In the February 2002 issue of *Media International Australia incorporating Culture and Policy*, ‘Culture: Development, Industry, Distribution’, issue editors Lisanne Gibson and Tom O’Regan identified ‘a shift in the underlying principles governing contemporary cultural policy’. Of ‘particular importance in this refocusing’, they argued, were ‘the two distinct but related notions of “cultural development” and the “creative industries”’ (Gibson and O’Regan, 2002: 5). That issue interrogated the then emerging creative industries policy discourses and assayed some of their consequences for existing formulations of cultural and media policy. This issue, edited by Tom O’Regan, Lisanne Gibson and Paul Jeffcutt, is *MIA*’s second ‘creative industries’ issue. It begins where the previous issue left off, with its tantalising suggestion that ‘effective cultural policy-making needs to be premised on a dual engagement with the global conditions of cultural practice and consumption and the actual conditions of local cultural production and consumption’ (Gibson and O’Regan, 2002: 8). Concepts of ‘cultural cluster’ and ‘cultural network’ have been the conceptual tools through which policy-makers and theorists have sought to manage and account for creative practice and industry in ways which encompass both local and global conditions of production and consumption. The articles in this volume analyse, account for, describe, advocate and critique a variety of articulations and applications of ‘cultural cluster’ and ‘cultural network’, and in so doing both provide a current snapshot of contemporary policy and theory on the creative industries, and suggest future directions.

A number of things have changed in the time which has passed between these two issues. First, the discursive relations between culture and the economy have become more ensconced and have been operationalised in particular ways. Creative city frameworks have been adopted by local, city and state governments — particularly in the development of cultural precincts which aim both to be economically successful (as tourist precincts and/or creative industrial hotspots, for instance), and to provide enhanced cultural access and effect social cohesion. Creative cluster development has become an explicit policy of economic development portfolios at the regional, state and national levels, as well as a grail for planners. Cultural and media policy studies have had to play catch-up with analytical frameworks and vocabulary, stressing ‘value chains’, ‘inputs’ and ‘outputs’, and the like. In short, creative industries have become a ‘dominant’ configuration in regional and national economic development.

Our position in assembling this issue is to describe, analyse and in some cases challenge the cluster development and creative industries frameworks currently being advanced. Our aim in doing so is not to posit a principled criticism of them for confusing culture and economics (or selling out culture to economics). Rather,
it is to work within these logics themselves, outlining problems and issues emerging from their application and theorisation.

This issue is purposefully titled ‘Creative Networks’, not ‘creative clusters’, for a number of reasons. It flags our unease with the kind of economic paradigm from which the term ‘cluster’ emerges, and which has both coloured and constrained its subsequent use. It avoids simplified notions of geographical situatedness which can mitigate against a balanced consideration of local conditions of practice and consumption in relation to global factors of policy, production and consumption. It appropriately describes the interrelatedness of processes of creative origination, application, publishing, distribution and consumption. It gestures to the cultural, social and economic inputs and outputs which feed into the various stages of the creative process. And it is ‘friendly’ to the situated and non-situated dimensions within which these processes occur, where and from whom these inputs and outputs originate, and what and whom they affect. ‘Creative ecology’ is another term which is used by a number of the authors in this issue to evoke the organicism of the interrelatedness of these processes, influences and effects (see articles by Jeffcutt, Shorthose, O’Connor).

This issue commences with a consideration of the history of, and the contemporary policy conditions which frame, creative industries policy in Australia and Britain. The articles by Steven Redhead, and by Tom O’Regan and Mark Ryan, outline two intersecting but identifiably different trajectories for ‘creative networks’. Redhead’s discussion of the emergence and development of creative industries policy in Britain describes a policy logic which leads to creative city policy planning paradigms and seeks synergies and connections among elements of the creative/cultural sector. O’Regan and Ryan’s consideration of the parallel policy history in Australia accounts for the contemporary policy articulations there where creative industries are understood primarily in relation to innovation, information communication technologies (ICT) and broader information economy and society agendas. These two articles describe contrasting constellations of the relations between culture and government: Redhead describes ‘the new cultural state’; O’Regan and Ryan describe culture and government relations articulated to ‘the knowledge “state”’.

Andy Pratt critically assesses the literature on ‘clustering’ and argues that the notion of ‘creative clusters’ is ‘not the best place to begin for either analysis or policy development’. Instead, Pratt argues for an ‘organisationally informed production system model . . . as it [is] open to the specificities of industries, and the notion of embedding in and across locations’. He argues especially for forms of analysis which are attentive to the specific conditions of production and consumption, including non-economic factors. Paul Jeffcutt’s pioneering in-depth study of creative industries in Northern Ireland does precisely this. He considers the organisation of knowledge- and transaction-based relationships in the cultural economy, demonstrating the problems facing more traditional forms of industry mapping when applied to creative industries. Finding not so much clusters as networks and ‘ecosystems’, Jeffcutt argues that development strategies must be ecological. The challenge for strategic research and policy is then to build situated knowledges. This advocacy of situated research is an important ongoing theme in the issue.
Chris Gibson and Daniel Robinson provide an analysis of a nascent music industry network in regional New South Wales in Australia. They identify some of the problems faced by non-urban creative networks, but also — importantly — they identify the value-adding function of the network for the region. These contributions are not simply economic (indeed, if measured only in economic terms, one might identify this network as unimportant); rather, Gibson and Robinson identify some of the myriad of social and cultural benefits the network brings. By contrast, the unit of analysis in Greg Hearn, Abraham Ninan, Ian Rogers, Stuart Cunningham and Susan Luckman’s study of the music industry is the state of Queensland, Australia. Like the Northern Ireland of Jeffcutt’s study, it includes a significant urban conurbation in Brisbane, where the majority of the creative industry activity is located; also like Belfast, this conurbation does not have global media city functions. They investigate the music industry in Queensland through the lens of first- and second-tier levels of production and distribution, identifying the music industry as predominantly existing at the second-tier level and proposing a policy focus which would facilitate connections with the first tier.

Susan Ward explores the contemporary intersection of creative industries strategies, cluster development logics and creative city paradigms in a particular city and state setting of Brisbane and Queensland. She uses the working out of these logics in film and fantasy fiction areas to both identify different kinds of application of cluster development and to consider the distances between these and traditional film and cultural policy models. In doing so, her analysis usefully forms a bridge between previous articles focusing on cluster development and the more explicit creative city concerns of subsequent articles.

Justin O’Connor considers the limitations inherent in popular governmental strategies for making their regions economically competitive in the global marketplace, through ‘creative cities’ policy paradigms built on the development of cultural industry clusters. The strategy here is to capture and develop the ‘genius loci’, or the tacit knowledge of the city, which is at the creative core of a cluster or network. Through this harnessing — or so the story goes — the city will become a new economic powerhouse, competitive in the global knowledge economy. O’Connor analyses the ways in which culture is at the service of economy and economic development in these formulations. He argues that we are teetering at the edge of culture’s ‘final annexation’ to economics. For O’Connor, our cultural policy research must retain a focus on the social and political; researchers should not simply become handmaidens to economic development. He maintains that we need ‘a cultural politics of “commodified cultural production” which looks to the life and culture of cities as a thing of value for itself ... not simply to become factors of production’.

Jim Shorthose also questions the utility of economic calculus in understanding the creative milieu. Shorthose argues for an ethnographic approach to creative industries research which would identify the complex cultural, social and economic dynamics of work, employment, distribution and consumption in the cultural sector, and in so doing illuminate the informal, as well as the formal, benefits of creative networks.

The next two articles scope out possible directions for future work. Pat Wise and Sally Breen’s focus is on the relations between real estate developers and the visual arts sector, describing the ways in which property developers utilise the
visual arts and cultural development discourses to sell developments in a new city. For their part, Stuart Cunningham, Terry Cutler, Greg Hearn, Mark Ryan and Michael Keane consider the ways in which an innovation and research and development agenda could shape the direction of thinking about the creative industries. They return to elements of O'Regan and Ryan's consideration of the emergence of ICT- and innovation-centred agendas for the creative industries, exploring how a research, development and innovation focus could remake and reposition the relations among cultural institutions, training providers and digital contents and applications industries.

While closely focused on creative industries policy and theory, this issue presents discussions which will be of use to a variety of constituencies. As well as those directly involved in cultural policy development, discussions in relation to creative networks also bear on those involved in planning more broadly, including social, urban and economic planning. The authors in this issue come from a range of academic disciplines, including cultural and media policy, management, cultural geography, economic geography and cultural studies. In assembling this issue, we have attempted to add to an interdisciplinary dialogue between these modes of analysis as they bear on the local and global conditions of cultural governance and consumption. In adding to this interdisciplinary and international discussion, we note forthcoming special issues of the International Journal of Cultural Policy and Urban Studies which deal with this topic.

References

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Tom O’Regan is Professor of Cultural and Media Studies in the School of English, Media Studies and Art History, University of Queensland.

Lisanne Gibson is a Research Fellow at the Cultural Industries and Practices Research Centre, University of Newcastle and from September 2004 at the Center for Arts and Cultural Policy Studies, Princeton University.

Paul Jeffcutt is Director of the Centre for Creative Industry and Professor of Management Knowledge at Queens University, Belfast.