National Museum of Australia
photograph by George Serras

Museology and public policy:

Rereading the development of the
National Museum of Australia's collection

by Ian McShane

Abstract

The authors of the 2003 review of the National Museum of Australia's opening exhibitions and programs strongly criticise weaknesses in the National Historical Collection. This paper looks at the development of the social history collections to contextualise this criticism and contribute to the Museum's institutional history. The paper situates the Museum's first 20 years in a dynamic period of museum-making, cultural policy formation and economic reform. The interplay of these elements produced a complex institutional ecology that did much to shape the collection.

Introduction

Disputes over social history as a museological foundation of the National Museum of Australia have been a major skirmish in the Australian 'history wars'.[1] The rise of social history as a disciplinary genre has a close temporal fit with museum developments in the Western world, especially at national level, since the 1960s. James Gore, in his comparative study of the National Museum and its New Zealand counterpart the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, argues that social history has played a vital role in the construction of national identity, which he sees as an instrumental role of national museums.[2] Gore affirms the pluralist underpinnings of social history for such a project, disputing the possibility of a single narrative of the national past in culturally diverse societies such as Australia. Furthermore, Gore suggests that interpretive pluralism offers a more profound and accurate reflection of the different and sometimes conflicting ways that the past is constructed and acted upon.

The authors of the review of the National Museum of Australia's opening exhibitions and programs (the Carroll report), in arguing for a more canonical narrative of Australia's past through direct experience of 'numinous' objects, inferred that social history's focus on everyday experience and its material culture yielded an insufficiently rich harvest of stories and objects to produce a transcendent and coherent national narrative.[3] Randolph Starn, in his historical review of writings on museology, calls up earlier debates over relativism and ideas-centred displays, but nonetheless sides with Carroll in his suggestion that adherents of new museology — those self-appointed 'ventriloquists' who speak on behalf of objects — have 'single[d] out differences to the point of dissolving the museum as a coherent subject'.[4]

Notwithstanding its significance, the combativeness of this debate has closed off a wider understanding of the Carroll report's location within a period of vigorous cultural and heritage policy reform in Australia. The first 20 years of the National Museum of Australia's life (1981–2000) was a dynamic period of museum-making, cultural policy formation and structural economic change. The interplay between these three elements produced a complex institutional ecology that did much to shape the development of the collection and demands on the Museum's interpretive modes. While such a perspective assists with mounting a defence against the Carroll report's trenchant criticism of the quality of the Museum's collection, it also, *pace* Gore, calls into question assumptions of a coherent intellectual project called 'social history' for which the Museum had agency.

This paper analyses aspects of the Museum's institutional history in the context of wider developments in cultural and heritage policy, and focuses on development of that part of the National Historical Collection — as the Museum's main collection is formally known — that interprets the theme of post-settlement, non-Indigenous history. Shifts in the nomenclature, periodisation, materiality and location of the collection during the period under review suggest the degree to which the Museum's early fortunes were shaped by economic and cultural policy settings. Finally, I will argue for a new reading of the Carroll report in this context, by locating the report's recommendation for a more singular national story within recent developments in national heritage policy that re-assign responsibility for the 'social' to local communities.

Collecting the nation

In late nineteenth-century Australia, administrative uses of the term 'national' denoted public ownership, free access and secular status, seen for example in the naming of the National Museum of Victoria or national schools. Tim Bonyhady notes Australian use of the term 'national heritage' at about the time when the concept was given its first statutory formulation as public interest or rights in historic private property, with Sir John Lubbock's 1873 introduction to the British Parliament of a Bill to Provide for the Preservation of Ancient National Monuments.[5] The Australian federalist movement encouraged a more exclusive association of national with the nation-state and the highest level of government. Early descriptions of the collections of national cultural institutions gave administrative recognition to particular institutional roles. The first Commonwealth museum-related legislation, the *Zoological Museum Agreement Act 1924* (and the subsequent *Australian Institute of Anatomy Agreement Act 1931*), were concerned with passing ownership of Sir Colin MacKenzie's anatomical collection to the Commonwealth, locating this gesture within the tradition of statutory transfer of major private collections to public museums, especially in the United Kingdom.[6] The *National Library of Australia Act 1960* used the functional term 'library materials' to describe its collections. The Australian War Memorial's early legislation (1925, 1952 and 1962) stressed the collection's commemorative role as 'relics'. The concept of a national historical collection was an initiative of the Federal Labor Government (1972–75). Drawing on United States President Kennedy's political rhetoric[7] and later US developments in federal heritage protection,[8] Prime Minister EG Whitlam adopted the concepts of the national

Silver tea urn presented to Amelia Campbell by local residents to commemorate her bravery in defending her Adelong, NSW property from a bushranger attack, 1863. The urn was donated in 1988: although early Museum publicity emphasised colonial history, limited funds and institutional demarcation placed significant constraints on acquisitions from this period.
National Museum of Australia

estate and national heritage in Australia. Whitlam's cultural nationalism and a desire for institutional coherence were both served by consistent references to national collections in the *National Gallery Act 1975*, the *Australian War Memorial Act 1980*, and the *Museum of Australia Act 1980.*[9]

However, agreement on what constitutes a national historical collection has been problematic, acting as a lightning rod for debates about the significance and needs of collections in all Australian museums. The aptly named *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Museums and National Collections* (or the Pigott report, after its chairman), which persuasively recommended the establishment of the Museum, took a pluralist position, evoking nineteenth-century ideals: 'Any collection of merit which is funded predominantly from public funds — federal,

state or municipal — should be regarded as a national collection'.[10] For its purposes, the Pigott report distinguished museum collections in Australia (the majority of which are at municipal level) from Australian government collections. The use of the term 'National Historical Collection' by the *Museum of Australia Act 1980* was initially deployed for reasons of accountability and expediency. The Act's prescriptive character was intended to give the interests of taxpayers and the Museum statutory protection by setting out criteria by which items could be acquired and accessioned. The conceptual breadth of the Act enabled an array of artefacts acquired by the Commonwealth Government since its establishment in 1901 and not otherwise disposed of in existing national cultural institutions to be transferred to the Museum's care, following a Pigott committee recommendation.

The story of the initial appearance of history curatorship in Australian museums, and the Pigott committee's lament of its under-development, has been well-recounted.[11] A conference on Australian history held by the Museum in 1982 initiated discussion of social history as both a collecting methodology and interpretive approach for that institution. The conference was opened by the Museum's portfolio minister in the Fraser Liberal government (1975–83), the Hon Ian Wilson, Minister for Home Affairs and the Environment. His opening remarks make interesting reading today:

> Naturally, with such a group of professionals gathered to discuss an issue like Australian History and its relation to a National Museum of History, there is unlikely to emerge consensus on all, or indeed on any, of the issues which you will be covering. And that it is how it should be. The museum will be better able to achieve

the expectations which have been set for it to the extent that diverging, perhaps even conflicting views and opinions can be accommodated within the framework of the museum, rather than suppressed into a bland artificial consensus.[12]

The Minister's endorsement of interpretive pluralism and his injunction to 'gather together the widest possible range of items and objects from our history to fill out basic themes'[13] set an expansive tone for the National Museum of Australia's first collections policy, developed in the mid-1980s. The Museum's Interim Council, in proposing an opening date of 1990 for the museum at its Yarramundi site, recommended to government that $25 million (in 1982 values) be allocated for collection development in the period 1983–90, citing the National Gallery's acquisitions budget as a benchmark — possibly the last moment of parity between the Australian art and artefact markets. Early acquisitions, such as the contents of a country town printery, appeared to suggest confidence in government commitment to the expansive Yarramundi Reach site, a greenfield location on Canberra's Lake Burley Griffin some distance from the city centre, that was selected for the Museum. Conversely, Andrew Reeves, the Museum's first curator of history, suggested the acquisitions strategy reflected an equal measure of concern over the strength of that commitment and anxiety over the short period for exhibition development.[14] Such acquisitions rested on views about the primacy of the object and the use of 'living history' as an interpretive strategy. Early Museum literature suggests the use of trained actors as intermediaries between audience and objects, the past and the present. The dialogic and interactive possibilities of such human-focused programs were soon rendered unfashionable by an emerging

Quilt or wall-hanging featuring Little Red Riding Hood, made by Ukrainian woman Olga Basylewycz in a displaced persons camp in southern Germany, 1946. This quilt, which can be interpreted as a vivid allegory of Nazism, became an innocent wall decoration at a Melbourne kindergarten, before donation through the Museum's migrant heritage program.
National Museum of Australia

and contradictory policy focus on digital communication technologies (involving large capital outlays and rapid redundancy) and concerns to limit staffing and program costs.

The search for difference

In the mid-1980s the cold winds of neoliberalism blowing across Lake Burley Griffin from the Department of Finance began to swirl around the shores of Yarramundi Reach. A new model of government, based on public choice theory, the outsourcing of functions, and private-sector emulation for government agencies, favoured reductions in public sector outlays and assessment of agency performance against narrowly-defined public value propositions.[15] In 1986, the federal cabinet

of the Hawke Labor government (1983–91) established the Review of Commonwealth Involvement in the Development of Museums and Similar Collecting and Exhibiting Institutions.[16] The review sought to establish expenditure priorities, efficiency targets and total funding outlays for the sector, and its report formed part of the 1989 federal budget deliberations. For the Museum, it brought deferral of a decision on construction for five years and, significantly for our purposes here, instructed that 'arrangements are to be put in place to exhibit elements of the national collection through existing institutions, including state museums'.[17] A climate favouring dispersal rather than acquisition left the Museum in a weak position to press for the return of significant items in the National Historical Collection for use in its 2001 opening day

exhibitions. Picking up a theme in the Carroll report, the Museum's treatment of Captain Cook, which Carroll criticised as deficient, may have been enhanced by the return of the anchor from Cook's ship the HMB *Endeavour* from the Cooktown Historical Museum in North Queensland, and one of the ship's cannon from the Australian National Maritime Museum in Sydney. However, their use presupposed site and design treatments favourable to the display of large objects on a new site close to Canberra's central business district and the Parliamentary Triangle, chosen as part of the Howard Liberal government's 1996 decision to fund building works. The contribution of the subsequent Ashton Raggatt McDougall design to Canberra's 'symbolic economy'[18] is evident; but its capacities as a collection-focused museum structure are yet to be convincingly proven.

One established collecting initiative to survive the 1989 Cabinet decision was the migrant heritage collecting program, undertaken by consultants Professor J Zubryzcki and Dr EF Kunz. Their work resulted in a significant collection documenting the arrival and experiences of displaced persons and refugees after the Second World War, as well as assisted migrants from central and northern Europe. Some material relating to the Greek, Italian and Polish presence in Australia in the first part of the twentieth century was also collected. It can be plausibly argued that social history and the representation of cultural diversity became conflated in Australian museums during this period, as the museums followed the contours and funding opportunities of government multicultural policy.[19] Desires to record and validate the experiences of a passing generation focused collection and exhibition outputs on post-Second World War immigration. This program favoured a historiography

of first-hand testimony and recognised the interpretive asset of oral history. The Carroll report's criticism of this aspect of the National Museum of Australia's enterprise is strident, but it can be paired with the equally forceful criticism of the hegemony of 'white multiculturalism' by Ghassan Hage.[20] From clearly opposing political positions, both texts critique a wider social program enacted by conservative and social democratic federal governments from the early 1970s to the mid-1990s that was given significant cultural and institutional support by the National Museum and state counterparts.[21]

The Museum's emphasis on the twentieth century, especially the post-Second World War period, can, though, also be traced to a line of policy argument about cultural federalism. A consequence of the 1989 Cabinet decision discussed above was a renewed search for institutional difference in a convergent museum industry. The search for difference, underpinned by federalist cultural politics, repositioned the National Museum's social history program: from the theme 'Australians since 1788' proposed in the Pigott report, through a generic 'Australian social history' in the 1980s, to the twentieth-century focus of 'Australian society and history' in the 1990s. The Department of Finance report discussed earlier is a key document for understanding this transition. The report's half-page summary of the history of museums in Australia made the confident claim that a 'social history museum' had been established in each colony by 1861.[22] This had become orthodoxy when business consultants BIS Shrapnel prepared a strategic plan for the National Museum of Australia in 1992, endorsing a refocus on the twentieth century to stress the Museum's distinctiveness and relevance, and defuse federalist tensions.[23] Developing interest in the concept of the Distributed National Collection,[24] evoking the Pigott report's

Museology and public policy

view on national moveable heritage, further suggested a conspectus-style approach to museum collecting. This was an attractive proposition in a rationalist economic climate, but the assumption that nineteenth-century history was well-represented in existing state museums was, as both Chris Healy and Gore have shown, well wide of the mark.[25]

While the rationalist mood effectively limited the Museum's collecting program, it also threatened to unbalance it by increasing the demand on the Museum as a broker of collections held by other Commonwealth government agencies. In the early 1990s agencies faced with corporatisation or privatisation regularly contacted the Museum proposing that curating historical collections was its core business rather than theirs. Major Australian public authorities such as Telstra, the Civil Aviation Authority, Commonwealth Serum Laboratories and Australia Post, for example, had impressive collections evidencing their corporate histories, the working lives of employees, technical achievements and their contribution to Australian public administration. Some of this material ended up in the National Museum and state museum collections. Notwithstanding the discharge by these museums of this proper role, the impact on Australian public institutions of a diminishing historical sensibility and the outsourcing of corporate memory to heritage agencies is a subject that awaits critical analysis.[26]

In 1990 the National Museum of Australia opened a campus in Old Parliament House, with a brief to collect and interpret the history of national politics and government. This provided new if unfunded momentum for collecting, and heralded a busy program of exhibitions and public programs, but it also suggested the degree to which Commonwealth Government portfolio arrangements supplied the Museum's logic at that time. The National Museum of Australia was then part of the Department of the Arts and Administrative Services, the latter element being the government's property manager and the landlord of Old Parliament House. Tensions between the commemorative, interpretive and commercial roles of the building were evident from the first. The former home of the Federal Parliament from 1927 to 1988, the building was full of stories, providing connections between public office and private lives, and between politicians and the media, that revealed the particular character of Australian national governance in the twentieth century. However, many of the resulting collections that were acquired in this program force the connection between the Federal Parliament, the city in which it sat, and the national museological project. The lack of acquisition funds and absence of a Canberra city museum meant that for a number of years the Museum's social history collecting program was somewhat biased towards Canberra and political history. A subsequent proposal by the Keating Commonwealth Government (1991–96) to disaggregate the Museum's three core themes (Indigenous, environmental and social history) and spread them across different Canberra campuses seriously undermined their thematic synergy. The proposed relocation of social history into Old Parliament House threatened to erode the distinction between social and political history that was the initial spur for the social history movement, and neglected the historical significance of the Parliament House site.

Museums and media

A new Commonwealth portfolio configuration of Communications and the Arts, established following the Keating government's success in the 1993 federal election, further demonstrated the influence

on the National Museum of Australia of wider policy ambitions. During the 1980s the flow of museum industry resources shifted from back-of-house documentation tasks to front-of-house public programs, from collections to communication. Museums were no longer seen as repositories of objects but of information, made accessible through the new global architecture of electronic technologies. Switching on the museum was also designed to cultivate a new type of visitor, one seeking a high-quality leisure experience as well as demanding a higher level of visitor comfort. These shifts in perception also chimed with the prevailing contractionist climate of public sector management. George MacDonald, a major influence on Australian museum development as the chief executive of the Canadian Museum of Civilization and Museum Victoria, portrayed the effect in graphic terms:

> Collections have suddenly become something of a burden to museums. Most museum directors now feel like directors of geriatric hospitals whose budgets are devastated by patients whose survival for another day depends on expensive, high-technology support systems.[27]

This opinion echoed around the world. Museum natural scientists, emblematic of the 'old' museum, countered by pointing to the value of taxonomy and systematics for research in environmental change and agricultural economics and, more recently, in countering threats posed by biological terrorism.[28] However, the suggestion that museums should be liberated from their collections created a discursive space in which a new relationship between museums and technology could be articulated, and new forms of cultural citizenship brought into being.

The cultural policy statement *Creative Nation*, released in 1994 by the Keating

Labor government, enthused over the strengthening connections between culture and the information economy. Openness, diversity, pluralism and accessibility were the policy's keywords.[29] During the 1990s policy-makers turned to emergent web technologies to enhance access to collections, unite the regionally and institutionally diverse museum sector into a single professional community, and respond to earlier arguments for more equal distribution of cultural goods.[30] Former Keating adviser Don Watson's account of the Keating government's plans for the National Museum of Australia provides an insight into how radically this new convergence of collections, access, and technology might shape museum forms. As a one-time scriptwriter of political satire, Watson verges on parody:

> there would be no mausoleum, or any other kind of public building … we would build half of it in cyberspace and put the rest on permanent tour. A virtual museum linked to every community in the country, every school and public meeting place. It would have found favour with new information industries and old intelligentsia; it was an investment in technology as much as heritage; it combined the national with the regional, fostered a sense of national unity and greater understanding of Australia's history; it was postmodern in the best way possible — and in all this it was a perfect fit with government policy.[31]

The momentum of this view was evident from the earliest moments of planning for the National Museum of Australia's building, with the inclusion of a multimedia theatre as the introductory visitor program. The vision was better realised through the provision of broadcast technology and space in the building design, enabling such exercises as

Fishing boat, the *Hong Hai*, which brought 38 people from Vietnam to Australia in 1978, part of the first group of refugee arrivals to make direct landfall. The opening of the Museum in 2001 coincided with a second wave of unauthorised 'boat arrivals' that generated significant public controversy. Physical and design constraints of the Museum's Acton site have not permitted the display of the vessel in its entirety.

photograph by Jenni Carter © Australian National Maritime Museum

'talkback classrooms' that challenge static and didactic conceptions of the museum as an instructional space.[32]

The 'death' of social history?

Having argued a case for recognising the influence of wider government programs on the development contours of the National Museum of Australia, I now want to locate the Carroll report within the context of recent developments in heritage management policy. This exercise points to the congruence between the Carroll report's emphasis on a singular 'national' story — that is, the rejection of the pluralist foundations of social history — and the reassignment of social value to local-level heritage regimes. The terms of this comparison, which has yet to be critically analysed in Australia, are set out below.

The rationalisation of normative

and functional roles of the three tiers of government has been a major theme in Australian public management over the past decade or so. The normative component consists of a narrative of the purpose of each level of government. This story has been most concisely told in a submission by a group of local government heads to a federal parliamentary inquiry: the federal government should emphasise nation-building, the state governments capacity-building, and local authorities community-building.[33] The functional component has been informed by the principle of subsidiarity, or the theory that administrative functions should be discharged at the lowest effective level of a hierarchy.[34] Subsidiarity policy underpins recent wide-ranging reforms to the national heritage management regime in Australia that, I argue, provide a new analytical context for the Carroll report's rejection of pluralism and everyday experience — those emblems of social

historiography — in favour of stories that teach exemplary lessons of national history.

The reforms were initiated by a 1997 agreement of the Council of Australian Governments on a new three-tiered scheme for the management of natural and cultural heritage. One outcome of this agreement was the passage of the *Environmental Conservation (Biodiversity Protection) Act 1999* (Cwlth), abolishing the Australian Heritage Commission (AHC) and removing the statutory status of the AHC's Register of the National Estate, replaced by an Australian Heritage Council and a national heritage register dramatically reduced in size and scope. A recent Productivity Commission inquiry into historic heritage gave further momentum to the decentralising of heritage management in Australia, and recommended heritage protection through contractual arrangements (between owners and governments) rather than statutory regulation.[35] These reforms are the most significant in the heritage field since the Whitlam period, and the parallels between the shedding of interest in social value by Commonwealth heritage authorities, and the Carroll report's emphasis on the National Museum of Australia's representation of significant national themes and stories, deserve careful scrutiny. Critics of these reforms have pointed to their implicit equation of social and community heritage with local significance, the loss of a sense that the experiences of diverse communities form the tapestry of national history, and the loss of leadership at national level to identify and conserve sites and artefacts of social value.[36] This reconfiguration has interesting parallels with sociologist Nikolas Rose's observation of the 'death of the social' as a category of national governance, outmoded by a new and unstable coalition of neoliberal and communitarian theories, evidenced most clearly in the emergence of 'community' as a new focus of policy thought and action.[37]

This parallel warrants further critical examination, but the important point to be made is that a full understanding of the work of the Carroll review should be set within a wider perspective of policy and its resources,[38] rather than debated in the more confined space of museology.

Mapping the relationship between museums and governments

As the Carroll report noted, the National Museum in its establishment phase had to steer a difficult passage through choppy waters.[39] Nowhere in the museum's activities was this more evident than in collection-building. The endorsement by the Carroll report of collection-building as a Museum priority stands in contrast to earlier policy manoeuvres that advocated collection dispersal or saw acquisitions languish for want of funds and political support. Yet, as several submissions to the review indicated, there is no consensus today that the museum should, in the qualified expression of the Carroll report, 'develop into a collecting institution'.[40]

Notwithstanding its hostile reception by a number of commentators, the Carroll review has prompted some searching examination of the museological role and expectations of a national museum. Much of this literature has focused on the challenges issued by the Carroll review to what Starn refers to as the orthodoxy of 'new' museology. To this point of time, though, the mapping of the National Museum of Australia's development and post-opening controversy against the broader policy context has been limited. This paper has argued that Australian governments of social democratic and conservative outlook have pursued policy agendas that significantly shaped the Museum's collection formation. Yet there are few available models to assist an understanding of the relationship between

public museums and the governments that fund them, with Ciaran O'Faircheallaigh's theorisation of arts agencies as the 'reluctant clients' of governments the most perceptive Australian attempt.[41] I have preferred an ecological metaphor to stress the dynamism and interdependency of the relationship, as well as the possibility of institutional growth in a maturing landscape. Such an imagining permits a nuanced understanding of the Museum's institutional history, and can make an important contribution to finding an appropriate future balance between the intrinsic cultural values of museums and the policy forces that bear upon them.

This paper has been independently peer-reviewed.

Notes

1   For example, see James Michael Gore, 'Representations of history and nation in museums in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand — The National Museum of Australia and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa', PhD thesis, Department of History, University of Melbourne, 2002; John Carroll (chairman), *Review of the National Museum of Australia — Its Exhibitions and Programs*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2003; Mat Trinca, 'Museums and the history wars', *History Australia: Journal of the Australian Historical Association*, vol. 1, no. 1, December 2003, 85–97; Bain Attwood, 'Whose Dreaming? Reviewing the Review of the National Museum of Australia', *History Australia*, vol. 1, no. 2, July 2004, 279–92; John Carroll, 'A response to Bain Attwood's 'Whose Dreaming', *History Australia*, vol. 1, no. 2, July 2004, 293–4; 'Forum: Culture wars and the National Museum of Australia', *Borderlands*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2004, www.borderlandsejournal.adelaide.edu.au/issues/vol3no3.html; Guy Hansen, 'Telling the Australian story at the National Museum of Australia: "Once upon a time"', *History Australia*, vol. 2, no. 3, December 2005, 90.1–90.9; Mat Trinca & Kirsten Wehner, 'Pluralism and exhibition practices at the National Museum of Australia', in Chris Healy & Andrea Witcomb (eds), *South Pacific Museums: Experiments in Culture*, Monash University E-Press, Melbourne, 2006.

2   Gore, 'Representations of history and nation', p. 11.

3   Carroll report, p. 2.

4   Randolph Starn, 'A historian's brief guide to new museum studies', *American Historical Review*, vol. 110, no. 1, February 2005, 68–98 (pp. 71, 80).

5   Tim Bonyhady, 'The stuff of heritage', in Tim Bonyhady & Tom Griffiths (eds), *Prehistory to Politics: John Mulvaney, the Humanities and the Public Intellectual*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1996, p. 144; see also David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998), p. 66 ff, on varieties of national heritage.

6   For a discussion of early references to a national museum and its collections, see Ian McShane, 'Building a national museum: A history', *Public History Review*, vol. 7, 1998, 75–88; and Libby Robin, 'Collections and the nation: Science, history and the National Museum of Australia', *Historical Records of Australian Science*, vol. 14, 2003, 251–89.

7   The concept was promoted by the Committee of Inquiry into the National Estate (RM Hope, chairman), *Report of the National Estate*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1974.

8   The *National Environment Protection Act 1969* required a detailed statement on the impact of proposed federal legislation or other major federal actions on biophysical, cultural and historic components of the environment (S102[42USC4332]).

9   See Bonyhady, 'The stuff of heritage'.

10 Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections (Peter Pigott, chairman), *Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections including the Report of the Planning Committee on the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1974, p. 34.

11 See Margaret Anderson, 'History in museums in the 1990s', in John Rickard & Peter Spearritt (eds), *Packaging the Past? Public Histories*, special edition of *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 24, no. 96, April 1991, 130–40; Gore, 'Representations of history and nation', pp. 90–3.

12 Museum of Australia, *Conference on Australian History: Proceedings*, Museum of Australia, Canberra, 1982, p. 5; the Minister's remarks find an echo in Davison's recent sketch of three possible institutional models for the Museum following its critical review by the Carroll committee: an 'authorised' version, an internal institutional consensus ('bland and boring', says Davison), or a civic pluralist model, see Graeme Davison, 'A historian in the museum: The ethics of public history', in Stuart Macintyre (ed.), *The Historian's Conscience: Australian Historians on the Ethics of History*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2004, p. 54.

13 Museum of Australia, *Conference on Australian History*, p. 8.

14 Andrew Reeves, former social history curator, Museum of Australia, personal comment, 21 March 2006.

15 On neoliberalism in Australia, see Mark Beeson & Ann Firth, 'Neoliberalism as a political rationality: Australian public policy since the 1980s', *Journal of Sociology*, vol. 34, no. 3, November 1998, 215–31; an extended analysis is found in Hugh Stretton & Lionel Orchard, *Public Goods, Public Enterprise, Public Choice*, Macmillan, Basingstoke UK, 1994. On value, see Carol Scott, 'Measuring social value', in Richard Sandell (ed.), *Museums, Society and Inequality*, Routledge, London and New York, 2002, pp. 41–55.

16 Published as Department of Finance, *What Price Heritage?*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 1989.

17 Department of Finance, *What Price Heritage?*, p. 12.

18 Sharon Zukin, 'Space and symbols in an age of decline', in Anthony D King (ed.), *Re-Presenting the City: Ethnicity, Capital and Culture in the 21st Century Metropolis*, Macmillan, London, 1996, pp. 43–59.

19 F Galbally (chairman), *Migrant Services and Programs: Report of the Review into Post-arrival Programs and Services for Migrants*, Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Canberra, 1978; *A Plan for Cultural Diversity in the Australian Public Service*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 1989; Department of the Arts, Sport, Environment, Tourism and Territories, *A Plan for Cultural Heritage Institutions to Reflect Australia's Cultural Diversity*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 1991. The focus on moveable cultural heritage was supplemented by the release in 1995 by the Australian Heritage Commission of a guide to migrant heritage places.

20 Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*, Pluto Press, Sydney, 1998.

21 See Ian McShane, 'Challenging or conventional? Migration history in Australian museums', in Darryl McIntyre & Kirsten Wehner (eds), *National Museums, Negotiating Histories Conference Proceedings*, National Museum of Australia, Canberra, 2001, pp. 122–33.

22 Department of Finance, *What Price Heritage?*, p. 13.

23 BIS Shrapnel, Museums Studies Unit University of Sydney and Howarth Services, *Rediscovering Australia: A Report on the Strategic Plan for the National Museum of Australia*, National Museum of Australia, Canberra, 1992; on museum sector tensions, see Anderson, 'History in museums in the 1990s', p. 133.

24 Paul Genoni, 'Distributed national collections: Concept and reality in two countries', *Alexandria*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2002, 103–15, http://espace.lis. curtin.edu.au/archive/00002160/02/Alexandria1. pdf.

25 Chris Healy, *From the Ruins of Colonialism: History as Social Memory*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1997, p. 86; Gore, 'Representations of history and nation', pp. 81–90.

26 Archival agencies have long performed this function for the paper and audiovisual records of government. However, as government agencies increasingly 'steer rather than row' (to cite a popular summary of new public management coined by David Osborne and Ted Gaebler in their classic 1993 work, *Reinventing Government* (Plume, New York), what significance should be attached to the material culture of government — the stuff that in large measure once symbolised the role of government itself — and who should record the transition? In defiance of the trend

noted in the text, some Commonwealth agencies, such as the Australian Customs Service and the Reserve Bank of Australia, have chosen to retain or strengthen their commitment to corporate history.

27 Cited in Andrea Witcomb, *Re-Imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum*, Routledge, London, 2003, p. 14.

28 Andrew V Suarez & Neil D Tsutsui, 'The value of museum collections for research and society', *Bioscience*, vol. 54, no. 1, 2004, 66–74.

29 *Creative Nation: Commonwealth Cultural Policy*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 1994.

30 *A Plan for Cultural Diversity in the Australian Public Service*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 1989; Department of the Arts, Sport, Environment, Tourism and Territories, *A Plan for Cultural Heritage Institutions to Reflect Australia's Cultural Diversity*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 1991.

31 Don Watson, *Recollections of a Bleeding Heart: A Portrait of Paul Keating PM*, Random House, Sydney, p. 134.

32 For example, see recent program footage of the Hon Julie Bishop, Minister for Education, Science and Training, interviewed by students on the topic of history teaching and the history 'wars', www.nma.gov.au/education/talkback_classroom/forums/2007_talkback_classroom_forums/julie_bishop.

33 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration, *Rates and Taxes: A Fair Share for Responsible Local Government*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2003, p. 74.

34 Wallace E Oates, *Fiscal Federalism*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1972, p. 34.

35 Productivity Commission, *Conservation of Australia's Historic Heritage Places: Productivity Commission Draft Report*, Commonwealth of Australia, Melbourne, 2005; an alternative argument for major public cultural institutions to decentralise their activities is found in Brendan Gleeson, *Australian Heartlands: Making Space for Hope in the Suburbs,* Allen & Unwin, Crow's Nest, 2006, pp. 174–5.

36 See responses to the Productivity Commission's report at www.pc.gov.au/inquiry/heritage/subs/sublist.html, especially by Federation of Australian Historical Societies Inc. and Professional Historians Association of New South Wales.

37 Nikolas Rose, 'Death of the social? Re-figuring the territory of government', *Economy and Society*, vol. 25, no. 3, August 1996, 327–56.

38 See George Yudice, *The Expediency of Culture: The Uses of Culture in the Global Era*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2003, on the use of culture as a policy resource.

39 Carroll report, p. 2.

40 Carroll report, p. 52.

41 Ciaran O'Faircheallaigh, 'The arts industry: Reluctant clients', in Ciaran O'Faircheallaigh, John Wanna & Patrick Weller, *Public Sector Management in Australia: New Challenges, New Directions*, Macmillan, Melbourne, 1999, pp. 273–89.

Citation guide

Author

Ian McShane is a historian by training and has a background as a curator, heritage consultant and public sector manager. He was a member of the National Museum of Australia curatorial staff from 1990 to 2000. Ian's research interests and publications range across museums and cultural heritage, education, community infrastructure, and public policy. He is currently completing a PhD dissertation on local government community infrastructure at the Institute for Social Research, Swinburne University of Technology.