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“The Australian-ness of Australian Fashion and Dress”

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Abstract

The idea of “fashion” as being a characteristic of Australian culture is frequently regarded as a non sequitur. Fashion is seen as belonging to far flung cosmopolitan sites elsewhere while Australia is a far flung site cut off from the trappings of civilisation. Equally, it has long been regarded as being cut off from the “finer things” of civility, fashion and good taste. At best, an Australian sense of style is regarded as anything that is practical, informal and casual – T-shirts, practical footwear, moleskin trousers and wide brim hats; as an outfit thrown together without much thought. And yet, there has been an abiding interest in fashion since European settlement in Australia, even in the early days of the convict colony. One recurring element of this fascination with fashion is what it means to speak of distinctively “Australian” fashion as opposed to derivative styles copied from elsewhere. Does it make sense to imagine such a thing? Moreover, if there is such a phenomenon as Australian fashion, when does fashion and dress practice in Australia become un-Australian? This question lies at the heart of this paper.

Introduction: The problem of national dress

This paper explores the succession of ways in which the Australian-ness of fashion has been defined and articulated. Three version of “Australian-ness” are examined: first, the transformation of traditional “*bush wear*” into fashionable forms of dress; second, the centrality of *swimwear and surf wear* in Australian fashion; and third, the incorporation of *Australiana* imagery and appropriation of *indigenous motifs* in the fabric and surface design of clothes. In cycles of fashionability, these three forms of “Australian-ness” have dominated the sense of distinctive codes of dress that have underpinned the idea of Australian style.

These three modalities address respectively: a sense of *place*; a sense of *body*; and a sense of *cultural heritage*. By oscillating between these modalities, they have become the rationale for an emergent sense of Australian style that encapsulates post-colonial heritage and contemporary themes of national identity.

While the idea of national dress has not attracted a theoretical literature, debates about national dress are common in the popular media. In her groundbreaking book, *Out of Line. Australian Women and Style*, Margaret Maynard (2001) argued that:

Australian fashionable style for women is different, identifiable and should be redefined as something that is frequently resistant to Eurocentric mainstream ideas. It is gracefully, if not wilfully, 'out of line'. (Maynard 2001: 13)

Australia is not the only place where an obsession with the components and rules of national dress has occurred. Similar trends have been observed in other former British colonies and dominions such as New Zealand (Wolfe 2001) and Canada (Routh 1993; Palmer 2004). In each place, derivative European dress codes competed with embryonic local modes of dress as well as incorporating – at different moments – aspects of “indigenous” design and culture; in the case of Canada, the stylistic forms of Inuit and First Peoples, while, in New Zealand, Maori and Polynesian motifs and decorative traditions. In each case, distinctive dress codes emerged in response to climate and lifestyle as well as reflecting changing ideas about national character (Craik 2002).

Maynard (2001) identifies particular preoccupations in Australia: the stranglehold of the “bush” myth and obsession with the rugged landscape; a preoccupation with leisure; an ongoing tussle moral conservatism and exhibitionism; a predilection for outdoor pursuits such as swimming, surfing and tanning the body; the centrality of Australian fauna and flora in national identity; and appropriation of indigenous and migrant stylistic traditions.

I have argued elsewhere (Craik 2002: 460) that a national sense of style or fashion is the expressive encapsulation of the cultural psyche or *zeitgeist* of a place through its people that occurs when three realms are synchronised: *aesthetics*, *cultural practice* and *cultural articulation*.

The *aesthetic dimension* refers to the distinctiveness and recognisability of clothing styles, including the choice and habitual preference for certain motifs (surface expression of identity); particular choices of garments, cut and composition; distinctive ways of wearing clothes and combining different garments to create particular “look”; and the cultural preference for certain fabrics and materials in the manufacture of clothes (such as cotton, wool, synthetics or silk). An Australian sense of dress, then, might be parodied as a slightly unkempt combination of informal colourful (“loud”) shirt or T-shirt probably in cotton, khaki shorts or trousers, boots, wide-brimmed hat and sun-tan.² These may come from Country Road, Colorado, Rivers or Jeans West rather than R. M. Williams but these garments still retain their “bush” wear symbolism.

Cultural practice refers to the uptake and consumption of clothing as either everyday wear or niche wear in ways that signal specific relations between the body and the cultural domain. While local adoption is the central element, this specificity must be recognisable to those from elsewhere who may, in turn, adopt

elements of the style to emulate “local-ness” (for example, tourist purchases of akubra hats, Billabong surf wear, Mambo shirts, elastic-sided boots and Okanui board shorts). Accordingly, there must be some continuity of these cultural practices reflected in effective supply, distribution, and marketing and representation.

The third dimension, *cultural articulation*, refers to the ability of the style or fashion to be projected with confidence to the point where it becomes taken-for-granted or “naturalised” such that internal and external perceptions of the essence of national stylistic identity overlap. Beach wear, for example, with logo-printed singlet (eg. Quiksilver or Brothers Nielsen), micro-fibre board shorts and thongs as footwear, is one example where internal and external perceptions coincide.

As well as considering how these shifting, competing yet interconnected versions of Australian-ness came about, it is equally important to consider what happens when these fashions become unfashionable (“dorky”, crass, “folksy” or frumpy). What are the implications of these shifting sands and will the impetus to produce distinctively Australian fashion recede if and when Australia establishes a foothold in the global fashion and design arena? If so, will un-Australian fashion become the linchpin of Australian fashion culture and dress codes?

Mapping the relationship between bodies, clothes, identities

It has now become an accepted idea that bodies are actively constructed and not just natural entities. Rather they are culturally specific and historically variable. Bodies are shaped and produced by a range of forces. Marcel Mauss (1973) advocated seeing the body via a triple viewpoint that took account of biological, sociological and psychological components of bodily deportment and conduct. He argued that bodily actions were not natural but highly contrived – none more so than sexual conduct!

For Mauss, the body is a composite of attributes and capacities that perform particular actions that are the product of training (such as by prestigious imitation). These trainings are specific to cultures – as well as embodying other bodily distinctions – race, gender, age and status among them. One of his examples was that of swimming. He contrasted what we now call surfing in Hawaii with the dog paddling among Europeans and the overarm crawl of antipodeans – each a product of particular circumstances and trainings. Each learned technique creates the body as a habitus imbued with a range of finely honed skills that interact with the immediate environment in highly specialised ways. In this sense, the habitus of the body is like the shell of a snail or turtle where the outer surface mediates internal and external factors in shaping how the body should perform in order to emulate culturally sanctioned ideals in a process of prestigious imitation (cf. Bremmer & Roodenburg 1993).

Australian bodies have been produced in a succession of ways that retrospectively have been identified as the true Aussie body –the stockman, the squatter, the surfer, the digger, the larrikin, and so on. My interest is the ways in which relations

between the body, clothing, body decoration and gesture interrelate and thereby produce a range of social bodies. Each body type or image is a component of clothing, accoutrement, posture and conduct gelled into a single iconic moment (see Craik 1984, 1994). Of all these Aussie looks, one is deemed to be quintessential. As fashion journalist, Maggie Alderson, concluded:

If there is a positive stereotypical image of Australian style it is spunky Bondi lifesavers in small Speedos and way-cool salt-bleached surf dudes in cord board shorts and wild printed shirts. (Alderson 2000: 2)

As argued above, this is a dominant but not the only image of Australian-ness in fashion. The three examples cited above illustrate interrelated aspects of body-clothing relations: revelation and concealment; the embodiment of national identity through surface markings of iconic representations; and the embodiment of national identity through clothing associated with traditional Australian body-space relations. Considered together, they incorporate competing yet overlapping narratives of Australian-ness.

Defining the “essence” of Australian fashion has been a constant preoccupation. In the 1980s, an Australian sense of style was defined as a combination of distinctive uses of “colour, texture and fabric and the dictates of lifestyle”, namely an outdoors life which has given people “greater freedom” to choose and express themselves. Together, “the national psyche, the way of life, the particular Australian light, have helped consolidate the Australian essence” (Symons 1983). Comfort is to the fore:

Australian women know what they want to wear and their choice may vary considerably from what European and American women wear. They want to be comfortable and favour a casual attitude. Australian women tend to be tall, with good figures, which means they can wear pants and jackets, for instance, with flair and style. (Symons 1983)

Yet, if these characteristics define Australian-ness, what does it mean to speak of un-Australian-ness? A term that has punctuated Australian cultural history, it has gained considerable attention and notoriety during the tenure of the Howard conservative government in Australia (since 1996). It is difficult, nonetheless, to locate a clear definition or discussion of what the term means. In 2003, a feature article in the *Sydney Morning Herald Good Weekend Magazine* was devoted to exploring the idea of UnAustralian-ness. One commentator defined it as a term used to “scapegoat individuals, ideas and groups with a different perspective” (Jesse Hooper, guitarist in the band Killing Heidi, quoted by Dapin 2003: 20).

Leader of the Greens party, Senator Bob Brown, defined it as views that go against the Australian ideals of “pluralism, different views, and vigorous democratic debate” (Brown quoted by *ibid*). Dapin himself defined being unAustralian as putting “more store in things that divide us than those that unite us” (*ibid*). In applying this definition to modes of fashion and dress, unAustralian might refer to *the choice of garments and ways of wearing them that are out of sync (challenge or*

contradict) everyday Australian dress codes. Examples might include burquas, pinstripe suits, kurtas, Stetsons or wooden clogs.

Often the very attempt to define Australian or national dress evokes a sense of unAustralian-ness especially if the chosen image contradicts popular perceptions or embedded though perhaps not articulated ideas of Australian-ness. Above all, rules about national dress are contextual, applauded or tolerated in some contexts but not in others. A recent example concerned reactions to the coverage of the death of wildlife adventurer, Steve Irwin. He had become an international icon of “Australian-ness” through his larger-than-life television programmes and synonymous with his choice of khaki shirt and shorts (also favoured by his wife and children) as a quasi-uniform worn on all public occasions (even at a BBQ hosted by Prime Minister Howard for US President, George Bush). Although Australians were somewhat sceptical of this sartorial statement during his life, after death, khaki became an almost mandatory way to mourn his passing with crowds outside Australia Zoo creating a khaki army.

However, when a commercial TV presenter who was usually associated with glamour and excessive attention to her looks, Naomi Robson, turned up outside the Zoo wearing khaki and sporting a bearded dragon on her shoulder, there was outrage across the nation that she was being unAustralian and had no right to wear khaki (Meade and Canning 2006: 15). Yet, just days after his death, *The Weekend Australian Magazine* ran a promotion for khaki as “eternally stylish” and offering “tailoring with military precision” (Style 2006: 36).

One example that split the nation was Aboriginal athlete Cathy Freeman’s spur of the moment decision to drape herself with an Australian and an Aboriginal flag after her victory at the 1994 Commonwealth Games in Victoria (British Columbia) with some applauding her acknowledgement of her indigenous heritage and others condemning her act as unpatriotic and quintessentially unAustralian.

Similar debates occur during every Commonwealth and Olympic Games over the choice of the official team uniform for the Australian team. I cannot recall a single instance where public opinion has endorsed unanimously the chosen design. Another more ephemeral yet persistent example is the choice of national costume for Australian entrants in Miss World and Miss Universe competitions. Irrespective of whether the contestant be dressed in some version of “bush” clothes, swim wear, an outfit incorporating the national flag, or fabrics based on Australiana motifs and symbols, there is always controversy about whether this is really Australian and really reflects our culture and mode of dress.

Australia’s most recent entrant in Miss Universe 2006, Erin McNaught, was highly favoured by bookies but was unplaced. Yet she made her mark in other ways, in particular by her choice of national dress. McNaught wore a sexualised version of “bush” wear and “Aussie digger” (military) uniforms, namely a slouch hat, denim jacket redolent of military dress, “indigenous” patterned singlet, mini denim “cargo style” shorts with low slung leather belt and stilettos with puttees and leather straps. Through her belt, was a nonchalantly slung stock whip. This

was a controversial take on “bush” wear (also the icon of the Aussie “digger”) ostensibly more suitable for a nightclub or Mardi Gras. While it had its roots in traditional Australian dress, it was arguable un-Australian in its sexualisation and juxtaposition of items of dress.

Outback gear: dressing up body-space relations

So, let’s turn to the first example of Australian style, namely the legacy of “bush wear” in contemporary fashion. “Bush wear” evolved informally as the Australian outback was settled and settlers had to make do with uncertain supplies of clothes, fabric, harsh climatic and working conditions and limited opportunities for dressing up in their finery. Clothes had to be practical and hard wearing. Over time, a distinctive mode of dress evolved, one that was intimately connected with the remoteness and mateship of outback life. As Julie Marcus noted:

Those who move out toward the centre, adopt new, more authentically Australian, garments (rough clothes – the felt hat, the boots, the tough trousers or ripped shorts, often ex army gear): a new language of mateship and equality with a distinctive vocabulary and accent, and new attitudes towards those they encounter. (Marcus quoted by Maynard 1999: 182)

While motifs of Australia form one set of representations about Australian-ness, another register derives from the mythology of the Australian outback as conveyed through cultural re-workings of the figure of the pioneer settler in the bush. These are of course related but the latter puts the emphasis on the survival of settlers in a hostile environment – living with and overcoming adversity. Many commentators have noted that the bush is a foreign land to most Australians – Australia is one of the most urbanised countries in the world with its population concentrated in coastal nodes. Yet, the bush continues to occupy a central place in the national imaginary and constructions of national identity and character.

In this vision, the Akubra (felt hat) and moleskins form an indelible part not only in the eyes of Australians but also outsiders. American cultural analyst, Alison Lurie, in her book, *The Language of Clothes* (1992), identified the distinctive dress of Australians and Canadians as a legacy of regional and rural British dress that took on a peculiarly ‘colonial’ set of adaptations. For Lurie, Australians provided a spectacle through their informal bush clothes:

Australians ... can often be recognised by their fondness for garments suggesting the pursuit of kangaroos across the outback: khaki shirts and jackets, clumsy sheepskin vests, high leather boots and the famous bush hat. These clothes may be worn by women as well as by men... It is presumably not just a desire for comfort that prompts these outfits, but ... that ... every Aussie is essentially a manly bushwacker. (Lurie 1992: 105)

Lurie’s description of outback gear translates the vernacular into international codes of style and establishes a connection between the clothes and the essence of the national character which in turn was located in the “outback”. The focus here is on clothes as an extension of cultural identity – in this case a concept of a

masculine, outdoors and outback folk community. Central, too, is the notion of a lifestyle that is casual and informal. It is increasingly this element that has come to characterise ideas about Australian style and fashion sense as a generic category. As the former editor of *Vogue Australia*, Nancy Pilcher, put it: “this relaxed air is the very essence of Australian style” (quoted by Alderson 2000). She continued:

I do think Australian people have a specific style. And the way they interpret the fashion that is presented to them is often more interesting than the fashion itself.

The look is relaxed and the attitude is of taking quite dressed-up things and making them relaxed ... here you can combine different looks without going head to toe in something. (quoted by Alderson 2000)

Added to this, says Alderson, is the centrality of the climate and outdoor sporting life in Australian culture:

Surf culture is responsible for a large part of our international style... We're an outdoor society who are really comfortable with our bodies. We're not scared to show them off, we're not scared of colour – in fact, we embrace all those things, and if that translates into Australian style then we have one. (Belinda Seper, Sydney boutique owner, quoted by Alderson 2000)

But while surf wear and swimwear may be the most spectacular images of Australian style, outback wear has also had a strong impact on the emergence of a broadly based idea of Australian dress sense and style. The combination of the two influences (outback and informal) has given the freshness and vitality to what are in reality a language of mundane garments and combinations. Lines such as Scanlan and Theodore that are said to typify this casual yet smart fashion have been described as “urban, intelligent, easy and clean sportswear you'd feel good wearing. It didn't say particularly 'Australia' to me, it has an international look” (Mary Gallagher, London fashion store consultant, quoted by Alderson 2000). In other words, a distinctively Australian sense of style has evolved from dominant cultural influences, climatic pressures and lifestyles (cf. Symons 1983).³

In this process, the role of outback clothes is symptomatic. The kind of outfits described by Lurie emerged in rural Australia as early settlers came to abandon the more formal wear favoured by Europeans and develop specific kinds of clothing suitable for a tough rough life in the outback – suitable for everyday working life yet smart enough to wear to town. These clothes seem to have had a range of sources: elements of some military clothing (khaki shirts and shorts, hard wearing boots, adaptations of slouch hats) while other elements may have been borrowed from American settlers especially those involved in gold digging and westward settlement (eg. moleskins). Other elements were devised or adapted in Australia.

Margaret Maynard (1994b) suggests that the concept of Australian bush clothes was itself a myth that stemmed from the widespread mythology of the outback, the bush and egalitarianism that came to characterise ideas about Australia in the mid to late nineteenth century. The centrality of outback life on farms and gold fields in accounts and representation of colonial Australia invoked a polarisation of bush

versus city and men versus women. The life of the bush and dress associated with it were resolutely masculine (as in Lurie's depiction) and this informed emerging concepts of national identity and character. By the 1890s, "The Bushman" was "the one powerful and unique national type", kitted out in "a broad-brimmed felt hat, riding boots and moleskin trousers" (Maynard 1994b: 176).

Yet these were the clothes of the bosses – the squatters and property owners. Workers wore very different outfits – flannel shirts and trousers, jackets and the like. That is to say, there were quite evident class differences between the bosses and the workers, yet these differences were elided in the elevation of outback wear as *the* clothing of the iconic Australian. Within this genre, it was the cream of outback gear – the most expensive and exclusive – that became synonymous with national identity. Cheaper brands were undoubtedly more common and more popular but did not achieve iconic status. Bush wear was also quintessentially masculine, the exclusive province of "blokes".

According to Maynard, women in outback Australia "were completely excluded from the folklore of the typical Australian and his dress" (Maynard 1994b: 179), with accounts of their clothing and interest in fashion largely deriving from letters and diaries from the period. While the everyday demands of outback life necessitated hardwearing clothing, many women retained best clothes for special occasions and photographic opportunities (see Maynard 1994a).

Yet, there is some evidence in recent studies of strong interest in clothes and fashion by outback women with clear codes and rules about who could wear what and when. Much of this has been gleaned from photographic records. But in so far as representations of bush women and their dress occurred, they depict such women as "surrogate" men – as "unaffected, fearless and frank" or as having "acquired a kind of second-rate masculinity" (Maynard 1994b: 176; cf. Elliott 1997).

The situation changed somewhat during the 1920s and 30s when notions of the Squatter's Daughter and aviatrix role models enabled the construction of female bush figures, concepts that were also dependent on the influence of modernity in shaping new ideas of Australian nationality and culture. Even so, the outback has remained the primary province of men and rugged masculinity.

Of all the garments that became identified as bush wear, the Akubra hat perhaps epitomises the look. These hats, made from rabbit hair in a mechanised felt making process, date from the 1870s (Eager 1998). The label "Akubra" was coined in 1918 and has become synonymous with the hats themselves. Initially, the hats were popular with working men especially those working outdoors. The securing of contracts to manufacture military slouch hats in both world wars gave the company its strength. In the 1950s Akubra additionally won the lucrative contract to produce Stetsons thus guaranteeing international recognition.

Not only has the term Akubra become the colloquial term for hat in Australia, the Akubra has become an icon of Australian-ness and a favourite gift for visiting

dignitaries – and souvenir for tourists. Playing on other Australian myths, the Akubra is promoted as having been worn by “the famous and the infamous” around the world from bushrangers to sporting stars to celebrities. In recent years, Akubra has expanded its range to meet the tastes of differing groups of consumers. The best selling hats however have names resonant of the Aussie outback tradition: Cattleman, Territory, Snowy River, Stockman, Plainsman, Bronco, Pastoralist, The Arena, Coober Pedy and Coolabah.

Despite the growing diversification of the market for Akubras within Australia, the Akubra has also become synonymous with a concern for the rural sector and more recently regional Australia. Thus it is that politicians venturing out into rural electorates shed their suits and don an Akubra because, as Maynard notes: “Akubra-wearing politicians send messages about their commitment to rural values by the signage of their headwear” (Maynard 1999: 182).⁴ The Akubra hat has become the most visible icon of the outback and the epitome of outback gear.

Complementing the hat are bush boots such as Blundstone, R. M. Williams and Baxters. Blundstone evolved from a footwear company started in the 1870s in Tasmania.⁵ Specialising in heavy duty footwear, the elastic sided boot was developed in the early 1900s to “withstand the harsh, unforgiving environment of the Australian outback” by providing a boot that was “comfortable and rugged” and could cope with both hot dry seasons and cold wet ones:

Designed to be cooler with its ankle high length, the elastic side gusset construction made it easy to pull on and kick off. Additionally, the uppers were made of thick leathers and sewn with double locked stitching providing extra protection against the craggy rocks and thorny, razor sharp vegetation found in the outback.⁶

Like Akubra, Blundstone was chosen to supply footwear in both world wars, contracts that guaranteed expansion and longevity. In the post war period, Blundstone diversified into heavy-duty footwear for farming, forestry, mining and industrial uses. It began exporting in 1969 initially to New Guinea but now its products are exported widely throughout New Zealand, the South Pacific, Asia, the Middle East, Europe, Scandinavia and North America. The company has specialised in improving production techniques experimenting with ‘highly modularised manufacturing methods’ and more recently manufacturing waterproof injection moulded footwear.

While these uses were primarily work-related in harsh outdoor settings, Blundstone was adopted by “Australian students and artists ... both as politically correct proletarian footwear and for their hard wearing qualities”. As grunge came to influence popular culture more generally, the popularity of Blundstones spread from fringe sub cultures to youth role models and celebrities. Gradually, Blundstones became highly sought after mainstream fashion items:

They became internationally trendy from the early 90s when Blundstone boots at trade fairs began to be snapped up by the fashion conscious.⁷

Blundstone gained international attention when it commissioned a number of prominent Australian artists to each paint a pair of boots. The Blundstone boot exhibition gained global recognition: work boots became works of art. Blundstone now manufactures 80 different styles and sells 'one and a half million pairs of boots and shoes per year for mining, forestry, construction, heavy industry, kitchen and recreation'.⁸ They even manufacture boots for children (Blunnies for Kids) packaged in boxes depicting 'children wearing Blunnies and playing in the Australian bush with Australian animals'.⁹

In recent years, Blundstone has introduced a range of dress boots that "appeal to both the rural and urban market".¹⁰ The success of Blundstone as a fashion item is attributed to 'the longevity and authenticity' of the footwear – its ability to trade on its history as a company, associations with the rugged outback and hard work, and its connotations of Australian-ness.

The third example of outback wear is R. M. Williams bush gear. Begun in the 1930s, the company's founder, R. M. Williams (1908-2003) has become the stuff of legend in recent Australian mythology. "RM" – as he is affectionately known – is the story of the little Aussie battler – an ordinary bloke trying to make a living in the bush and making the best out of adversity (see Dunn 1998). RM began making boots and other bush gear during the 1930s Depression in order to survive. His breakthrough came when "Australia's Cattle King", Sir Sidney Kidman,¹¹ bought some saddles and became a convert to the quality of RM's workmanship. RM set up business in Adelaide where the business still prospers. The original premises have been revamped as the Showroom and incorporated the R. M. Williams Outback Heritage Museum into the retail centre while manufacturing has moved out to Salisbury.

Boots and saddlery were the first products but gradually the firm diversified into a huge range of boots, clothing, accessories, bush gear and bush paraphernalia. Its first mail order catalogues were produced in the 1930s, enabling RM to reach all parts of the continent. These catalogues, "which have now become collectors' items", set the company firmly on the road to further growth and a permanent place in Australian folklore.¹²

One aspect of his marketing genius was his choice of the "longhorn" logo as the company insignia. RM used this because the "longhorn" wild scrub cattle found in the Northern Territory's wild scrub cattle had "horns [that] had grown to an extravagant size and spread". The cattle themselves were regarded as "ultimate survivors of the harsh outback". In choosing this brand logo, RM created "a legacy"¹³

As well as appealing to rural workers and townfolk, the Longhorn brand has developed a strong following generally, since it has become synonymous with the idea of Australian heritage:

Urban customers have happily identified themselves with the company's "longhorn" brand and appreciate what it means to all Australians and the many that buy and use the product in other countries.¹⁴

R. M. Williams products have become – like his boots – “tough enough to outlast the harshest bush conditions, yet handsome enough to polish up and wear into town”.¹⁵ The range of products – boots, moleskins (shirts, jeans and skirts), oilskins (Droughtbreakers), leather goods, camping gear and riding gear – epitomise “a strong image of the bush that tourists identify as being uniquely Australian” (Collins 1997). RM maintained an active role in bush life and the promotion of outback Australia, perhaps his best known achievement being his intensive lobbying to establish the Stockman's Hall of Fame at Longreach (Queensland) and the National Horse Trail. In 2000, the living legend was awarded a Millennium Award for Excellence in recognition of his contribution to primary industries by the Queensland Premier.¹⁶ Williams has become a figure synonymous with the idea of the bush as the source of Australian heritage, character and identity.

All three companies – in association with similar enterprises – have embarked on aggressive marketing campaigns on a global scale with retailing and advertising accompanied by snazzy web sites and sophisticated distribution techniques.¹⁷ For example, in the lead-up to the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, the Sydney department store, Gowings, reorganised its menswear section to highlight “great Australian brands”, namely, Akubra, Bonds, Drizabone, R. M. Williams, Speedo and Van Huessen.¹⁸ This is indicative of the success not only of these companies and products but their integration into something that is recognised as distinctively Australian and appeals to locals and visitors alike. As the advertising blurb for R. M. products says:

Discover for yourself what princes, presidents and movie stars – as well as the people of the outback – already know: that for quality, dependability, service and craftsmanship, it's hard to go past R M Williams (R. M. Williams 2000b)

It also reflects the migration of outback gear from the bush to the city and from the category of work clothes to fashion clothes. Increasingly, the sales pitch is increasingly towards the urban yuppie and international consumer to buy garments that exude nostalgia for a dreamtime. Items such as R. M.'s Droughtbreaker – their Drizabone equivalent, their Millennium and Olympics range, and the new range of casual clothes for men *and* women are indicative of the re-orientation of outback gear (R. M. Williams 2000b). Another popular R. M. advertisement reads: “*If we had a national costume, this would be it*” above a list of clothing worn by an iconic Aussie bloke: grazier shirt, solid hide work belt, Droughtbreaker oilskin, Akubra ‘cattleman’ hat, moleskin jeans and elastic sided boots (R. M. Williams 2000a).

The expansion of the women's range is particularly interesting. Although located after the men's clothing of the R.M. catalogues – in contrast to most other fashion catalogues – securing the female consumer is undoubtedly crucial to their future due to the ever-expanding importance of the female market. Yet the clothes for women were uniformly dull, reminiscent of toned down, respectable wear for bush

dances and bush events – plain shirts, denim and moleskin jeans, pants and skirts – complete with leather belts and boots. This perpetuated a conservative image of rural woman as demure, practical and not interested in femininity and fashion, as helpmates and homemakers.

In the early 2000's, R. M. catalogues dropped the bush imagery and Accessories in favour of a softer rural image (for example, one catalogue was shot in the wine growing Hunter Valley and another at the Windsor Polo Club) and featured a more urban-oriented range of clothes. The change has been particularly noticeable in the women's range which features more fashionable, "softer" cuts and pastel shades with names like Grevillea, Frangipani and Sweet Pea borrowed from Australian flora. The result is a catalogue and outfits more in keeping with the Country Road look¹⁹ than a bush dance or the wild west. However, the most recent catalogue (for Spring/Summer 2007) revived the "longhorn" legacy by shooting in remote spots in the outback of the Northern Territory and interspersing a broad array of women's fashions (from traditional "bush" clothes to feminine "urban" ones) throughout the catalogue – even including action shots of women mustering and horse riding. This may reflect the reality of the bush today, namely, that women are often managing properties while men work in jobs in town. Either way, the R. M. Williams representation of "bush wear" for women is a long way from McNaught's provocative outfit.

As the marketing reveals, the continuation of traditional approaches to manufacturing, design and production – preferably within a family or at least Australian owned company – is part of this appeal to an essential sense of Australian-ness and sense of national identification and belonging. Sure it is a form of simulacra that draws on an imaginary and nostalgic idea of the Australian outback, but here the bush comes to the city – and other global spaces.

From neck-to-knees to bikinis to "fastskins": the play between revelation and concealment in national dress

No swimsuit has made this kind of splash since Brian Hyland immortalised a certain yellow polka-dot bikini in the 1960s. And, unlike that itchy-bitsy number, Speedo's Fastskin isn't raising a ruckus because it risks anyone's modesty. A throwback – at least in silhouette – to the era of genteel seaside bathing, the new suit encases swimmers from neck to knee. (Brooks 2000)

The history of swimming culture in Australia is tied up with successive controversies about the design of garments for swimming. The most recent controversy concerned with launch in 1999 by adidas of a body suit for competitive swimming. It was called the Equipment Bodysuit and consisted of a teflon-coated long-john suit that went from neck to ankle (Rushell 2000). In March 2000, Speedo launched its full-body silhouette Fastskin, which it promoted as "the fastest swim suit ever made" (Speedo 2000). Made from a "new fabric and revolutionary design", the swimsuit was heralded as improving performances by 3 percent. The Fastskin was the successor to the Aquablade, the suit worn by 77% of

winner at the Atlanta Olympic Games in 1996. Other companies such as Arena also introduced similar suits (Malone 2000).

The aim of these innovations in swimwear design was to streamline the body and cut down resistance as the body was propelled through the water. While the public had become used to hyperbolic claims about new approaches to swimwear, these developments were criticised as creating “a different era and a different sport” (swimmer Kieran Perkins quoted in Malone 2000; cf. le Grand 2000; Smith 2000; Dixon 2000a, b). The full body suits were alleged to be equipment – not costumes or uniforms – and as such created an artificial advantage for swimmers who wore them. These swimsuits were, then, of a different order than the shift from wool to cotton to nylon and then to lycra. They were arguably creating a new body technique.

The new suits were approved by the Federation Internationale de Natation Amateur (FINA – the international ruling body on swimming) in November 1999 and first worn *en masse* at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games. Despite huge controversy in the lead up to the Games, once their benefits became clear (even if they were technically “equipment” not swimsuits), the fastskins quickly became accepted racing wear, and were adopted by competitive amateur swimmers internationally. The new look has become the norm.

One of the implications of the new suit is that it incorporated devices to aid the mechanics of propulsion similar to French army’s use of a “special apparatus resembling a carousel for teaching recruits the breaststroke on dry land” (Lenek & Bosker 1999: 179). Thus the new suits were likened to other kinds of swimming equipment such as fins, paddles and hand webbing. Indeed, commentators have suggested that future designs will incorporate coverings over the hands and feet creating quasi-paddles or fins, and thus further blur the distinction between a performance enhancing garment and performance enhancing equipment. Until then, a distinction had been made between technological advancement (eg. the advent of triple-stack large baffle lane lines), equipment improvement (previously not regarded as relevant to swimming) and comfort-related developments such as goggles.

But was the debate merely technical – or was it also a cultural debate? While the apparent focus of the debate about these garments was whether they artificially improve performances of swimmers, most of the media and public attention centred on other matters; in particular, how the suits changed the look of the swimmers? A publicist for several top Australian swimmers said the trend towards full body suits was “very sad for the viewing public ... [who] love seeing the healthy bodies of the sports stars – they’ve got sensational bodies. Why would you go and hide them?”²⁰ The concern seemed to be the loss of “sex appeal” or the “perve factor” – that is, the desire of spectators to voyeuristically gaze at the bronzed, toned and oiled athletic bodies (Harari 2000).

Implicit in this discussion was an assumption about how swimmers and bodies should look as much as the rules of how the body should work as a swimming

device. In particular, the suits once again highlighted the debate about the play between concealment and revelation that has been central to the development of public swimming and swimming costumes. While the twentieth century history of swimsuits and bikinis has been towards revealing more and more flesh as attractive and aiding speed, the new suit is based on the reverse logic, namely that the new fast fabrics should cover as much skin as possible. As American swimmer, Jenny Thompson, observed: "People thought that the less material the better, the skimpier the swimsuit the faster. Now it's the opposite. Now because the material is so fast, it's the more material the better" (quoted by Brooks 2000). Although this does not appeal to some spectators, others find the cover-up all the more appealing. As one spectator put it: "They still enhance all their bits... These are completely full on. They're as tight as can be, really" (quoted by Harari 2000).

The new look is androgynous at one level because it compresses the lumps and bumps of the body but, because it is so tight, it also signals the imprisoned attributes of gender rather like S & M gear or transvestite costumes. This shift inevitably provoked a revised set of guidelines about swimwear design and its relation with the body. These guidelines specified in minute detail codes of modesty to ensure that the pubic area and upper body were covered. Such guidelines stem from assumptions about the body-space relation in the act of swimming and the role of fabric and clothing in that activity.

But there is more to the debate than questions of technical advantages and images of bodies. In Australia, the debate was transformed into issues of national identity. Although the new suits were an international issue for all competitive swimmers, the centrality of champion swimmers in the Australian pantheon of national heroes meant that the fastskin challenged accepted ideas about the swimming Aussie body. In other words, the new body undermined the narrative of the beautiful swimming and surfing Aussie body epitomised in popular culture by the 1937 Max Dupain photo "*The Sunbaker*". As Joan Kerr has noted, Australians have chosen iconic representations:

that symbolised the young white race in the most ancient continent controlling or 'mastering' the land. Survival of the old 'sunburnt country' ideal has helped [give Dupain's photograph] a place among the blessed. (Kerr 1999: 217)

Other historic icons of the Aussie swimmer body are champion swimmers, Annette Kellerman and Esther Williams. The former shocked the world in 1907 by wearing "a boy's black woollen racing suit that clung tightly to her torso and left her legs, arms and neck bare". She was charged by police on the grounds of revealing too much flesh:

So she sewed a pair of black stockings onto the bottom of the suit, attached sleeves and a neckpiece to the top and returned to [Boston's] Revere [beach] – as curvaceous and sexy as ever, but with nearly every centimetre of her skin covered to meet the demands of the law. Thus was born the one-piece swimsuit, which allowed women to look like women and made Kellerman the world's first aquatic glamour girl. (Johnson 1989)

Kellerman went on to become a successful Hollywood actor displaying her swimming prowess, a tradition emulated by Esther Williams in the 1950s. While Hollywood appropriated these Aussie bodies, their fame ensured international identification of Australians with swimming achievements. The Aussie body was born! This was a white body, typically male or the object of the male gaze, yet one that worshipped the sun and sought to be as brown as possible. While this was achieved by some, others found that their Anglo-Celtic heritage produced more freckles than bronzed golden flesh! Of course, the consequence of high levels of post war immigration changed the skin shades of Australians with Mediterranean, Eurasian and Melanesian skins coping rather better with the sun. But sun worship has meanwhile suffered a setback as people become more health conscious about the risk of melanoma – of which Australia has the highest rates in the world.

Even so, significant sections of the public are still explicit or implicit sun worshippers. While small children are now routinely clad in neck to knee swimming costumes on any Australian beach, their parents cavort in bikinis and speedos covered only in sun tan creams! Even lifesavers have caught the bug, most kitted out now in long sleeved tops or wet suits and sun hats. In tropical north Queensland, they also wear tights due to the threat of stingers whose tentacles can produce fatal lashes. But despite these modifications to the swimming, sun-worshipping Aussie, the myth of the bronzed Aussie remains.

This body is often purported to be a natural body and elided with an image of Australian-ness. It is the outdoor body and the exercising body, a body that is confident to tackle the natural elements. Along with swim wear, Australian brands of surf wear and beach wear such as Mambo, Billabong, Rip Curl, Quicksilver and the Brothers Nielsen have become internationally renown (Dent 2000; Nicklin 1993). Mambo, in particular, uses iconography that is hard edged – sometimes deemed obscene – yet is seen as encapsulating an “image of freedom, health, fitness and a frisson of rebellion”.²¹ As Dare Jennings, founder of Mambo put it:

What we have become, if you like, is an alternative Ken Done. Done works all the great cultural clichés and does very well out of it, and good luck to him – where we go for a more obscure iconography. We don't make a fuss about being Australian; it's more the attitude I'm interested in than the direct use of the icon imagery. Australians have a great hunger for things that are distinctively theirs without resorting to the obvious. (quoted by Nicklin 1993: 41)

In this national celebration of the body in its outdoors, casual and irreverent environment, the Aussie body is regarded as the locus of personal identity – its techniques elided with sense of self. It was this sentiment that lay behind Susie

O'Neill's reaction after breaking the 200m butterfly world record wearing 'normal togs':

'I really wanted to do it in short swimmers just for my own piece of mind. "I thought that if I'd got it in the longsuit I might just have maybe thought it was the suit that swam the time. Now I know it was me'. (Sports News 2000)

In other words, the swim suit becomes not just an extension of the body surface through the play between flesh and fabric, revelation and concealment through the cut and silhouette, but, more profoundly, of the body's mechanics.

In other words, the fastskin suit manipulates how the body feels and behaves both in and out of the suit. This is both a sensory feeling as well as a sensual feeling, again raising the connection between partially revealed or concealed bodies simultaneously evoking a play between sensuality and sexuality. The history of swimming and swimwear is a history intertwined with conventions of, and discourses about, modesty, manners and sexuality and how these are conveyed, embodied or exaggerated by the partially clad body and the wet body (see Craik 1994).

In the case of Australian debates about swimming and swimwear, these concerns have also been associated with debates about national identity. In actuality, it is probably the T-shirt that is the quintessential Aussie garment although many believe that it is the swimsuit – especially the bikini.²² Even though the bikini was a French invention and current style leaders in contemporary swimwear are probably swimwear design in Israel, America and Italy, Australians still believe that this type of swimwear belongs to the Aussie psyche and pantheon of inventions. In fact, conservatism, outraged controversy and prudish denunciations have marked Australia's flirtations with swimwear innovations. Notwithstanding this pattern, in popular culture, the swimsuit epitomises the Aussie outdoor and casual lifestyle of the modern Australian. As Sydney boutique owner, Belinda Seper has put it:

Surf culture is responsible for a large part of our international style... We're an outdoor society who are [sic] really comfortable with our bodies. We're not scared to show them off, we're not scared of colour – in fact, we embrace all those things, and if that translates into Australian style then we have one. (quoted by Alderson 2000)

The popularity of champion swimmers emanates from this narrative of the special place of swimming in the national psyche. There is a long history of treating champion swimmers as national heroes – until, of course, they lose the plot in or out of the water. Under these circumstances they are relegated to footnotes – until re-invented as national treasures in their older years (eg. Dawn Fraser, Shane Gould, Murray Rose, Tracey Wickham, Lisa Forest, Michael Wenden, Ilsa and John Konrad).

In short, the swimming body has become bound up with notions of national identity and its encapsulation in the iconic Aussie body. It is a body composed of the outdoors, natural elements, activity, exercise and projection into and with its

environment. The habitus of the Aussie swimming body extends beyond the body itself and encompasses the space and materials through which it is being propelled. The advent of the fastskin and similar full body suits unsettled that assumed cosy relation and drawn new body-space relations in the swimming habitus. Central to this re-configuration are new modes of revelation projected through an apparently more concealing swimsuit yet by silhouette, seaming and sensitisation of the skin inadvertently produced a new sense of sensual and sexual frisson amid the new array of body techniques about what constitutes the swimming body. As one advertising guru put it: “The costumes are so body hugging, it probably doesn’t leave too much to the imagination anyway. It’s probably sexier to wonder what’s there than see it all anyway”; in short, he quipped, “the great Aussie cossie just got bigger” (quoted by Beikoff 2000).

Australiana fashion: surface embodiments of national icons

On Tuesday evening last week, the local fashion world quietly divided... Some gushed about what a sensation it had been: The bold Australiana print! The graphic Aboriginal design! The rest cringed.

It was not the dot and line prints that were under fire. Woman Dreaming created on canvas by Aboriginal artist Jacinta Numina Waugh exclusively for Morrissey, won admiration. The question was whether or not the Australian public is ready to wear such brazenly national emblems again. Put simply, would you? (Honor 2000)

“Reconcile in Style” was the headline in *The Australian’s* Fashion Week 2000 coverage of the unexpected re-appearance of Australiana motifs in high fashion (Anon 2000a). While the headlines were denounced by some as tasteless, shallow and out of touch with political sensitivities,²³ there was generally little reaction to this ‘cannibalisation’ and appropriation of the language and substance of indigenous culture in fashion design. Marion Hume, editor of *Fashion Extra* raved that designer Peter Morrissey’s appropriation of motifs and use of ‘clashing colours’:

Worked as a fashion statement, rather than laboured as a political one. That said, it would be great if someone were to turn up to next Sunday’s Sydney reconciliation march in the sequined Dreaming dress, with the stilettos and matching clutchbag. (Hume 2000)

Morrissey was one of the most keen users of indigenous motifs in the 2000 Fashion Week collections following on from his T-shirt design from the previous year that combined the Australian with the Aboriginal flag and sold very well. But Morrissey himself, was reluctant to be seen making a political statement declaring:

I'm not a campaigner for rights and wrongs. I just wanted to make a statement that the country should come together. If I can make people wear this stuff on the street then I've made fashion; I haven't saved a race. (quoted by Epaminondas 2000)

Of greater interest to the fashion aficionados was whether Australiana motifs and themes should be incorporated in Australian fashion *at all!* The message seemed to be that this was somewhat unsophisticated. As evidence, the words of Karin Upton Baker, former editor of *Mode* magazine, were quoted when she had purportedly declared five years ago that: "there would be no koala bears and no wattle. Good thing she didn't mention frill-necked lizards" (The Buzz 2000). Several designers including high profile Japanese-born Akira Isogawa used desert frills in their collections while Morrissey was among several who used Aboriginal-like dot designs, ochre colours, and patterns and motifs familiar in the Australian landscape and artwork.

While some were deliberate appropriations, others were unintentional. An Easton Pearson shirt attracted the interest of Barneys Japan because of its apparent use of an Aboriginal print though it was:

actually inspired by some antique French rickrack we found in Paris! We would love to do Aboriginal prints in the future but if we did we would collaborate with an Aboriginal artist. It was a coincidence that what we offered this time *looked indigenous* [my italics] (quoted by Honnor 2000).

The turn to themes of Australiana may be a cyclical phenomenon but it is also a reflection of a recent phase of debate about national identity and another bout of popularity for revering national icons. This coincided with preparations for the Sydney Olympic Games (September 2000) that were promoted as signalling international attention on Australia as a "now" place – cosmopolitan, exciting, colourful and multicultural. In many ways the lead-up to the games proved to be an embarrassing litany of mal-administration, cronyism, corruption and scandal.

But above all, the lead-up to the games placed the international spotlight on the situation of Aboriginal Australians – both historically and currently. The refusal of the Prime Minister to apologise amid the troubled reconciliation process only magnified the issues and the hypocrisy of mainstream Australia in basking in the international recognition of indigenous culture especially artforms yet failing to genuinely redress basic living conditions and lifestyles of indigenous people.

In this context, the use of indigenous motifs and designs – or influence on design more generally - in fashion may be more than a superficial nod towards these weighty matters. Thelma McQuillan of *Harper's Bazaar* believed that the use of indigenous prints has:

been made much more relevant to our generation. The issue of reconciliation is pushing [indigenous culture] to the forefront of people's minds. I honestly believe our generation want to support indigenous culture and this could be the way of doing it. (quoted by Honnor 2000)

The incorporation of Australiana and indigenous motifs not only focuses attention on the political and cultural issues, it also takes art and design out of the rarefied environment of the cultural elite and gives it a circulation among a wider public. By doing so, and wearing bold distinctive Australian designs. According to Roslyn Premont, owner of Gallery Gondwana in Alice Springs, "you enter into dialogue with people. You communicate. It's not just wearable art" (quoted by Honnor 2000). In addition to using his frill neck lizard collar, Akira Isogawa also drew on the wallpaper designs of 1920s artist, Florence Broadhurst (cf. O'Neill 2006). These designs incorporated decorative allusions to Australian flora and fauna. For Isogawa:

The fascination with Florence Broadhurst is the timeless quality [of her designs] and the challenge of transformation. It is similar to my past collections where I have used vintage kimonos and brought them back to life. (Mead 2000)

Thus it has been argued that the recent use of Australiana in fashion reflects a more sophisticated and complicated sense of national identity and more nuanced sense of body-space relations.

Morrissey featured several garments "imprinted with a spectacular ochre and gold design by Aboriginal artist Jacinta Numina Waugh", an artist born in the Central Desert now living in Darwin (Epaminondas 2000). Waugh's painting was commissioned by Teresa Chang, who worked for an Aboriginal development unit, as part of a scheme to encourage indigenous cultural production and offer it to fashion designers for licensing. The work was the only one of twenty indigenous designers chosen by Morrissey as the basis for a textile design for his 1999 collection.²⁴ Her design was adapted from a work on canvas depicting Woman Dreaming, a pattern purportedly "passed down from generations of women in the Numina Waugh's family and handpainted onto the breasts of women in a traditional ceremony" (Epaminondas 2000). For his 2000 collection, Morrissey reworked the print in three new colours – hot pink, bright green and deep brown as well as adding a "boomerang print", "tortoise shell jeans" adapted from a wallpaper design reminiscent of Aboriginal art, "waratah dresses" and "grass of our native land skirts" (ibid). According to Morrissey's PR director, the artist "has been very generous with how we modify and adapt the painting for use as a print, and she receives a royalty on every piece of clothing sold" (quoted by Meade 2000: 50).

Epaminondas argues that this usage differs from earlier appropriations in several important ways. First, the designs are based on the work of indigenous artists who have been recompensed for use of their work. Second, the appropriations are more subtle manipulations of design elements rather than pictures merely being pictures on clothes (like, for example, tourist T-shirts that feature direct reproductions of

indigenous paintings). Third, Morrissey incorporates these elements in his “sexy” clothes trademark thereby “transforming cultural cringe into hip fringe” (ibid). So popular were Morrissey’s clothes that the entire collection was bought by the London store, Browns.

Commentators have argued that this new use of Aboriginal and Australiana imagery differs from previous experimentations with local motifs. The most common point of reference has been comparisons with the Flamingo Park stable and similar designs in the 1970s. By contrast, this use of Australian flora and fauna was “consciously kitsch”.²⁵ A range of Australiana fashion proliferated including Ken Done’s simplified images of places and Australian symbols that appealed to tourists especially Japanese, the more abstract Weiss designs also pitched at the discerning tourist market, and a myriad of T-shirt and fabric designs stocked everywhere from designer boutiques to chain departments stores, discount souvenir outlets and street markets.

The best known exponents of Australiana were designers Jenny Kee and Linda Jackson. They individually and jointly (as Flamingo Park) used Australian motifs as well as a range of other motifs of the exotic (derivative of African, New Guinean, Japanese and Ancient Cretan designs) in boldly coloured, extravagant designs to demonstrate a new level of Australian confidence and pride. This reflected a demonstrably multi-cultural Australia that drew on diverse cultural traditions and re-worked them into something distinctively Australian (Maynard 1999, 2000; ABC 1998; Markson Sparks!online 2000).

Initially these designs were largely representational transpositions – such as the Blinky Bill, Koala, Kooka and Kanga jumpers that attracted international attention after a pregnant Princess of Wales was photographed in a koala jumper – but gradually the designs became much more complex, eclectic and imaginative. While Kee’s designs were typically bold and bright, Linda Jackson’s work had a more romantic streak especially after she began collaborating with David McDiarmid (Grey 1999). Drawing on the bush as “our universal theme”, these designers were credited with creating:

An entirely new feeling in Australian fashion, design and cultural consciousness. Rejecting the “cringe” and its associated insecurities, they set about restoring a sense of delight and pleasure (with some attendant ironic humour) in Australian vernacular forms: indigenous flora and fauna, and popular symbols of Australian locality such as the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the Sydney Opera House and, more problematically, Aboriginal imagery. Undeterred by notions of kitsch, popular taste or high-keyed colour, they expanded the visual language of an audience tired of received notions of what constituted good taste and *haute couture*. (ibid)

Over time, the work of these designers became more and more eclectic and bound up with the subcultures and political culture of the sources of inspiration they drew on. In the case of Kee and Jackson, the each initiated strong connections with Aboriginal communities with reciprocity and acknowledgement to the fore (Maynard 1999, 2000). This approach has been reinforced by the recent rapid

development of indigenous cultural production – including clothing and accessory design – within indigenous communities, a trend that has prompted serious questions and unresolved issues about authenticity, copyright, ownership of designs and compensation. While there have been a number of high profile legal cases concerning such issues, this has not always guaranteed reparation and the adherence to codes of practice (Johnson 1996). Despite the development of labels of authenticity, the delayed implementation of the scheme does not augur well for the protection of indigenous work (Sexton 2000: 14).

One of the unresolved issues is the nature of the authenticity in question. It is often assumed that authenticity is one way, with westerners appropriating indigenous art and design motifs. However, some commentators have suggested that the process is more complex with mutual influences between the development of contemporary forms of indigenous art and western art. This argument negates some of the justification for elaborate copyright and authenticity protocols. In addition, some motifs, such as the boomerang, are regarded as having moved out of indigenous custodianship and into the public domain, and thus beyond the copyright issue. Morrissey's non-controversial use of a boomerang print in his textiles tends to confirm this argument.

The Kee and Jackson designs differed from the popularity of Aboriginal themes in "suburban paraphernalia" of the 1960s that fell "into disrepute" and were denounced "as hideous Australiana" in the early 1970s (Isaacs 1999). In fact, the use of Aboriginal motifs has an even longer history and some have argued has been part of the development of Australian culture and a sense of national culture from the outset. Jennifer Isaacs identifies the Australian-isation of craft courses between 1890 and 1910 as a turning point when motifs of Australian flora and fauna became incorporated into decorative designs:

By the 1920s, boomerangs appeared frequently amongst the wattle, kangaroos and emus on logos, mastheads, insignia and coats of arms... Boomerangs, shields and crossed spears entered the composition [of certificates] to add historical and regional authenticity. (Isaacs 1999: 66)

From the 1920s, artist Margaret Preston – perhaps Australia's best known woman artist - actively championed recognition of Aboriginal art and design as a source of inspiration for Australian artists and the basis for the development of a distinctive national culture (ibid: 66, 68; Maynard 2000: 144; Cooke 1998). Preston was also perhaps the first to recognise the aesthetics of Aboriginal art for what they were.²⁶ According to Missingham:

The work of Aboriginal painters impressed her profoundly, not to the point of facile imitation, she was too considerable artist for this, but because it was clear to her that the whole business of conveying life through painting was not wrapped up in a verisimilitude of external appearances... She attempted in fact to impose on the currently prevailing naturalistic Australian-English way of seeing and painting, a more austere and intellectual perception and ... *Australian* atmosphere: ... a certain tonality of colours ... most characteristic of the Australian bush: a vivid, scrubby, spiky and persistent use of line-

embracing blacks, and above all perhaps, an acceptance of the white ground or canvas as a base from which everything springs clearly into a vivid life. (ibid: 90)

She travelled widely and was actively influenced by a myriad of other cultural aesthetic forms but travel also intensified her championing of “a distinctive national art form”. She exhorted other artists “to stop aping outmoded European traditions, to try to discover the beginnings of a new tradition more suited to Australia” (ibid: 95). While full appreciation of Preston’s work and promotion of a national culture did not happen in her lifetime, she was not alone in taking up Aboriginal motifs and recognising the distinctiveness of indigenous and Australian motifs in design. Isaacs (1999) and Cooke (1998) chart the work of Gert Selheim (particularly in advertising and travel posters), Frances Derham (cards, decorative arts), Byram Mansell, Frances Burke (textiles), Elizabeth Durack, products for the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games, Douglas Annand (fabrics and murals), David Malangi (the first \$1 note) and Martin Boyd Pottery as examples of the widespread use of indigenous imagery in a vast range of artistic, commercial, institutional and domestic contexts.

During the same period, recognition of the significance of Aboriginal culture and artefacts became apparent in museum and gallery exhibitions and collection policies. Much of this fascination stemmed from the belief that Aboriginal culture was dying out. Yet, increasing familiarity with the distinctiveness of Aboriginal concepts of design perhaps unwittingly educated the general public about the importance of acknowledging that “Aboriginal Australia is the real Australia”. This set the scene for the belated encouragement of indigenous cultural production (Isaacs 1999: 72).

Isaacs concludes that recent appropriations of indigenous art in Australian culture signal both a revised way of Australians ‘signalling to the world [that] “this is what we are”, but also (perhaps more significantly), others are signalling that “this is what *they think* we are” (ibid: 74). While the fashion for Australian and Aboriginality may wax and wane, these authors suggest that there is a more responsible and politically aware process of cultural borrowing that recognises the unique history of Australia and its original inhabitants as a central element in any configuration of national identity and culture. To this end, Australian motifs will persist and continue to convey both serious and irreverent dimensions. Asked if a skirt made from a “scaly” fabric was “the goanna print”, Morrissey quipped, “I’ve never thought of it like that before. I’m going to call it blue tongue now” (quoted by Epaminondas 2000).

Official recognition of Australian designs came in the form of the selection of Morrissey, Kee and Lisa Ho as designers of the outfits for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games opening ceremony. Promising “innovative costume pieces”, these designers were chosen because of their Australian design approach which ceremony organiser, Ric Birch, says, would provide a “distinctive visual quality to the ... ceremony” (quoted by Mead 2000). Mambo took the advice of athletes and abandoned ties and formal uniforms, opting instead for yellow and ochre striped shirts, bronze trousers and skirts, and ochre loose fitting jackets (with the Mambo

logo emblazoned inside). For the closing ceremony, Mambo swapped the yellow shirts for a colourful shirt featuring a typical Mambo rendition of an Aussie suburban landscape that instantly became collectors' items.

Conclusion: reconciling Australian-ness and un-Australian-ness in the modalities of Aussie bodies

These examples of different ways in which body-clothes relations in Australia have been produced each depend on explicit narratives about the peculiarities of the Aussie body. While these narratives intersect and overlap, there are distinct elements that are picked up in each version reflecting specific preoccupations. While the *swimming body* continually ignites issues of modesty in the process of revelation and concealment, the *Australiana body* reflects the debate about the fit between settler bodies, the environment and Australia's first inhabitants. Finally the *outback body* re-works concepts of the bush, hard yakka and the battler in a narrative about adversity and survival. Oddest of all is the fact that although these bodies are insistently – even stridently – nationalistic in tone – their appeal has not only grown domestically but internationally. Perhaps these bodies are working as counterpoints to other narratives or perhaps they are together devising a body habitus for the truly global body.

Images of “the national” continue to be constructed through clothes and modes of representation. Distinctive fashions in clothing and how they are depicted have changed with the globalisation of Australian culture. Australia and culture were traditionally seen as contradictory yet in recent years, diverse forms of Australian culture have been exported and re-imported. Australians now have an internationalised and cosmopolitan image of themselves that has been reflected in trends in fashion and clothing. The dominant types of dress that have been explored here, namely “bush” wear, swim and surf wear, and Australiana and indigenous design, remain the foundations of national dress and an Australian sense of style. But, as these modes are embedded in their own cultural politics, any sense of Australian-ness equally evokes an allusion to un-Australian-ness. National dress is the most vexed arena in which such debates are played out.

Meanwhile, Australia has become a multi-cultural society with many other cultural forms of dress and fashion moulding national culture. It is not yet clear to what extent these new cultural influences have changed the *zeitgeist* of national identity how it is represented in the fashion media and popular culture. These remain research issues for the future.

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² Examples of Australians who have become international icons of Australian-ness include entertainer "The Boy From Oz" Peter Allen, "Crocodile Hunter" Steve Irwin, "Crocodile Dundee" Paul Hogan and "The Great White Shark" Greg Norman.

³ Examples of Australian designers who have achieved success internationally include Sass and Bide, Easton Pearson, Colette Dinnegan, Akira Isogawa and Toni Maticevski, Michele Jank, Theodore and Scanlan, and Nicola Finetti.

⁴ Yet the donning of outback wear can also be prone to mis-interpretation. An employee of the National Farmers Federation from an urban background chose not to wear "outback" gear on rural visits after hearing members scathingly ridicule a former NFF employee who, they said, used to turn up wearing an Akubra, moleskins and riding boots "pretending he was one of us"! Clearly rural people were applying their own authenticity test. (pers. com.).

⁵ An amalgamation of James and Thomas Cuthbertson's and John Blundstone and Son. The enterprise consisted on a tannery, manufacturing premises and retailing outlet.

⁶ www.blundstoneusa.com.

⁷ www.blundstone.com.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ Grandfather of actor Nicole Kidman, an Aussie icon in her own right!

¹² www.rmwilliams.com.au.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ www.australiana-design.com.au.

¹⁵ www.australianboot.com.

¹⁶ www.premiers.qld.gov.au.

¹⁷ See, for example, the web sites for Akubra, Blundstone, R. M. Williams and Bootsonline.

¹⁸ www.akubra.com.au.

¹⁹ Country Road is an established Australian clothing and lifestyle (manchester, knick knacks, etc) that has had a solid domestic presence and made occasional forays into international markets.

²⁰ Max Markson cited by Beikoff (2000).

²¹ Alexandra Joel cited by Payget 1999; cf. Mambo 1994.

²² Others have suggested that Australia's national costume is a tracksuit and 'ug' boots (sheepskin boots with thick rubber soles)!

²³ For example, in the following week's Media section of *The Australian* and ABC television's *Media Watch*.

²⁴ Although some other work and similar schemes were adopted or adapted for the fashion industry, most collapsed due to the difficulty of meeting deadlines and the frantic cycle of the fashion industry.

²⁵ Roger Leong, Director of Decorative Arts at the National Gallery of Australia, cited by Honnor 2000.

²⁶ Bernard Smith cited by Missingham 1963: 92.