



# CU Book Review

**Elizabeth Jacka (ed.), *Continental Shift: Globalisation and Culture*  
(Sydney: Local Consumption Press 1993), \$24.95 pb.**

**This edited collection of essays, coming out of a conference at the University of Technology, Sydney in August 1991, has been some time in coming, but still makes for interesting and valuable reading.**

Its concern is to assess critically the relationship between globalisation and 'local' cultures, in the context of a media-centred, postmodern culture characterised by eclecticism, bricolage and the increasingly heterogeneous nature of national cultures. In particular, the various authors seek to question some received wisdoms of cultural theory, like the view that globalisation is simply a gloss placed upon what is actually the imposition of American 'cultural imperialism' upon otherwise pristine 'national identities'.

One aim of the book is to be interdisciplinary. The point is made that as culture is increasingly commodified, then analysis is needed of both the political economy of global cultural flows, and the textual appeal of cultural objects across national boundaries and among different populations. The essays by John Frow on cultural markets, Tom O'Regan on Hollywood cinema, John Sinclair on Mexican and Brazilian television, and Tony Mitchell on 'World Music' address such themes.

The book contests the implications of these trends for theoretical analysis. While Louise Johnson's essay on the restructuring of the textiles industry in Geelong reiterates the importance of a neo-Marxist political economy approach, Meaghan Morris's 'The Man in the Mirror' undertakes a withering critique of David Harvey's attempt to incorporate such changes into the framework of neo-Marxist theory. Morris argues that such an approach devalues feminist, anti-racist and postcolonialist contributions in the name of preserving the capacity of 'total theory' to explain everything. McKenzie Wark explores the various perspectives he has found useful in

developing an analysis of global media events such as the Gulf War and the Tiananmen Square massacre, ranging from critical geography and liberal journalism to the 'vectoral' approach of theorists such as Paul Virilio.

*Continental Shift* is not an easy read for those unacquainted with recent theories in cultural studies and contemporary philosophy. Its readership is more likely to be found among humanities academics and students than policy-makers and public interest groups. If this is the case, then it is unfortunate for two reasons.

While phrases such as the 'global media vector' may sound like jargon, they actually address critical phenomena in contemporary mass media ranging from the Dead Elvis cult to the role played by fax machines and photocopiers in the fall of Communist governments in Eastern Europe, and the role of amateur video footage of the Rodney King bashing in triggering the Los Angeles riots. Global flows of media and information now frame the

fabric of our everyday life, and their impacts and consequences remain complex and unpredictable.

It is also a problem since the issues surrounding globalisation and media, and their implications for national strategies, have profound consequences for those concerned with current policy. Communications flows are increasingly global, they are not one-way, and the perceptions of cultural objects differ considerably within Australian society. As Elizabeth Jacka points out in her introduction, the rhetoric of globalisation is currently the property of those who tie it to deregulation and market forces. As the essays in *Continental Shift* make clear, the forces and flows associated with the globalisation of culture can be channelled in various directions, and the challenge for those with a different view of global cosmopolitanism to Rupert Murdoch is to think seriously about the possibilities, as well as the problems. □

Terry Flew

## Not Our David Hill?

**A 17 September media release from the CRTC lists applications received to provide new specialty, pay TV and pay-per-view services in Canada.**

Among the applicants is one David Hill, who has applied to provide a national pay-per-view sports service.

Is the ABC's Managing Director expanding the Corporation's empire still further? Can we expect Aussie Rules or the Todd River Regatta to become cult viewing for Canadians?

Before Friends of the ABC get their knickers in a knot, we should point out that the applicant is David G Hill. According to Who's Who, our David has no middle initial. □