

CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIA

12. Sport and Popular Culture

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From the Monash University National Centre for Australian Studies course, developed with Open Learning Australia

In the twelfth week of the course, Chris Baker presents the struggle to develop and maintain a national identity in the face of global culture. Support for Australian identity and culture in the media, the impact of Australian films. Sports mania, 'Aussie Rules' and sporting heroes.

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12.1 Viewpoints on Australian culture

This week we take a look at Australian Culture - the Local and the Global through Australian film books, theatre and even Aussie Rules Football. There are often two conflicting points of view about Australian culture: one that such a young country can hardly be seen to have a national culture and another more positive view that Australia is no longer a British outpost nor a branch office of the US and can build something new and different in terms of [cultural product](#).

When Australia commemorated 200 years of European settlement in 1988, John Rickard published 'A Cultural History of Australia'. Rickard makes the point that much of Australia's brief history has been preoccupied with a quest for a national identity. In thinking about Australian popular culture you will encounter a [range of interesting symbols](#) that reflect the shared experiences of generations of Australians.

12.2 Australian content

Since the late 1960's successive Australian Governments have provided significant funding for the arts including theatre, and other performing arts and also film making. Australian television is protected by local content rules which to some extent keeps at bay the torrent of American and British programming. The national broadcaster, the [Australian Broadcasting Corporation \(ABC\)](#) was established to be independent of government and to broadcast Australian programs to a local and overseas audience. Despite the existence of the ABC as a television radio and web broadcaster, Australian media features a wide selection of foreign product ranging from mass marketed American sitcoms (mainly on the commercial networks) to foreign art house product seen mainly on the [Special Broadcasting Service \(SBS\)](#). Whilst much of Australia's non

Indigenous culture can be seen to be derivative, it can be seen that Australia has also produced a number of globally significant cultural initiatives.

High profile examples of this are SBS with its diverse range of international film and television content, [Picture Australia's portal](#) to a wealth of diverse Australian image culture, and the new [Australian Centre for the Moving Image](#).

12.3 Australian cinema

While Australia's history of European settlement is short, it's role in the history of global cinema is significant – for example it's not widely known that Australia produced one of the world's first feature films: 'The Story of the Kelly Gang' produced in 1906 about a bushranger who became Australia's most enduring folk hero. For the first half of the twentieth century Australia had a small but successful film industry but after the Second World War right up till the nineteen sixties mostly foreign owned cinema chains made it impossible for smaller Australian films to get a screening.

The nineteen seventies saw a revival of the film industry when Australian governments began to actively support local film and TV producers. Since 1970 Australia has produced more than 630 feature films and many local actors, producers and technicians have hit the big time in Hollywood. Some of the best known of these films include *Sunday Too Far Away*, *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie*, *Caddie* and *They're a Weird Mob*. Directors such as Peter Weir, Fred Schepisi and Gillian Armstrong have become famous for their early films set in an Australian context. For a look at Australian cinema see [Screensound Australia](#).

By 1998 - 99 - total film production in Australia was worth \$678 million dollars but growth in the nineties has largely been accounted for by Hollywood productions that have been made in Australia: movies like [MISSION IMPOSSIBLE 11](#) and [THE MATRIX](#) that was appropriately about multiple identities.

These films tend to blur the lines between the local and the global and an interesting question is whether we can any longer talk about Australian films. While an Australian story might find a niche among Australia's 20 or so million people current production costs often means that films need an international audience instead of focussing on the domestic. Changes in the film industry have meant that more finance has to be found overseas thus films have to have more of an international appeal.

12.4 Aussie Rules

Sport is an integral part of Australian culture and Aussie or [Australian Rules football](#) can claim to be Australia's one truly local, home- grown game. Sport has been an integral part of Australian culture dating back to pre European indigenous society and forms a key element of current Australian life. For example Aussie rules has origins in the traditional Indigenous game of [Man-gurt](#) (see – "Daily life/sport").

And though 'the footy' as it is known, faces stiff competition from sports like cricket and soccer that have a global following, many Australians are confident about the future of the game precisely because it is so embedded in local culture.

And if many non-Anglo Australians are mad about the game so too, are many Indigenous Australians who feature among its best players.

12.5 Sports mania

Aussie rules is only one of dozens of sports, including variants of rugby, Australians are passionate about. Virtually every form of sport is keenly played somewhere in Australia, thus accounting for Australia's success in international sport from the Olympic Games to international competitions in specific sports.

It is often argued that it is the mild Australian climate which is responsible for this sports mania, but there are probably many cultural reasons for the popularity of games in Australia. It can be argued that sport reveals the Australian character, of both sexes, and that the participation aspect as well as spectator sport equally reflect the nature of the Australian male and female.

Australians tend to make heroes of their most famous sportsmen and women, with the cricketer Sir Donald Bradman and the racehorse [Phar Lap](#) being the two most feted figures in the sporting pantheon.

Australians have erected museums to their sporting heroes and the media is an accurate mirror of popular passions in sport. For a discussion of the life of one of football's pioneering Indigenous stars, Syd Jackson, see the episode 10 of the accompanying radio series.

12.6 Further reading

Artefactual culture

National Museum of Australia
<http://www.nma.gov.au>

National Gallery of Australia
<http://www.nga.gov.au>

Powerhouse Museum (Sydney)
<http://www.phm.gov.au/>

Museum of Victoria
<http://www.museum.vic.gov.au/>

Sovereign Hill
<http://www.sovereignhill.com.au/>

Museum of Contemporary Art
<http://www.mca.com.au/>

Australian Women's Art Register
Richmond Library, Melbourne
<http://yarranet.net.au/womar/womar1.htm>

The Arts

Culture and Recreation Portal
Commonwealth Government
<http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/>

Australian Public Intellectual Network
<http://www.api-network.com>

ABC Arts and Culture Gateway
Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) Online
<http://arts.abc.net.au/>

Latest News – Arts
ABC Online
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/arts>

Latest News – Culture
The Australian Newspaper
<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/culture>

Literature

Australian Literature on the Internet
National Library of Australia
<http://www.nla.gov.au/oz/litsites.html>

OzLit – Australian Literature
<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~ozlit/>

Sydney Writers Festival
Sydney, New South Wales
<http://www.swf.org.au>

C.J. Dennis
Australian Authors
<http://www.middlemiss.org/lit/authors/denniscj/denniscj.html>

Australian Children's Literature
Children's Book Council of Australia
<http://www.cbc.org.au/>

Snugglepot and Cuddlepie, written and illustrated by May Gibbs
Australian Authors
<http://www.q-net.net.au/~lolita/snugglep.htm>

Blinky Bill
ABC Children's Television
<http://www.abc.net.au/children/show/programs/prog33.htm>

Dance and Theatre

Sydney Dance Company
<http://www.sydneydance.com.au/>

Theatre Australia
Independent Theatre Association
<http://www.theatre.asn.au>

Cartoonists

Peter Nicholson
<http://www.nicholsoncartoons.com.au/>

Geoff Hook
<http://www.geoffhook.com>

Film

Australian Film Commission
Commonwealth Government
<http://www.afc.gov.au>

Film Australia
Commonwealth Government
<http://www.filmaust.com.au/>

Australian Film Finance Corporation
Commonwealth Government
<http://www.ffc.gov.au>

Screensound Australia – National Film and Sound Archive
Commonwealth Government
<http://www.screensound.gov.au/>

Music

Music Australia
<http://www.musicaustralia.org/>

Australian Music Information
<http://www.australianmusic.info/>

The Big Day Out
ABC Radio, Triple JJJ
<http://www.bigdayout.com/>

Festival Mushroom Records
<http://www.fmrecords.com.au/>

Waltzing Matilda
<http://www.matildacentre.com.au/>

New media

Dlux
Innovative Film, Video, New Media and Sound Arts
<http://www.dlux.org.au/>

Australian Centre for the Moving Image
Melbourne, Victoria
<http://www.acmi.net.au/>

Experimenta Media Arts
<http://www.experimenta.org>

Television

ABC Television
<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/>

Channel Seven
<http://i7.aol.com.au/>

Channel Nine
<http://tvguide.ninemsn.com.au>

Channel Ten
<http://www.ten.com.au>

SBS Television
<http://www.sbs.com.au>

Imparja Television
<http://www.imparja.com.au>

Advertising Federation of Australia
<http://www.afa.org.au>

Sport

The Sports Factor
ABC Radio National
<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/talks/8.30/sportsf/>

Australian Sports Commission
<http://www.ausport.gov.au/asc>

Australian Institute of Sport
<http://www.ais.org.au>

Latest News - Sport
The Australian Newspaper
<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/sport>

Latest News – Sport
ABC Online
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/sport>

Roy and HG - This Sporting Life
ABC Online, Triple JJJ
<http://www.triplej.abc.net.au/thissportinglife/>

Australian Commonwealth Games Association
<http://www.commonwealthgames.org.au/>

Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games
<http://www.melbourne2006.com.au/>

The Melbourne Cricket Ground - the "G"
<http://www.mcg.org.au/>

Sydney 2000 Olympics
<http://www.atn.com.au/nsw/syd/olympics.htm>

Melbourne 1956 Olympics
State Library of Victoria, Online exhibition
<http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/slv/exhibitions/olympics/>

Australian Cricket Board
<http://www-aus.cricket.org>

Australian Football League (AFL)
Also search for AFL Indigenous Australia Foundation
<http://afl.com.au>

AFL Club Songs
http://www.iafc.org.au/g_songs.html

Australian Swimming Online
<http://www.swimming.org.au/>

Australian National Rugby League
<http://www.nrl.com.au/>

Horseracing and the Melbourne Cup
<http://www.vrc.net.au/>

Phar Lap
<http://www.museum.vic.gov.au/pharlap/>

Soccer Australia
<http://www.socceraustralia.com.au>

Sport Industry Australia
<http://www.sportforall.com.au/>

Surfing Australia
<http://www.surfingaustralia.com.au/>

Surfworld Museum
<http://www.surfworld.org.au>

Tennis Australia
<http://www.tennisaustralia.com.au/>

Basketball
<http://www.basketball.net.au/>

Other pursuits

Gambling – Tattersalls
<http://www.tattersalls.com.au>

Beer - Fosters Brewing
<http://www.fosters.com.au/beer/>

Wine Australia
<http://www.wineaustralia.com/>

Australian Food
<http://www.dfat.gov.au/facts/foodindustry.html>

Housing and Property
<http://www.domain.com.au/>

Gardens
<http://www.anbg.gov.au/anbg>

Beaches - Bondi beach, Sydney
<http://www.voyeurmagic.com.au/>

Online Image Databases

Gateway to Australian images online: Picture Australia, National Library of Australia
<http://www.pictureaustralia.org/>

Keywords: individual sports; art; theatre; etc.

Personal and private: Biggest Family Album, Museum of Victoria,
<http://www.museum.vic.gov.au/bfa>

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