Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Broadcasting (December, 1999)

Comment on Cultural Policy

Submission by Dr. Deane Varan
Chair, Marketing & the Media Programme
Murdoch University

[1] I wish to commend the Commission for the outstanding work it has done in developing what I believe is both a stimulating and provocative draft report on its inquiry into broadcasting. The very well researched report provides an excellent overview of the Australian broadcast landscape. I am particularly pleased, therefore, to comment on specific recommendations in the Commission’s draft report, drawing from my research in transcultural media impact, media economics, and digital television. This submission focuses on questions related to content regulation, particularly in terms of the social and cultural effects associated with such policy and the potential impact of such regulation on Australian trade in television programming. Specifically, I write to urge you to reconsider draft recommendation 9.3 which argues for the removal of content quotas.

[2] Much of my academic career has focused on study of the transcultural impact associated with media systems. I am the original author of the ‘cultural erosion’ model of media impact (Varan, 1998a) and have engaged in a seven year natural experiment studying the social, cultural and economic effects associated with television in remote islands in the South Pacific where I could achieve some degree of quasi-experimental control. I have also studied the structure of the international trade of television programming where I have documented anti-competitive and ‘un-natural’ practices which continue to reinforce dependency relationships in the supply of content (Varan, 1999).

[3] I believe that the Commission’s recommendation to remove content quotas would be counterproductive to Australian interests to reinforce its cultural identity. I also maintain that the un-natural structure of the international marketplace would unfairly disadvantage Australian producers thereby reducing their opportunity to compete more effectively in the international trade arena. Furthermore, I believe that the Commission’s recommendation falls short because although it criticizes the existing approach to content regulation, it fails to recommend a better alternative assuming, without evidence, that the removal of such quotas would, in itself, better target Australian social and cultural objectives. Finally, I note that although the recommendations explore cultural policy, they fail to explore the potential impact on Australian sub-cultures, particularly among indigenous and migrant communities.
On Cultural Impact

[4] Researchers studying the transcultural impact associated with media systems are often faced with conflicting evidence. On the one hand, qualitative research tends to suggest that media are exerting a dramatic influence in changing local cultural identities (this same research often also illustrates cultural resistance). In stark contrast, however, quantitative measures tend to discount such effects all together. This suggests that people are either misunderstanding the influence of television in their lives, perhaps attributing to television effects which are caused by other variables, or that our measures and theories of cultural impact remain largely inadequate. While both possibilities are probably at work, I would suggest that it is primarily the latter.

[5] Historically, there have been numerous attempts to document transcultural media effects. Most such attempts have made, in my opinion, minimal contributions to the wider debate because they were simple one shot surveys comparing heavy and light viewers of television programming. This is of limited value because, of course, one does not know whether television is the cause or effect. Of better merit have been a range of 'natural experiments' which have attempted to measure such effects by comparing populations with and without television.

[6] While I discuss these findings in further detail elsewhere (Varan, 1998a), it is important to note that most of these studies concluded by arguing that television did not have a significant influence over cultures, highlighting the extent to which cultures actively resist foreign influence. This was the position maintained by Tsai in his 1965 study of the influence of television in Taiwan (Tsai, 1970); Payne & Peake in Iceland (1970); Tan, Tan & Tan in the Phillipines (1987); Kang & Morgan in South Korea (1988); and Chu, Aliair & Schramm in Indonesia (1992). Yet each of these studies noted residual effects which were typically discounted because the authors assumed an all or nothing approach to the question rather than trying to contextualize the varying conditions under which foreign media content appeared to influence local cultures. To a large extent, this was because the theoretical model which framed their research (i.e. cultural imperialism) demanded such an all or nothing response.

[7] The most extensively researched of these natural experiments was a six year study comparing two indigenous villages in remote Northern Canada; one which received satellite television services (treatment) with another village that did not introduce television until a few years later (control) (Granberg, 1982,1985). Villagers in the treatment group were affected by television in dramatic ways: Children became more aggressive, viewers modeled Euro-Canadian behaviour and thought of themselves more as Canadians, and the consumption of nontraditional products escalated. This appeared to be the 'smoking gun' that finally demonstrated the dramatic effects associated with foreign media content. However, these same effects were absent when, some time later, the control village introduced television. How can such variation be understood?

[8] My seven year study of the introduction of television in the Cook Islands was also based on a natural experiment with baseline measures prior to the introduction of television, comparisons between islands with (treatment) and without television (control) as TV services were gradually phased in across the various islands, and following the advent of television in all islands in the study. The study was both qualitative and quantitative in nature. What stuck me most was the varying circumstances under which cultural effects were or were not apparent, and the inadequacies of both the imperialism model and active audience reception studies in
accounting for what transpired. In cultural terms, foreign television was neither all evil nor all good - it neither wiped out the local culture nor was without impact. Unfortunately, our models fail to appreciate the inherent complexity associated with such cultural questions.

In attempting to better contextualize such impact, I developed a model of ‘cultural erosion’ drawing from my own dataset and from that of the previous research noted earlier. By reframing the studies noted earlier using the new model, I found a better fit which incorporated the previously ad hoc residual effects. This formed the basis for my argument which appeared in the Journal of Communication (Varan, 1998a). Essentially, I argue that cultural impact is similar to geological processes associated with soil erosion, metaphorically speaking. Thus I distinguish between four different types of processes: Cultural abrasion, deflation, deposition and saltation.

Just as the term ‘abrasion’ is used to refer to erosion caused by friction between a physical terrain and either an agent, or the material carried by that agent, the construct can also be applied to explore the potential for media systems to act as a cultural abrasive agents, reflecting a threat of cultural domination by a system of values which is perceived to contrast with local cultural terrains. Although not specifically labeled as such, most existing research and popular discourse tends to focus on this potential threat associated with transcultural media systems. This position, however, often ignores the extent to which audiences mediate their viewing experience. As Naficy demonstrates, audiences “may think with American cultural products but they do not think American” (Naficy, 1993, p. 2). The empirical record to date, consequently, demonstrates that such abrasionary effects are minimal - particularly where audiences actively resist such foreign influence. Although abrasionary effects can and do occur, they are hardly the sweeping one-way effects they are often construed as.

The single greatest flaw with previous studies, however, is that they have almost always focused on studying impact relative to the strongest and most deeply consolidated facets of a culture. Yet I believe that where the cultural terrain is strongest, the capacity for cultural erosion is least. Those values which are most deeply engrained in a culture are least vulnerable to the influence of television. In this context, the residual effects noted in the earlier studies can be better understood. Television has had its greatest influence in shaping a wide range of secondary values, such as influencing preferences for American music and clothing (Tsai, 1970; Kang & Morgan, 1988). This process can be best understood in the context of cultural deflation.

In geological terms, the term deflation (from the Latin ‘to blow away’) accounts for the process through which material which is unconsolidated in a terrain is carried off by an erosive agent. Key to understanding the deflation process is an analysis of forces, such as weathering, which loosen material thereby making it vulnerable to future displacement by an erosive agent. Cultural deflation, therefore, explains how those facets of a culture which are least consolidated are most likely to be uprooted by contact with a foreign media agent. In a similar manner, it helps explain how subgroups within the culture who have less consolidated local values (such as children and youth) are often more vulnerable to such influence. Media systems can also act as agents of displacement, weakening the consolidating factors within a culture through time displacement and agenda setting effects, for example. In this way, through displacing local cultural reinforcement, particular facets of the culture are further exposed to deflationary forces.
[13] This helps frame the question of media impact, at a particular point in time, in its larger historical context. For media systems can either act as agents of displacement – weakening the capacity of a culture to reinforce and reproduce itself; deflation – uprooting cultural values and practices which have been left exposed by previous displacement; or both – by displacing at one point in time and deflating at another.

[14] However, cultural interaction is not a zero sum equation. The adoption of foreign values does not always inherently come at the expense of the local. Often, such cultural adaptation is supplemental in nature. In other words, people can take on new values without compromising their local cultural beliefs. Cultures are inherently adaptive and dynamic, either inventing or adopting solutions to the wide range of problems which they face for which they have no immediate response. Such adoption, however, is rarely un-negotiated. Rather, hybrid solutions often result which integrate local and foreign values. In this sense, cultural interaction can play a positive cross-fertilization role. However, key to the capacity for such interaction to make such positive contributions is a sense of balance – for where the local terrain is overwhelmed by excessive exposure, its local cultural expression risks suffocation. Consequently, many cultures respond by attempting to further assert their local cultural expression, a process related to cultural salutation.

[15] In geological terms, the force of impact associated with deposition often uplifts local particles which are then further diffused through a process referred to as salination. A particle carried by an agent such as wind, for example, eventually lands on a terrain causing material at its point of impact to be uplifted and further diffused. In like manner, the impact associated with foreign media systems often helps stimulate local cultural expression, resulting in the appropriation of such systems for the diffusion of local or traditional texts. Cultural exchange, again – in balance, helps awaken various facets of local cultural expression – often in ways which would have remained dormant had such contact not been apparent.

[16] Understanding the varying conditions under which cultural impact occurs has important policy implications. It helps us understand where government support is most needed and where it is likely to have little effect. It also brings better balance to the issue, recognizing both the positive contributions and potential threats associated with foreign content. But perhaps the most important implication, particularly in the new media environment where technology is increasingly frustrating the capacity of governments to regulate the delivery of content, is that the best strategy to prevent further cultural erosion is to reinforce your own cultural terrain.

**On Content Distribution**

[17] But this assumes that the structure of the international marketplace gives everyone a fair go at developing their own content. Clearly, however, this is not the case. Not only do natural market forces, such as economies of scale, reinforce this inequity, but as the Commission notes in its draft report, there are restrictive trade practices at work characterized by a high degree of collusion. In my own research I have documented a range of tactics used to manipulate the market to the advantage of larger producing nations – practices which would clearly violate anti-trust laws within a domestic environment but which are almost standard practice in the international arena (Varan, 1999).

[18] Under these ‘un-natural’ market conditions, local content producers are disadvantaged. Thus liberalization of the market inherently works to the advantage of
larger content providers who are best positioned to manipulate the market to their own advantage.

**Implications for Australia**

[19] I believe that when one factors both economic and cultural considerations, Australia has done remarkably well in developing a strong local content cultural industry and in finding niche markets for the export of locally produced television programming. Indeed, Australia’s success in export is entirely disproportionate to its size. That it is the fifth largest exporter of television programming in the world is nothing short of remarkable. I believe this is, to a large extent, both the result of good policy and an openness to cross-cultural fertilization which enhances the demand for Australian cultural products among audiences elsewhere. Australia’s approach to cultural policy, I believe, has been among the most effective in the world, despite its minor hiccups along the way.

[20] In this context, one must consider the potential impact of the Commission’s recommendation. Consider the following:

a) Even if current quota requirements haven’t always resulted in programming which has the ‘look and feel’ of Australian culture, it has reinforced the capacity for Australians to develop Australian content, particularly at the high end of the production scale. Necessarily, the articulation of local culture must begin with the reinforcement of such capacity, particularly in economic terms. The removal of the quota all together could have undesirable financial impact on the capacity of local producers to produce cost-effective content that could compete with the cost of foreign imports. Although this would not extinguish the local television industry, it would probably result in fewer Australians producing such content - a move which appears to conflict with the wider objectives of the Commissions report.

b) The removal of the quota system could likewise decrease the export of Australian programming. Australia is already disadvantaged in that it does not have large economies of scale through which to recover much of the up-front cost of programming potentially suitable for export. Much of the capacity to such exports depends on revenue earned locally through less expensive content development. Removing quotas would jeopardize this revenue stream and further limit the financial capacity for export. Once again, this becomes even more important when one considers the extent to which the market is manipulated to the advantage of large foreign content providers.

[21] In this sense, the quota system not only buffers the negative impact of limited economics of scale, but also protects us from exploitation by foreign content providers manipulating the market to their own advantage.

**The Alternative**

[22] Although the Commission questions the extent to which the existing policy succeeds in achieving its social and cultural objectives (and this is a debatable point), it fails to provide any viable alternatives. Instead, it seems to assume that the removal of the quota system will, of its own volition, enhance the capacity for commercial television to better address cultural objectives. I see no evidence in support of this position and question how it can be assumed to deliver such an outcome. It’s one thing to criticize the existing approach - but without proposing something better this is of limited use. Indeed, I believe the outcome of the Commission’s recommendation would hurt,
rather than assist, the capacity of broadcasters to meet such cultural objectives. If anything, I believe the increasing availability of foreign content through new media means that the Government should be searching for strategies which further reinforce and assist local cultural industries.

The Impact on Sub-Cultures

[23] The cultural erosion model recognizes that transcultural media impact is inherently differential. Some groups are effected more than others. With deflationary forces, in particular, this depends, to a large extent, on the capacity of a culture to defend or otherwise consolidate its cultural terrain. As noted earlier, media often act as agents of displacement thereby making particular facets of a culture more vulnerable to foreign cultural influence.

[24] In this context, I believe there are a number of sub-cultures within Australia that require additional consideration relative to broadcast cultural policy. While the draft report includes an excellent appendix exploring issues of concern to indigenous Australia, the needs of these communities are not well integrated throughout the report. Likewise, Australia’s success with multicultural programming, through SBS, also highlights a need to insure that discussion of cultural policy address the needs of migrant and ethnic communities as well. Would the introduction of competition to multicultural programming, for example, damage the currently favourable financial terms under which non-English programming is acquired? This submission does not consider such issues - rather alerts the Commission to the need to factor in the potential impact on such sub-cultures whenever exploring such cultural policy.

Conclusion

[25] The intent of this submission has not been to be negative - but rather, is a direct response to the invitation in the draft report to provide further evidence and discussion of these issues. Once again, I would urge the Commission to reconsider draft recommendation 9.3 arguing for the removal of Australian content quotes. I believe such a measure would work against the cultural needs of Australians, resulting in increased imports of foreign programming and reduced export opportunities for Australian producers.

[26] Thank you for the opportunity to comment. I have attached, via fax, a copy of an article I wrote which explores the cultural erosion issues relative to indigenous communities (Varan, 1998b). I included this particular article because it concludes with an exploration of the policy implications associated with cultures and new media technologies. If I can be of any assistance in further elaborating on the issues raised in this submission, please do not hesitate to contact me at (08) 9360-6035 (varan@murdoch.edu.au).

Sincerely,

Dr. Duane Varan
Chair, Marketing and the Media Programme
References


The empirical record revisited

The empirical record revisited
the more common of these are the expression of depression and suicide. The
expression of these symptoms is often accompanied by a sense of hopelessness and
utter despair. The patient may withdraw from social activities, lose interest in
previously enjoyed hobbies, and experience changes in appetite and sleep. These
symptoms can be so severe that the patient may contemplate or attempt suicide.

After carefully considering all available evidence, including the patient's clinical
presentation, medical history, and psychosocial factors, the physician may
determine that pharmacotherapy is indicated. Common medications used to treat
depression include antidepressants, mood stabilizers, and cognitive-behavioral
therapy. These treatments aim to address the underlying biological and
psychological factors contributing to the patient's symptoms.
words we must also recognize how each cultural bias in our model of experience of the culture influences our model. In other words, we cannot assume that any bias must also apply to account for our experiences of other cultures. This applies to both the ways in which we construct our models of cultural influences and the ways in which our models account for experience.

Fig. 1: The cultural lens model of cultural experience.

Modeling a cultural lens, we see the cultural bias as a lens through which we perceive the world. This bias is influenced by the cultural norms and values of the culture in which we live. The cultural bias affects our perceptions and interpretations of the world around us, and it can be difficult to remove this bias from our experiences.

Cultural influence is a complex phenomenon, and it is important to recognize that each culture has its own unique set of biases and influences. In order to accurately model cultural experiences, we must first understand the nature of cultural influence.
Although the evidence supporting revision influence is strong, as illustrated in Figure 3, countermeasures are needed to ensure that it remains focused on cultural relevance. These strategies include:

1. **Cultural Relevance**
   - **Contextualization**: Tailor the learning materials to the cultural background of the learners.
   - **Incorporating Local Knowledge**: Use local examples and narratives to make the content more relatable.
   - **Cultural Sensitivity Training**: Educate instructors on cultural appreciation and sensitivities.

2. **Meeting Learning Objectives**
   - Ensure that the learning objectives are clearly defined and culturally appropriate.
   - Regularly assess and adjust the objectives to reflect cultural changes.

3. **Feedback and Adaptation**
   - Collect feedback from students and adjust the course content accordingly.
   - Encourage open communication to address cultural concerns.

4. **Collaborative Learning**
   - Facilitate group work that includes a diverse range of cultures.
   - Promote intercultural communication and collaboration.

By implementing these strategies, educators can enhance the cultural relevance of their revision courses, making them more effective and engaging for all learners.
Deposition of material depends on the specific context in which it is engaged. The state of the environment can strongly affect deposition, as it influences the rate and duration of deposition processes. The type of environment can also determine the characteristics of the deposited material. For example, in a coastal setting, deposition can be influenced by tides and currents, which may affect the distribution of deposited material. The diagram illustrates the interaction between the environment and deposition processes. Understanding these relationships is crucial for predicting and managing deposition events.
Cultural Cushions

1. Cultural Cushions

2. Cultural Cushions

3. Cultural Cushions

4. Cultural Cushions

5. Cultural Cushions

6. Cultural Cushions

7. Cultural Cushions

8. Cultural Cushions

9. Cultural Cushions

10. Cultural Cushions

11. Cultural Cushions

12. Cultural Cushions

13. Cultural Cushions

14. Cultural Cushions

15. Cultural Cushions

16. Cultural Cushions

17. Cultural Cushions

18. Cultural Cushions

19. Cultural Cushions

20. Cultural Cushions

21. Cultural Cushions

22. Cultural Cushions

23. Cultural Cushions

24. Cultural Cushions

25. Cultural Cushions

26. Cultural Cushions

27. Cultural Cushions

28. Cultural Cushions

29. Cultural Cushions

30. Cultural Cushions

31. Cultural Cushions

32. Cultural Cushions

33. Cultural Cushions

34. Cultural Cushions

35. Cultural Cushions

36. Cultural Cushions

37. Cultural Cushions

38. Cultural Cushions

39. Cultural Cushions

40. Cultural Cushions

41. Cultural Cushions

42. Cultural Cushions

43. Cultural Cushions

44. Cultural Cushions

45. Cultural Cushions

46. Cultural Cushions

47. Cultural Cushions

48. Cultural Cushions

49. Cultural Cushions

50. Cultural Cushions

51. Cultural Cushions

52. Cultural Cushions

53. Cultural Cushions

54. Cultural Cushions

55. Cultural Cushions

56. Cultural Cushions

57. Cultural Cushions

58. Cultural Cushions

59. Cultural Cushions

60. Cultural Cushions

61. Cultural Cushions

62. Cultural Cushions

63. Cultural Cushions

64. Cultural Cushions

65. Cultural Cushions

66. Cultural Cushions

67. Cultural Cushions

68. Cultural Cushions

69. Cultural Cushions

70. Cultural Cushions

71. Cultural Cushions

72. Cultural Cushions

73. Cultural Cushions

74. Cultural Cushions

75. Cultural Cushions

76. Cultural Cushions

77. Cultural Cushions

78. Cultural Cushions

79. Cultural Cushions

80. Cultural Cushions
ENDNOTES

Policy Implications

In the final analysis, the coordination and integration of financial and consumer information is a crucial aspect of effective governance. The effective integration of financial and consumer information is critical to ensuring that policymakers have the necessary data to make informed decisions. The lack of coordination and integration of financial and consumer information can lead to ineffective governance, as policymakers may not have the necessary data to make informed decisions. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that financial and consumer information is coordinated and integrated effectively to ensure effective governance.

It would be important to consider the following points:

1. Establish a transparent and inclusive process for the coordination and integration of financial and consumer information.
2. Ensure that financial and consumer information is available to all stakeholders, including policymakers, regulators, and the general public.
3. Develop a framework for the coordination and integration of financial and consumer information that is flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances.
4. Implement policies and regulations that promote the coordination and integration of financial and consumer information.
5. Monitor and evaluate the coordination and integration of financial and consumer information to ensure that it is effective.

In summary, the coordination and integration of financial and consumer information is essential to effective governance. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that financial and consumer information is coordinated and integrated effectively to ensure effective governance.
Doing It by Numbers

Cultural Studies: Ecticism and orthodoxy

Andy Meddick
Critical Arts

NEWS,
governmentality
and aboriginality

THINKING
about policy
utility

POLICY:
Governance & Culture
Contributors
Andrew Tull

Kathryn Tess

information collection and presentation of information in the music industry. Particularly, the use of social media for music promotion and interaction is a significant component in the evolution of music marketing.

The use of digital platforms and the integration of traditional and online marketing strategies are essential for the success of today's music industry. Understanding the impact of these strategies on consumer behavior is crucial for effective marketing in the music industry.