and Westbury 2010)

They argued that the gap in regulation around areas of cultural expression is what should be addressed rather than how the arts funding cake should be divided. They asserted in addition that the majority of Australia Council funding supported Western European cultural heritage practice so they asked for the establishment of a separate agency from the Australia Council that focused on contemporary Australian cultural practice (2010). This did not occur but the changes that have been recommended for the Australia Council as part of the review process will certainly affect future funding policy (Eltham 2013b).

A major intent of the new cultural policy, according to Minister Crean, was that it would encourage the arts to be mainstreamed across all government portfolios, rather than the arts staying out on the fringes politically. In the case of the earlier *Creative Nation*, Prime Minister Keating saw one of the benefits of having a cultural statement was making the connection between culture and trade (Stevenson 2000). A direct outcome for instance of *Creative Nation* was a significant boost to the amount of money allocated to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for cultural export. It has been argued that *Creative Nation* was framed within a paradigm of demonstrating the economic benefits of arts and culture to the nation, as compared to seeing arts and culture from a perspective of 'arts for art's sake' (Caust 2003). Nevertheless, Stevenson argues that the Coalition parties on getting into government in 1996, while publically eschewing the principles of *Creative Nation*, put into place most of its objectives over the next decade (Stevenson 2000, p. 39–41). If Stevenson's reading of the impact of *Creative Nation* is correct, then it might be possible that the same could happen again. That is, while publicly rejecting the content of *Creative Australia* the present Coalition Government may eventually act upon its principles.

The new Minister for the Arts in the present Federal Coalition Government is George Brandis who was the opposition spokesperson for the arts for several years and has an avowed interest in the arts. He is also the Attorney General in the new government. One media commentator observed that with Brandis as Minister there is now ‘an adult ... back in charge’ of the arts portfolio’ (Cosic 2013), implying that Brandis is knowledgeable about the area and will make ‘sensible’ decisions. When asked about the Coalition’s arts policy during the election campaign Brandis was quoted as saying,

... The Liberal approach is fundamentally at odds from the Labor Party’s instrumentalism. We value the arts and the work of arts practitioners as things which are intrinsically good in themselves and deserve to be supported by appropriate government measures, for their own sake. The Liberal approach is one which is not embarrassed by excellence and one which celebrates and nurtures it. Our vision for the arts is not limited by what can be downloaded, and is not proscribed by a government dictated cultural plan. (Brandis qtd in Frost 2013)

So what he is suggesting here is that a Federal Coalition Government might take ‘an arts for art’s sake’ line more than a Labor Government. While this would suit many in the arts community, the truth of this might need to be explored in a few years, given the previous Coalition’s government focus on corporatization and business models in the arts (Caust 2010). Elsewhere though Brandis has suggested that the arts and cultural portfolio might need to wear some cuts given the desire by the incoming government to cut at least \$300 million from the current budget overall (Eltham 2013a). It would appear too that the Coalition Government would favor the ‘high’ arts more than their predecessors re-affirming a more élitist approach (Eltham 2013a). Certainly there is a recent example in Queensland where a new state Coalition Government has made significant cuts to the arts and cultural budget that appear to favor major arts organizations at the expense of smaller and middle scale organizations and activities (Eltham 2013c).

Brandis states clearly however that the Coalition would not adhere to a ‘government cultural plan’. So it is likely that the Coalition Government will make a strong statement against *Creative Australia* as it did against *Creative Nation* when it took power in the mid-90s. But whether this means that the document and or its ideas will be ‘mothballed’, remains to be seen. Interestingly a State Coalition Government (New South Wales) is now pursuing the development of a state cultural policy subsequent to the announcement of the Federal policy (Souris 2013). So this reflects Schuster’s observation that in a federal system the cultural policies of states are strongly influenced by the national model and its policies (Schuster 2002). As New South Wales is the most populated state in the country and is also governed by the Coalition, this might mean that the need for a cultural policy is not viewed as negatively by the Federal Coalition as it has been in the past.

Historically, both sides of government in Australia have continued to support public funding of the arts. In fact a recent study has demonstrated that there is little difference between the two political parties in term of quantity of funding (MacNeill *et al.* 2013). So while there is no factual evidence that the Labor Party is demonstrably more financially generous to the arts sector than the Coalition Parties, their cultural, artistic, and social priorities differ related to their particular political ideologies. Nevertheless, public comment in the popular media is usually

derisive of government support for arts and culture as Craik has noted (Craik 2007). It has also been observed that to receive government funding, there has been a shift from the ideology of public support for the arts as a 'public good' towards proving that the arts provide tangible economic or social benefits (Glow and Johanson 2006). While this may be an extension of the populist 'cultural cringe' position, it also reflects an ongoing ambivalence towards arts practice and culture and their association with what is framed as 'intellectual élitism' in Australia. Unlike many other countries, being acknowledged as an expert in something (unless it is sporting prowess), is frequently frowned upon in Australia, as it challenges the notion that everyone is equal and no one is special.

Conclusion

From the early part of this millennium there has been much public discussion about the framing and delivery of cultural policy and arts funding in Australia. When a Labor government was elected in 2007 this resulted in a conversation with a select group about the concept of a 'Creative Australia' followed by a series of government initiated reviews on aspects of arts and cultural delivery, culminating in the publication of a *Creative Australia* in March 2013. This document shifted the conversation about cultural policy to embrace a broader definition of culture as well as update, to a limited extent, current approaches to arts funding. At the same time another government initiated review recommended significant changes to the national major arts funding body, the Australia Council. In this process, there was a shift towards more government influence over the workings of the Council while at the same time there was a recommendation for increased funding. However, a change in government 6 months later made the implementation of all of the recommendations unlikely.

In fact in the new Coalition government there is already evidence that there may be significant cuts in funding, and in this likelihood, the high arts would be given preference. In addition a broader embrace of cultural policy issues is unlikely under a Coalition government given their stated resistance to this paradigm. So in the short term any perceived shifts in understanding and valuing of arts and cultural issues in the Australian context, as an outcome of the latest approach to developing an Australian Cultural Policy, may have a limited tenure. Certainly the framing and content of national arts and cultural policies continue to be a political issue in Australia as they are elsewhere. Even so there is also a possibility that the present Coalition Government, while publicly rejecting the framework of *Creative Australia*, may still embrace aspects of it, if it should suit their political agenda.

Notes

1. According to Mathew Westwood in *the Australian* on the 17th January 2012, there were '... 450 formal submissions and about 2000 online responses' (Westwood 2012) accessed at: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/arts/culture-to-connect-the-dots/story-e6frg8n6-1,226,245,839,174>.
2. <http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/our-people/apology-to-australias-indigenous-peoples>.

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