Precarity, public value and power economies:
the effects of industrial change on small screen content creators -
A view from behind the lens

by

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Exegesis
submitted to Flinders University
in partial fulfillment of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy by Creative Artefact in Creative Arts (Screen & Media, Australian Television)

College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences
16 March 2023

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ABSTRACT

The screen industry in Australia is undergoing upheaval; arguably its largest since the inception of broadcasting in the early twentieth century. Technology, audience behaviour and industry business models are being transformed by national and transnational factors, while government regulation struggles to keep pace. The consequences for creative practitioners are considerable, and include increased precarity and reduced creative agency. This exegesis is designed to illuminate the practical outcomes of industrial change at ground level with particular focus on the small screen, through an examination of a case study: the television arts documentary, *Getting Their Acts Together* (Jasek 2020), made by this author for Australia's national public service broadcaster, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC).

This 'insider account' commences with a macro-level analysis placing contemporary industry conditions into historical context. Included is discussion of the rise and decline of 'nationing', a term coined by Rowe, Turner & Waterton (2018) to describe the development of national culture through the use of cultural policy; and challenges to the role of public broadcasting whose remit is to foster culturally representative work with public benefit. It shows that forces acting on practitioners now are direct outcomes of conditions set at the beginnings of Australian broadcasting, accounting for their depth and pervasiveness, and include an intertwining of cultural and economic goals which operate to the detriment of the former.

The exegesis proceeds to a meso-level illumination of the effects of industrial change at the level of organisations and labour. As the program mix and business models of free-to-air television have been disrupted by the arrival of digital technologies and streaming services, analysis shows increased levels of precarity for production companies and individual practitioners, despite frequent industry rhetoric to the contrary. Documentary for public service broadcasters (PSBs), especially the ABC, has assumed increased importance for filmmakers seeking to create culturally representative work, a point highlighted by examination of funding models that favour documentary with social benefit. Comparison is

made between PSBs in Australia and other Western liberal democracies (especially the UK's BBC), who rely increasingly on commercial metrics to justify their existence, putting them at odds with their public service remits and the creative artists engaged to service those remits. This leads to discussion of a theory of creative opposition at times of industrial change drawing on the work of Dwyer (2019b) and Bourdieu (1996); a power dynamic at the heart of this exegesis.

The outworkings are demonstrated at micro-level through detailed examination of conditions encountered during production of the case study. They will show that conflict between economic metrics and social benefit has come to lie at the heart of the ABC's present operations; and that this conflict is having corrosive effects on practitioners' creative autonomy.

The exegesis concludes with reflections regarding tensions between economics and creative agency, the 'valuation of value', and the links between aesthetic vitality, diversity of cultural forms, and the health of the public sphere.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis:

1. does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university

2. and the research within will not be submitted for any other future degree or diploma without the permission of Flinders University; and

3. to the best of my knowledge and belief, does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed: RICHARD JASEK

Date: 16th March 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing projects, like children, take a village to raise. This exegesis is no different, a point sharpened because I have scant experience writing academic prose. So I start with profound thanks to my principal supervisor, Associate Professor Julia Erhart, of Flinders University's College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences. Her dedication, enthusiasm and patience with my stumbling efforts at scholarship were remarkable and humbling; her support in practical matters above and beyond. When we needed additional equipment to help make our documentary she was there, provisioning university support. When the film needed me, she helped me buy time with an intermission. When financial pressures mounted, she became a reference-writing factory, resulting in success with a grant. Thank you Julia, none of this would have been possible without you. I am forever in your debt.

Thank you too, Dr. Nicholas Godfrey, my associate supervisor, for your timely emails with academic papers, input and fresh ideas. It goes without saying that any errors in what follows are mine alone.

I also thank Flinders University for the contribution of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship to assist with this PhD.

Thank you to my screen industry partners-in-arms on the making of *Getting Their Acts Together*: SLA Films' Anna Vincent and Bonnie McBride; and editor and co-writer David Scarborough. Your friendship, creative judgement and professionalism have been unwavering over the several films we have made together, and turned the one discussed here into something we can all be proud of.

Finally, thank you to my partner Bernice Devereaux. You, most of all, have borne my absences, physical and mental, with good humour and love, and even claimed the outcome is interesting, despite the academic language and annoying citations in brackets. Whether it's really worth reading we leave for others to judge.

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1 PREFACE

It is Monday March 16th, 2020, and we are anxiously awaiting notes from our commissioning broadcaster on the latest cut of our documentary: *Getting Their Acts Together*.

It's been a long road to get to this point.

Back in late 2018 a newly-appointed Executive Producer (EP) responsible for commissioning arts programs at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), approached us with an idea for a one-hour behind-the-scenes arts documentary about the process of curating Australia's flagship Arts Festival, the Adelaide Festival, as it constructed its 60th Anniversary program. Specifically, it would follow the Festival's charismatic Artistic Directors, Rachel Healy and Neil Armfield. Both highly accomplished arts figures, and with a prior nine-year professional association at Sydney's Belvoir Street Theatre, Healy and Armfield had been in their current role for two years and in that time transformed the Adelaide Festival artistically and financially. Our ABC EP had been struck by their highly engaging public personae: a kind of bickering double-act, self-described by Armfield as "like a married couple without the sex". She wished to seize this opportunity to celebrate the arts, not just for an audience of "Festival cognoscenti", but also for a wider viewing public who may not have strong connections with the field, and in so doing create a satisfying television hour.

The ABC, Australia's largest national public broadcaster, has historically been regarded by many in the industry as a 'safe haven', willing to undertake formally innovative projects that meet its Charter obligations to promote Australia's national culture through production of local content, and to foster the voices and careers of the individual artists and creators working in media fields. Now, at a time of challenge to local Australian screen content brought about by accelerating industrial change - a phenomenon widely discussed both within and without the academy (inter alia, Cunningham, Flew & Swift 2015; Lobato 2018a, 2018b; Lobato & Meese 2016; Lotz, Potter & Johnson 2022; Lotz, Potter, McCutcheon, et al. 2021; Lotz & Sanson 2021; Rowe, Turner & Waterton 2018; Turner 2016, 2018b) - the opportunity to collaborate with the organisation was exciting. Could it lead to a project that combined creative experimentation with audience outreach, in ways not possible elsewhere in the screen industry?

My own personal and professional history is of relevance. I have 35 years' experience directing a substantial number of Australia's mainstream television drama shows, spanning multiple genres on all its broadcasting networks. I was also producer of the primetime crime drama, *City Homicide* (2007-2011), and executive producer of the long-running television soap, *Neighbours* (1985-2022 resumed 2023), in which latter role I successfully undertook a restoration of the show's ratings, which had slumped. My documentary outputs to that point included three formally innovative one-hour works, comprising two science biographies (*Driven to Diffraction: the Story of William and Lawrence Bragg,* 2008; and *Microbes to Macrobes: the Story of Frank Fenner,* 2011); and an arts film (*Making a Mark,* 2017). My professional history is thus predominantly in the commercial mainstream, where success is measured by audience viewing numbers and an ability to work within time and budgetary constraints. My personal background is in the so-called 'high arts': my father was a concert violinist, and I had studied classical piano from the age of 5. I am also a trustee-director on the boards of two philanthropic organisations focussed on the arts, both of which have positive relations with the Adelaide Festival. The ABC felt this confluence of personal attributes and professional experience made me an attractive choice to direct a documentary that would involve a long-term observation in the 'high arts', but which sought to engage with as wide an audience as possible.

Which brings us back to now.

After four months of development and fundraising in close collaboration with the ABC, a shoot spanning 15 months and generating 200 separate interviews and over 1000 hours of footage, we have arrived at a close-to-completed edit of the film, known in the industry as the 'fine cut'. Over the weekend we have sent it to our ABC EP for comment, and while she has seen earlier versions of the film, this is the first time the project has coalesced into a meaningful form- in other words, it has finally become 'real'. A few friends and colleagues have been shown the film in confidence, and have responded enthusiastically, as have the Festival themselves. With only five days left in our edit schedule we hope this is a harbinger of our ABC EP's reaction.

Finally, late in the afternoon, her notes arrive. They are a 14-page stream of consciousness that tear the film to shreds.

How has it gone so wrong?

This exegesis will examine the push and pull of industrial, political, economic and individual-professional factors that brought competing values, expectations and aspirations to bear on this project. A macro picture that diachronically locates issues currently besetting the sector (including a public service broadcaster labouring under ongoing funding pressure) will provide broader context to a finer-grained, meso-level picture of industrial precarity, and a micro analysis of the on-the-ground consequences for the individual practitioner. By using *Getting Their Acts Together* as a case study we will discuss how industrial change in television is affecting Australian practitioners who, in an environment of precarity, are attempting to build and maintain their careers through the creation of culturally representative Australian content with public value. The conclusions I reach, particularly regarding the ABC, are my own and should not be taken implicitly to reflect the views of my production colleagues. However, by bringing together the varied perspectives of cultural and media studies, industry and production studies, and through reflexive analysis of my case study's production process, I hope to answer my central research question, namely: in light of industrial change transforming the broadcasting industry, to what extent is it possible for practitioners to retain creative control, especially with works of public value?

2 METHODOLOGY

This is a work of screen production research in a field widely known under the umbrella term: 'creative practice research', in which a creative artefact "sits at the centre of the research project, regardless of how it is undertaken/made/developed" (Batty & Kerrigan 2018, p. 7). Referring to other literature in the field, Phillip McIntyre (2018) uses the term "Practice Based Enquiry", to explain the purpose of this approach to scholarly enquiry:

> PBE is a process in which practitioners 'enquire into their own practices to produce assessable reports and artefacts' (Murray and Lawrence 2000, p. 10) and it is directed 'towards the acquisition of intellectual autonomy, improved judgement making and enhanced technical competence' (McIntyre 2018, p. 94)

The field has evolved over the past few decades despite sometimes uneasy discussion within the academy over its validity (see, for instance, Bell 2009; Brabazon & Dagli 2010; Kroll 2002; Meyrick 2014; Strand 1998), however in Australia in recent years it has begun to stabilize, as forms of discovery and their accompanying definitions have emerged and been tested through various combinations of creative practice and research (e.g. Batty et al. 2019). Screen production research, as a subset of creative practice research, includes forms that have been variously described (e.g. Skains 2018; Smith & Dean 2009). I opt here to use Batty & Kerrigan's nomenclature, which breaks these forms into four broad pathways labelled: "practice-based research" and its affiliated "research-led practice"; and "practice-led research" and its affiliated "practice-as-research" (op. cit., p. 2). The terms are similar so can be confusing, but they describe important differences which deserve some unpacking as a prelude to positioning my own research in the field.

Research that is specifically intended to result in a screen work as an outcome falls into the realms of "research-led practice" and "practice-based research". These have generated a wide array of theory-driven films as objects of embodied knowledge, often where the research question is connected to the subject matter of the screen work (inter alia Dooley 2014; Higgins & Cole 2018). Such works stand in contrast to "practice-led-research" and its affiliated "practice-as-research" (e.g. Kelly 2018; Wotherspoon 2012), where screen works are "used as a site for systematically gathering reflections on the process of doing/making, in order to contribute

knowledge to the practice of doing/making" (Batty & Kerrigan 2018, p. 7). The former category produces works as objects of research, while the latter uses works as sites of research that may be used to examine the surrounding field and its processes.

The intention of my research is to use *Getting Their Acts Together* as a case study/site of field work to test ideas about media industry operation that are often constructed in the abstract, by analysing my responses as a practitioner to changed industrial circumstances that appear to be decisive for the sector. It involves what Batty & Kerrigan term "systematic reflection upon a production to gain rigorous insights into how a work was made" (op. cit. , p. 1) and accordingly falls into the realm of practice-led research.

In practice-led research the relationship between the work to be studied and its accompanying documentation can be variable; indeed Brad Haseman and Daniel Mafe, in their contribution to Smith and Dean (2009), point out that this form of research can be messy and complex: "[F]rom the outset practice-led research is multidisciplinary. It is built, at times uneasily, from contrasting registers of professional activity, creative practice and academic research" (p. 218). As a result, when creative practitioners present accounts of their work inevitable questions arise around subjectivity, and whether research results can have wider applicability. Sarah Peters (2020) discusses this problem with reference to her verbatim theatre research:

> Roberta Mock in "Researching the Body in/as Performance" argues that documentation in practice-led research is always personal and subjective (2011, p. 228) and that this potential for research findings to only be relevant to one specific situation may be problematic when identifying findings that are transferable beyond that one research context (p. 3341).

As a filmmaker who has spent a career creating meaning on screen, I am all too aware of how mutable and subjective 'meaning' and 'truth' can be. The change in a cut point by a single frame can completely alter the viewer's perception of the reality being presented, and this perception may vary from viewer to viewer. Susan Kerrigan's discussion of ontologies and epistemologies in arts disciplines contains a quote from Crotty that summarises my own position:

> 'There is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it. Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world. There is no meaning without a mind. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed' (quoted in Kerrigan 2018, p. 19).

The use of an object as a case study can answer questions of subjectivity by creating claims that are generalisable, not through the illumination of 'the case', but rather, 'the problem in the case'. Expanding on the point, Julian Meyrick (2014), explains that the object's:

> …analytical value does not lie in the 'whole' which a case, empirically speaking, comprises, but in its constituting elements which have been subtracted from its phenomenal appearance and examined *as* elements via a hierarchy of concepts …What stands to be explained (clarified) is not the case … but a problem in the case, constructed as an object of study. This object, properly described via a hierarchy of concepts, presents as divisible, comparable and available to analytical extension (or historical generalisation) (pp. 5-6) .

He later cites Pierre Bourdieu, who distils this to: "a well-constructed single case is no longer singular" (ibid, p. 7).

Meyrick is not alone in noting that case studies "require the utilization of a number of research methods; a 'triangulation' of data…to ensure the construction of a broader intellectual vista" (ibid, p. 7). Similarly, Peters (op. cit.), citing others:

> O'Toole (2006, p. 37) and Taylor (1996, p. 43) advocate that the integration of triangulation combats this concern [subjectivity] and serves to validate and corroborate the findings; that triangulation in research ensures findings are plausible, credible and transferable (O'Toole, 2006, p. 37 cited in Peters, 2020, p. 3341).

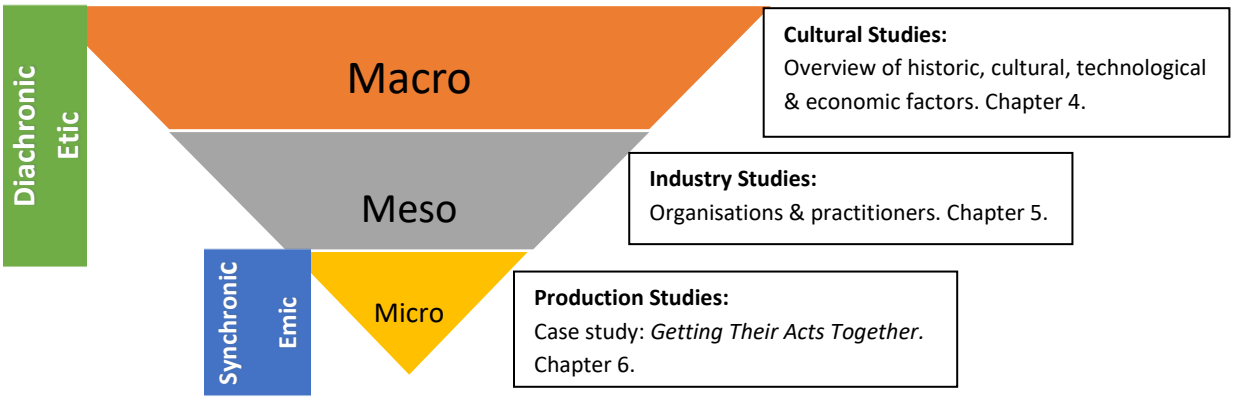
The point is especially pertinent to accounts such as mine, where a practitioner is essentially analysing their own career. British television and digital culture scholar James Bennett cautions against overreliance on practitioner accounts, which may be inflected by "rose-tinted glasses or embitterment about the failure to win commissions for their favored type of programming" (2016, p. 126). The sweeping in other forms of data and third-party analysis can act as correctives by illuminating a problem from different angles.

To illuminate my case study from different angles and generate claims that can be validated, I will utilise two forms of triangulation, each with varying data sources and forms of documentation as outlined below. Analysis will be from dual perspectives: that of "participant-observer" (i.e. emic) where the voice of the filmmaker will speak most loudly; and what Meyrick (ibid) terms "detached scrutineer" (i.e. etic), where "the language of analysis reflects the categories and paradigms of academic scholarship" (p. 7).

2.1 The first form of triangulation

As outlined in the preface, I will analyse the effects of industrial change across macro, meso and micro levels, providing the broad structure of this exegesis.

Figure 1: The first form of triangulation



This form of triangulation will draw on scholarly literature, as well as empirical data sources. The latter will include audience statistical measurement (ratings figures and streaming catalogue information), measurements of business conditions from screen agency reports, and analysis from government reports and papers.

Macro and meso levels will be etic in nature and diachronic in perspective, to provide context by situating the effects of industrial change on the practitioner within a historical continuum. The goal is to locate the industrial 'moment' specific to my case study and the issues currently besetting the ABC, in the context of the longer story of the rise and decline of free-to-air television (both commercial and PSB).

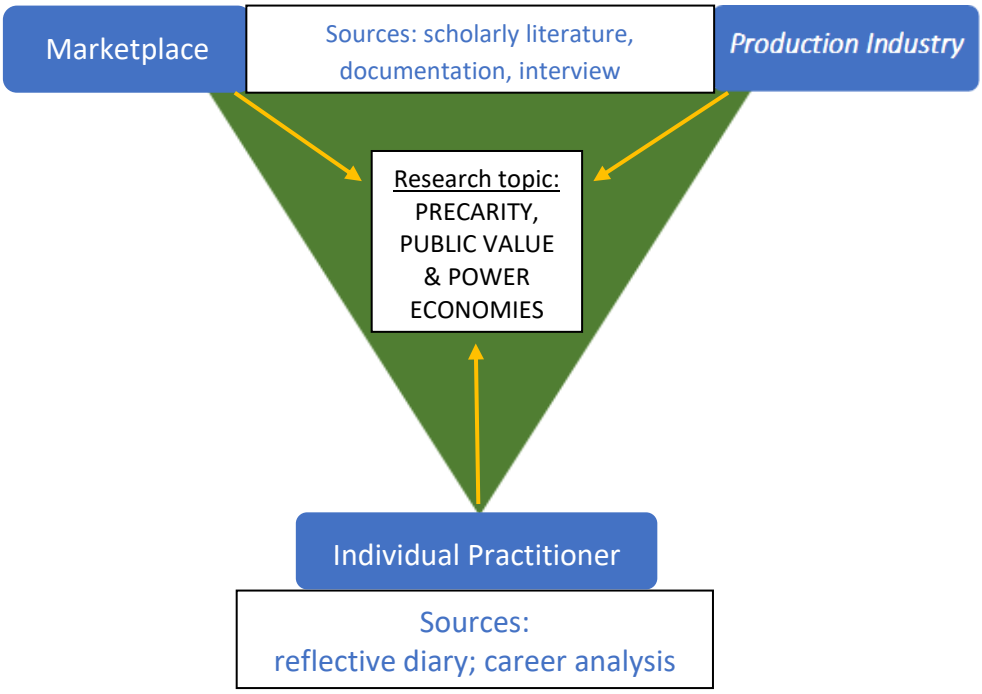
The micro level will address my artefact in detail to explore Meyrick's "problem in the case" – namely, individual screen practitioners' wider relations with their field. It will be emic in nature and synchronic in perspective.

2.2 The second form of triangulation

This will be synchronic and non-hierarchical, consisting of three checkpoints: the "Individual Practitioner", "Production Industry" and "Marketplace". Each item will be discussed throughout the exegesis, although some will occur more frequently in certain chapters.

The individual practitioner for the purpose of this exegesis is me as a screen director, producer and writer with a long career, analysed through a reflective diary of my case study: *Getting Their Acts Together (GTAT)* as well as a self-analysis of changes to my own career. The marketplace and the production industry will be analysed by three methods: scholarly literature, documentation, and interview.

Figure 2: The second form of triangulation



I will now discuss each checkpoint in turn.

The Marketplace and Production Industry *(Scholarly literature, documentation and interview)*

The purpose of these checkpoints is to provide intelligence on how productions are now funded (especially documentary productions), the politics of the funding environment, the current and projected future trends for audience viewing habits, and to what degree changes in my own career, and the issues encountered by *GTAT*, are reflective of industry trends and hence generalisable. Sources comprise interview and industry reports and documentation; analytical methods will include discourse and policy analysis. Scholarly literature will also be referenced to provide context and additional insight. Interview participants will consist of producers, both of *GTAT* and unrelated production companies, and have been conducted by both my myself and other researchers.

The Individual Practitioner *(Reflective Diary & Career Analysis)*

Tools of analysis here will be derived from ethnographic methodology, in particular the use of journaling, to provide emic perspective. The purpose is to capture granular moments – "constituting elements" (Meyrick 2014) - in the evolution of the case study, that may be held up to analysis in order to illuminate broader issues relating to the field that produces the case study.

Haseman and Mafe (2009) advocate journaling as a means by which to cultivate reflexivity, documenting how the discoveries made during production of an artwork are fed back into the process to inform and renew it. As Meyrick explains, this form of participatory commitment:

> …allows researchers to validate their conclusions by bearing witness to the personal journey necessary in generating them. As Platt puts it: 'One way, and a rhetorically very effective way, of reaching a conclusion is to tell the story of how you arrived there yourself… This is a very different strategy from the 'scientific' one of concealing human agency in the production of findings, and starting with a hypothesis which has been confirmed' (Platt 2009: 29, cited in Meyrick, 2014 p. 8).

I was accepted by Flinders University as a higher degree student at around the same time the ABC approached us to make *GTAT*. As a result, I kept an extensive and detailed production history in the form of a diary of incident during the shoot and post-production phases of my documentary- something I have not done on other projects during my career, and would not

have done in this instance were it not for my PhD. At that stage I had not fully defined a research question; I knew I wanted to focus on issues facing creators of local content in a rapidly-changing industry, however, despite 'hunches' borne of my working life in the industry it was impossible to know exactly what, and how generalisable, those issues might be. This forced my capture strategies to be wide-ranging and unfiltered; and include the recording of events, conversations, reactions (mine and others), and my adaptive responses to unfolding circumstances. At some 22,000 words this has turned out to be an extremely rich source of primary data which will be analysed in detail in Chapter 6.

As television viewing patterns have shifted and long-running drama series on which I found employment, including *McLeod's Daughters* (2001-2008), *Blue Heelers* (1994-2006), *All Saints* (1998-2009) and *Stingers* (1998-2004) to name but a few, have dropped off the schedules of broadcast television, my own work has moved from drama to documentary. So a further source of data will come from an analysis of my career, mapping changes in the industry to changes in my own outputs. This self-reflection will provide an embodied, real-world, case study in its own right to highlight the issues raised by my industry analysis.

2.3 A commissioned artefact

I make two final points about my artefact.

Firstly I note that *GTAT* - a work commissioned by the ABC - underwent a somewhat different process of iteration with respect to my PhD study than would a "student film". Had academic/scholarly issues arisen during production of my artefact that might have conflicted with the requirements of the ABC, they would have been overridden by the requirements of the ABC as the work's commissioning body. No such conflicts did in fact occur; however, the circumstances distinguish my artefact from works with a purely academic distribution of interrogative pressures. It required a different form of engagement with the academy, in which my case study was "quarantined", while its process was documented for subsequent academic scrutiny, and therefore feeds differently into this exegesis as an outcome.

The second point is that the project was somewhat unusual because it was initiated by an approach from an ABC gatekeeper to us as filmmakers. While such a broadcaster approach is not

unheard-of, the more common industry pattern is for practitioners to pitch their projects to the marketplace in hopes of uptake, a point that will be discussed in subsequent chapters. The extent to which this places boundaries around GTAT's generalisability as an object of study should be raised. In answer: while every project has its own unique elements and dynamics, the contention of this exegesis is that as an artefact, *Getting Their Acts Together* represents logical outworkings of the forces of industrial change, particularly in the context of neoliberal challenges to PSBs (the details of which, along with neoliberalism as a concept, will be further discussed in the next chapter), and sets out to detail their ramifications on the creative agency of practitioners. These forces bear throughout the industry, so regardless of how *GTAT* was initiated, it retains its relevance as a generalisable object.

3 INTRODUCTION

This exegesis attempts to bridge a gap between the academy and industry. The academy takes stock and makes theories about why something is so, yet, perhaps in part due to a relative shortage of contributions from industrial practitioners, there can be discontinuities between these theoretical perspectives and the lived, practical, realities for screen practitioners on the ground.

Seminal contributions in the field of production studies include work that reveals the daily realities of screen production businesses and workers at both managerial and shop floor levels, including John Caldwell's *Production Culture* (2008); *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media* (Banks, Miranda J, Caldwell & Mayer 2009); and *Production Studies, the Sequel!* (Banks, Miranda J, Connor & Mayer 2016). They contain valuable insights, but may be regarded as 'outside in', by which is meant that they are substantially written by scholars, and not active fulltime filmmakers. Even though such forms of analysis are frequently based on practitioner interview or ethnographic observation (at times as participant-observers), the 'gaze' remains that of an observer, the perspective necessarily theoretical, as may be gleaned from Mayer's introduction to *Production Studies* (2009):

> As a field of study, "production studies" captures for me the ways that power operates locally through media production to reproduce social hierarchies and inequalities at the level of daily interactions. Production studies, in other words, "ground" social theories by showing us how specific production sites, actors, or activities tell us larger lessons about workers, their practices, and the role of their labors in relation to politics, economics, and culture (p. 15).

Other forms of examination about screen production by screen practitioners range from how-to manuals, such as Robert McKee's book about screenwriting: *Story* (1998), to William Goldman's seminal tell-all memoir about writing in Hollywood: *Adventures in the Screen Trade* (1983). These may present insider viewpoints, however the former category seeks to instruct largely absent a politico-economic context, and the latter's primary function is to entertain by anecdote, even if it locates its revelations in an industrial setting.

While the intersection of scholarly and insider perspectives is an actively evolving field, more remains to be done, particularly in Australia, a point that has been noted for some years now.

Batty and Glisovic (2017), reporting for the Australian Screen Production Education and Research Association (ASPERA), found:

> In comparison with other disciplines such as art and design, architecture, creative writing and performance, research in/on/about screen production is very under-developed. While there are numerous books on the market dealing with media production, very few focus on the practice of developing, making and exhibiting content for all types of screen. There are very few books that combine theory with practice (note 4 p. 6, citing Kerrigan, 2016).

By 2018 the lines of enquiry had clearly broadened. In follow-up work by Batty & Kerrigan (2018) an attempt is made to target tools and academic scaffolding to screen practitioners who, like myself, may not have extensive academic backgrounds, but seek to make broad-ranging contributions from the shop floor to the academy. Although Australian contributions have since been made - see, for example, *The Palgrave Handbook of Screen Production* (Batty et al. 2019), or Hambly (2020) - there still remains considerable room to explore the intersection of creative with industrial issues, particularly with reference to the small screen in Australia.

The definition of "small screen" should be clarified for the purposes of this exegesis. As outlined by the federal screen agency, Screen Australia, historically the term has been widely used to distinguish television from cinema (a.k.a. "big screen"), although over the last decade or more the industry has come to include other electronic devices such as mobile phones and computers under the umbrella of "small screen", in a process known as "convergence" (Screen Australia 2010, p. 3). I deploy that convention here. An additional point to note is that, while both big and small screen are affected by the larger trends this exegesis will discuss, they have somewhat different regulatory and business conditions and challenges, making them distinct business subcategories of the wider "screen industry". Although I will discuss both, my case study was commissioned for the small screen (agnostic of the particulars of which platform might be used to view it), and this exegesis focusses primarily on the small screen as a business subcategory.

The nexus of creative and industrial issues mentioned above requires an explanation of changes currently sweeping through the Australian screen industry (i.e. both "big" and "small"); arguably its greatest transformation since the inception of broadcasting. In the field of industry studies, extensive mapping of the complex and overlapping effects of these changes has been recently undertaken through ARC-funded major research by Amanda Lotz and Anna Potter, along with colleagues Catherine Johnson, Kevin Sanson, Marion McCutcheon, and Oliver Eklund. Their work

includes a survey of drama production levels (Lotz, Potter, McCutcheon, et al. 2021); a comparative study of the small-screen macroeconomies of the US, UK and Australia (Lotz, Potter & Johnson 2022); analysis of the internationalisation of Australian television through foreign ownership of Australian production companies (Lotz & Sanson 2021); a study of how the history of Australia's digital transition affects future content creation, especially television drama (Lotz & Potter 2022; Potter, A & Lotz 2021); and exploration of the requirements of future Australian screen cultural policy (Lotz & Potter 2022).

This exegesis seeks to build on that picture by enumerating the specifics of how industrial change in Australia conjoins with creative and economic pressures on the individual practitioner. A framework to describe the dynamics of this has recently been proposed by Paul Dwyer, a UK screen practitioner who also operates in the academy. His *Understanding Media Production* (2019b) , is wide-ranging, bringing together discourses of technology, political economy, labour relations, production forms and strategies, and the film and television shows that are the resultant outputs, in an attempt to use media theory to understand media practice. Of particular interest is Dwyer's attempt to synthesise a review of economic and media studies literature to arrive at a theory of media production. He proposes a distillation of elements from several modes of economic analysis, leaning towards the more recent "evolutionary economics", which has a focus on technology and knowledge that is mediated by a process of continual change referred to as an "industry life cycle". To this he adds macro, meso and micro layers of analysis and states that:

> …Evolutionary economics is important because its focus on technology and knowledge helps establish the links between the structural levels of the market, the organisational level of the business and the shop floor or workplace level of production (p. 33) .

Dwyer analyses screen texts as case studies from the UK and USA where local conditions have their own unique dynamics; some, but not all of which are common to Australia. However, his framework is also generalisable as a tool to examine how people involved in screen production in jurisdictions beyond his case studies create and deploy new technical and creative forms as an adaptive response to changing industrial circumstances. Additionally, Dwyer's framework helps explain why such knowledge exchange results in power struggles between players who all suffer

from what he refers to as “radical uncertainty” (ibid). Indeed, the classic ‘makers’ text by the screenwriter William Goldman cited above makes the idea of radical uncertainty a centrepiece:

> Nobody knows anything..... Not one person in the entire motion picture field knows for a certainty what's going to work. Every time out it's a guess and, if you're lucky, an educated one (1983, p. 39).

Dwyer uses economic terms to contextualise the creative practitioner’s answer:

> We have noted that the media industries produce “experience goods” for “attention markets”. The core knowledge required, therefore, is not the technological knowledge of recording or distributing text, images or sound but the cultural knowledge of gaining and holding audience attention (2019b, p. 23).

This certainly rings true with my own experience as a practicing director and producer. It sets the stage for a competition of ideas, in which practitioners are hired for their knowledge and skill but are constrained by the systemic insecurities generated by radical uncertainty and industrial happenstance. Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010) speak of the “tensions and contradictions between economics and culture, creativity and commerce” (p. 9) which inevitably ensue. As will be seen, the resulting power dynamic forms the core dialectic of my exegesis, and its application to working with Australia’s largest public broadcaster represents a new contribution to the Australian analysis, particularly with reference to the creation of local content in the form of television arts documentary. My contribution will include an overview of how changes to Australian cultural policy have interacted with industrial change (Chapter 4), informing detailed discussion of how this has resulted in greater employment precarity for screen producers, and funding precarity for public broadcasters (Chapter 5), and flowthrough effects to the local content now being made in service of the latter’s public service mandates (Chapter 6).

I will now briefly outline the application of Dwyer’s three layers of analysis to my exegesis, other literature in these layers, and discuss further the ground I believe remains to be covered in an Australian context.

3.1 The macro level

3.1.1 Conjoined cultural and economic goals

Cultural and media studies abound in authoritative texts that provide historic, regulatory, social and industrial overview. Contributions from Jacka & Dolin (2007), Cunningham & Turnbull (2014), McKee, Given, and O'Regan (Turner & Cunningham 2000) are but a few in a crowded field that chart the evolution and devolution of Australian media as a result of changes in technology, business conditions, and audience behaviour. Of particular relevance to this study is Rowe, Turner, and Waterton's muscular contribution: *Making Culture- Commercialisation, Transnationalism and the State of 'Nationing' in Contemporary Australia* (2018), which provides an account of the rise and decline of 'nationing', a term the authors have coined to explain the development of national culture through the use of cultural policy. Nationing will be further discussed in Chapter 4, however, taken as a whole, the argument of their book is that nationing, as a project common to a number of nation-states, is now challenged by technological, commercial, ideological and transnational factors which leave little room for cultural nationalist agendas. The authors apply their analysis across a range of cultural fields, including literature, visual arts, music, and television, and broaden its reach to cultural tourism, heritage, and sport; concluding that:

> …the cultural nationalist model …has been reconfigured and its discourses and principles, on the whole, devalued. This shift in position is discernible in a wave of deregulation and disinvestment across a range from the late 1990s onwards (film, broadcasting, literature, conservation and heritage, community arts and related activities, for some examples). (p. 5)

With specific reference to television, Turner's chapter (2018b) points out that in a neoliberal polity, commercial imperatives have subsumed media's social role. He argues that commercial media organisations:

> …should no longer be examined as if they were cultural institutions – or maybe even social institutions. They are industries, businesses [who]…no longer consider themselves to be part of the communications architecture of a liberal democratic state. Rather, they are simply competing for a profitable share of the market (p. 73).

While one may argue that commercial media organisations were ever thus, in such an environment the situation of the public service broadcasters (PSBs), in particular the ABC,

becomes perilous, as they chase ratings and introduce commercial arms to shore up their position, making them de facto competitors to commercial organisations who therefore wish them gone. The ABC will be discussed in greater detail below. However, the point is sharpened by the pressure on commercial television's business models that has been created by successive waves of digitisation resulting in audience fragmentation, accompanied by an overall decline of 10% in viewing numbers on free-to-air (FTA) television since 2014; indeed, by 2020 in the lucrative, and therefore coveted, 18-34 demographic, only 18% of viewing time was devoted to FTA television per week (ACMA [Australian Communications and Media Authority] 2020). In a bid to retain audience, commercial FTAs increasingly rely on internationalised formats, in particular reality TV, displacing locally made dramas and documentaries.

Culturally representative local content has therefore become a highly contested space in Australia. Cultural policy implementation for the screen has hitherto been via a series of initiatives, which on the 'demand-pull' side featured local content mandates on commercial broadcasters, and on the 'supply-push' side, rules that tie state financial support for local production to minimum levels of "qualifying Australian production expenditure" (referred to as QAPE- an economic measurement), and "significant Australian content" (SAC- a cultural measurement). Content mandates have been eroded since 2020, with commercial FTAs successfully lobbying during the COVID pandemic for their loosening, and in the case of children's content, complete removal. Chapter 4 will place this into historical context leading to further discussion of the role of support mechanisms for the industry, particularly in light of the rise of digital streaming services. The point I make here is that the question of 'Australianness' is tied to definitions of what makes a project 'local', and is now becoming a site for debate around how productions should qualify for economic support, at the same time as their traditional broadcasting outlets erode. What is at stake is both cultural and economic (especially employment for local creative artists), however, as will be argued, cultural and economic goals are at present intertwined to the detriment of the former.

In a recent *New Platform Paper*: 'Nobody Talks About Australianness on our Screens' (2022), the freelance screen journalist Sandy George expresses the opinion that these mechanisms have become unfit for purpose and "need to be thoroughly examined" (p. 36). Lotz and Potter (2022) point out that with foreign finance now comprising around 40% of most local drama budgets:

"the need to attract or serve audiences across nations – as suggested by such a large stake of financing – actively discourages cultural specificity" (p. 5), and propose that 'Australianness' should be demarcated by the centralising of place in local screen narratives. Meanwhile, the production sector has implemented a lobbying campaign to influence regulatory change: *Make It Australian*, with the byline: "We want Australian stories told on Australian screens by us, to us, about us" (Make It Australian Campaign 2022). Industry arguments for local content have been on both cultural and economic grounds, and throughout this exegesis when I refer to the importance of protecting local content it will generally be on both grounds unless otherwise specified.

Lotz and Potter propose a decoupling of these goals, in order to retain the viability of both:

> This is necessary because of the ease with which economic development comes to overshadow cultural aims. Rarely are citizens' interests well represented in policymaking processes or are questions raised about whether citizens derive value from the use of public funds in support of television production, while advocates for economic support have deep pockets and organized advocacy. Separating policy meant as industry sector support from cultural policy goals prevents the erosion of cultural priorities resultant from focus on economic metrics and ensures agencies have clearly aligned priorities (2022, p. 10).

By this reasoning it follows that the nationing role of the ABC remains crucial and is separate from the fact it is a significant generator of economic activity or employment. I concur; and this exegesis will demonstrate some of the consequences of their conjoining. As Australia's largest PSB, the ABC's Charter explicitly stipulates it must broadcast "programs that contribute to a sense of national identity and inform and entertain, and reflect the cultural diversity of, the Australian community" (*Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act (No. 6) 1983* (Cth), PtII s6(1)(a)(i)). The exercise of this mandate creates non-monetary forms of value- of community benefit- which is the basis on which the ABC approached us to make the documentary that provides the case study of this exegesis. The question of public value therefore requires some scrutiny.

3.1.2 PSBs and public value

One cannot discuss the situation - predicament - of the ABC, whose very mission is to create work with public value, without reference to the large volume of scholarship that has arisen around public value theory. The term was coined by management scholar Mark Moore in his seminal

Creating Public Value: Strategic Management in Government (1995), but arguably the ethos that public institutions bore civic responsibilities had deeper roots, underscored by economist John Maynard Keynes' idea of the arts as a public good alongside public education or public health care. Moore's term refers to a non-monetary form of value that is created for the benefit of society by its publicly-funded institutions. It has spawned a field of investigation including, *inter alia*, Castells (1998), Benington & Moore (2011), Martin & Lowe (2014) and Meyrick, Phiddian and Barnett (2018); and has now been widely adopted as a term in Western jurisdictions.

Martin & Lowe suggest the notion of public value has been deployed, at least in part, as a counterproposal to neoliberal ideas that posit individuals as consumers rather than citizens, organisations as "brands", and that cultural works are commodities to be measured by materialist indices such as ratings or price. Michael Tracey (in Martin & Lowe) asks whether such mercantilist values are not simply an inevitability of a "broader order of modernity". He quotes the early twentieth century social theorist Georg Simmel, who:

> … argued, somewhat presciently, that as capitalism matured – not in an emotional or moral sense, but as an economic formation – and as urban environments metastasised, everything, all modes of living and being, would be reduced to one question: "How much? …Man is reckoned with like a number, like an element which is in itself indifferent." The result is that the modern mind has become ever more calculating: "The calculative exactness of practical life which the money economy has brought about corresponds to the ideal of natural science: to transform the world into an arithmetic problem, to fix every part of the world by mathematical formulas" (Simmel 1950: 411-412 , quoted in Tracey (2014, p. 99)).

Tracey points out that if one accepts this argument, it is unsurprising that PSBs, whose foundational philosophies were rooted in the humanistic ideals of the Enlightenment, should now be facing challenge:

> In this sense public service broadcasting is but the latest site of a long-standing feud, at the heart of which is a basic question: what should be the forces by which society and the individual are formed and the principles that shape them? (p. 100)

3.1.3 The BBC: a cautionary tale

During the latter years of the twentieth century the BBC became a spectacular site for this feud. The organisation is an evergreen case of the ideals and values of public broadcasting, long exerting influence on other PSBs, including the ABC (a point I will discuss further in Chapter 4). Georgia Born's ethnographic study of the BBC in the late 1990s and early 2000s, *Uncertain Vision:*

Birt, Dyke and the Reinvention of the BBC (2004) is a cautionary tale. Embedded as an anthropologist within the BBC during the closing years of the last millennium, Born documents the rise of a managerialist culture driven by auditing and accountancy practices derived from the business sector. Initially conceived of as a defence of the organisation against political hostility that gained force during the Thatcher era, such practices rapidly took on a life of their own. Under this new thinking, the cultural and public service purposes of the organisation, once central to its operations, came to be regarded as epiphenomenal, and the conditions for creativity marginalised:

> Tighter financial probity was posited as the cutting edge of a broader cultural change that would instil greater discipline in relation to the corporation's obligations to its licence fee payers; ensuring value for money became the core of the BBC's democratic role. In this way financial discipline took on the cast of a new corporate morality, and one that threatened to displace the former ethical centre of the BBC. The determinedly complex cultural purposes of public service broadcasting were flattened in this mentality to commercial measurements: 'value for money', equated with 'audience performance', equated in turn with ratings and audience share, came to stand in for value itself (Born 2004, p. 224).

The sterilising effect on innovation resulted in an "overcrowding in the centre-ground of programming and ever purer imitation of the BBC's [commercial] rivals" (p. 178). The disquiet felt by Britain's creative community was given full expression when the renowned British writer, Dennis Potter, colourfully eviscerated the organisation's management culture in his 1993 James MacTaggart Lecture:

> Our television has been ripped apart and falteringly reassembled by politicians who believe that value is a monetary term only, and that a cost accountant is thereby the most suitable adjudicator of what we can and cannot see on our screens... The political pressures from market-obsessed radicals, and the huckster atmosphere that follows has by degrees, and in confused self-defence, drawn the BBC so heavily into the dogma-coated discourses of so-called 'market efficiency' that in the end it might lose clear sight of why it, the BBC, is there in the first place. I fear the time is near when we must save not the BBC from itself, but public-service broadcasting from the BBC (p. 171).

My own 'insider' account adds to the Australian literature by asserting, through an examination of its case study, that conflict between economic metrics and social benefit has similarly come to lie at the heart of the ABC's present operations; that although public value is implicit in the organisation's Charter, this has come to be confused within the ABC with 'value for money'; and that this conflict is having corrosive effects on practitioners' creative autonomy.

3.1.4 Beyond "FAANGs"

Potter and Born's observations were made before digital disruption had fully taken hold. The rise of digital services, especially those historically referred to as the FAANGs, has now compounded and accelerated the situation. The term "FAANGs" applied to the online services Facebook, Apple, Amazon Prime, Netflix and Google, although it is out of date as newer entrants, such as Acorn, Britbox, Discovery+, Paramount+ and Disney+, proliferate, and Facebook has now been rebranded to Meta.

Turner (2018a) convincingly argues that the formal arrival of Netflix into Australia in 2015 marked an irrevocable tipping point as audiences turned increasingly online to discover content, decimating the business models of commercial FTAs, creating spillover effects for PSBs. Australian content constitutes only a very small proportion of online catalogues, and although it is increasing, the percentages remain low. Lobato (2018b) demonstrated just 1.6% of the Netflix catalogue in 2018 was Australian, a number that had only risen to 3.3% by 2021 (*Streaming Services Reporting and Investment Scheme Discussion Paper* February, 2022). By 2021 the Australian streamer, STAN, whose point of market difference is its Australian catalogue, carried only 7%; while on other streamers percentages varied from a low of 0.1% on Disney+ to 9.2% on Paramount+ (ibid). Moreover, much of this is old content, so makes little contribution to the local industry, and its discoverability (i.e. the ease with which it can be found in online catalogues) can be patchy (ibid). In the past twelve months it should be noted that streamers have increased their commissioning of new local content as new services enter Australia and jostle for market share[1] (Screen Australia 2022a), but the industry regards this uptick as fickle and easily subject to reversal (Quinn 2022)[2]. The situation here contrasts with the EU, where regulators have imposed European content quotas of up to 30% since 2020 (ibid), as well as levies on their local revenues to underwrite local content production. In November 2022 Australia's federal government flagged its intention to introduce content regulation for streamers locally (Tadros 2022),

[1] Perhaps most visibly in November 2022 with Amazon picking up the serial drama, *Neighbours*, which had been cancelled just six months earlier, after a record-breaking 37-year run on FTA television.
[2] The point was also widely discussed at the industry's 2022 Screen Forever conference (Jasek, notes taken during Screen Forever conference, 28-30 March 2022).

underscored in its new cultural policy, “Revive”, released in January (Commonwealth of Australia 2023). However, the details are unresolved at the time of writing, and Lotz and Potter (2021) have presented valid arguments as to why quotas could backfire, not least of which is that content made *in* Australia may not necessarily be content *about* Australia.

A significant contributing factor is Australia’s small market size, and therefore, influence, compared to the global reach and might of online services, documented in detail by Martin Moore in ‘Tech Giants and Civic Power’ (2016). His study details how their power is exercised in a number of jurisdictions, along with the benefits and risks for screen practitioners, local content, and the industries in which they operate. These digital behemoths, which he refers to as “information intermediaries”, with their power to gather audience data and command their attention, have now attained:

> …political power comparable to that of a broadcaster. The difference being that, in many democracies, broadcasters are constrained in what they can broadcast and in the political views they themselves can express (p. 29).

Their power assumes varying forms and is expressed globally. The influence of Facebook (as it was then branded) on the outcome of the 2016 US Presidential campaign has been widely reported. In the local policy arena, Australia experienced an example of a digital behemoth’s power in February 2021, when Facebook/Meta temporarily closed its Australian news feed during a standoff with Australia’s Federal Government over proposed media bargaining laws (ABC News/Reuters 2021). And in 2022 the lobbying power of streaming services including Netflix, Amazon, and Paramount+ was on display through vigorous efforts to avoid the imposition of local content mandates (Samios 2022).

Of relevance to my enquiry is therefore the difficulties faced by a smaller player like Australia in its attempts to participate in this ecosystem, enjoying its benefits, whilst retaining sufficient agency to protect its unique cultural voice. George (op. cit.) refers to 2022 research conducted in Europe that observes in the new world of streamers:

> Creative and artistic freedom is sometimes as great as it is in the old world, but it is more often curbed and restricted. Local content is attractive, but the majority of the ‘originals orders’ strive for generic expression and storytelling (George 2022, p. 25, citing Film i Väst Analysis report, 2022, p. 14)

Ever-greater reliance is therefore being placed on PSBs to compensate for clear commercial market failure to provide public value local content, and regulatory failure to protect it. However, to better understand how the interplay of these forces affects the lives and livelihoods of businesses and practitioners, we need to move a level down.

3.2 The meso level

As noted above, industry and production studies discourses map interconnections between individual media organisations, management teams, business conditions, and industry gatekeepers, and typically contain reflections on or by senior industry figures.

By 'gatekeepers' I refer to individuals or collections of individuals charged with sifting and selecting screen texts for further development or forms of economic exploitation such as distribution and exhibition. These include funding committees of government screen agencies, network commissioning editors, and independent sales agents. It is with gatekeepers in particular that filmmakers must contend to find an outlet for their work, making them a key feature of the power structures found in industry hierarchies. Chapter 5 will discuss the power dynamics of Australian practitioners' relations with gatekeepers in detail from an insider perspective, which will include relations with screen funding agencies, however, the gatekeeper of most relevance to my case study is the ABC.

Turner (2016) considers the situation of the ABC as it experiences repeated attacks on its funding, placing this in an international context through reference to the similar experiences of European PSBs in what he refers to as the "post-broadcasting era", characterised by competition from new digital viewing platforms:

> It is notable that public broadcasters such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the ABC have developed commercial arms partly as a means of dealing with this competition, but probably more importantly as a means of dealing with the uncertainty of continuing government funding support. In this respect, the distinction between public and commercial broadcasters is clearly on the way to breaking down. The Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) is far from alone in being a publicly funded broadcaster that also takes advertising (Cunningham et al., 2015) […] It is difficult not to see these developments as related to the withdrawal of political and ideological support for the idea of a public broadcaster in Europe in recent years (p. 20).

In Europe and Australia, vertical dis-integration, whereby production is outsourced to independent producers rather than conducted inhouse, has been commercialisation's bedfellow. European academic literature contains a number of studies of the effects on screen practitioners including another contribution by Dwyer: 'Flexibility, Innovation and Precarity in the Television Industry', in the book: *Making Media: Production, Practices, and Professions* (2019a). Here, he provides an account of "flexible specialisation" as a response to industrial change in the UK. The term refers to the purported benefits to industry workers of "innovation" and "flexibility", as the UK industry moved from vertically integrated broadcasters over several decades from the 1980s (echoing, albeit decades later, the devolution of the US film industry post 1948). These benefits were supposed to flow from the liberated creative energy of independent producers who would be able to create new program ideas at lower cost. Quoting Tony Hall, the then-Director General of the BBC, Dwyer observes:

> This logic reached its apogee in July 2014 when the BBC announced the vertical disintegration of all of its in-house production into a commercial subsidiary, creating "one of the leanest, hungriest, most flexible organisations […] a production powerhouse that is a beacon for creativity, risk-taking and quality" (p. 349).

The florid rhetoric was at odds with the industrial realities that ensued. Dwyer compares the underlying theories and expectations of flexible specialisation with empirical industry data. He reveals how, after an initial period of program innovation in the 1980s, especially from a burst of independent production for Channel 4, market forces (including, *inter alia,* the introduction of advertising on Channel 4 in 1993) resulted in reduced innovation, and the buying up of smaller indies by larger multinationals (pp. 354-5). Fewer, large, foreign-owned production companies now pursued profit with proven formats at lower cost, leading to diminishment of innovation and greater precarity of employment for practitioners. It will be shown in Chapter 5.1 how the same dynamics have developed in Australia, as formatted productions have taken over FTA television schedules and multinationals have bought up local production houses. It may therefore be asked whether a devolved model is reconcilable with the core values of public service media, on either cultural or economic grounds.

The picture stands in contrast to public utterances by industry gatekeepers. The leading Australian screen funding agency, federally-funded Screen Australia, has a natural interest in 'talking up' the prospects of the industry, with its CEO Graeme Mason presenting optimistic

forecasts about the future of Australian content in the industry journal *Inside Film* magazine over a number of years: "Great ideas get rewarded. Great scripts, great pictures, and great casts all still matter. Keep an open mind about where the rewards will come from too" (Mason 2018); or: "Some broadcasters may have reduced some of their requirements for local content but so many new content providers are coming on line there are many more places to take that content…You will not see such a dramatic collapse in content creation" (Groves 2020). Amanda Laing, Chief Commercial and Content Officer of cable television provider, Foxtel Group, presented a similarly optimistic view at the industry's 2022 screen conference, Screen Forever: "There is so much Australian production going on it's a really exciting time to be a producer here" (notes taken by Jasek, 28-30 March 2022), with almost identical words used in a South Australian industry forum six months later by the ABC's Acting Director of Entertainment and Specialist (Jasek, notes taken at SAFC industry forum with Jennifer Collins, Acting Director, ABC Entertainment & Specialist, 29 September 2022).

This does not square off with the lived experience of many creative practitioners. Chapter 5.2 will contain a personal diachronic career survey, cross-referenced with the experiences of other filmmakers, which shows reduced work and creative freedom. Sandy George (op. cit.), refers to ideologically driven conflations of economic with cultural value to explain the optimistic tone despite the realities of industrial precarity. She uses the reporting of drama production levels by Screen Australia, as an example:

> In recent years, Screen Australia executives drank the Kool-Aid of their old political bosses.[3] The media release about the appearance of the 2020/21 drama report (which its research department does an exemplary job of publishing each year) demonstrates this. It trumpeted: 'Aussie drama production reaches record-breaking $1.9 billion expenditure'. It's misleading because it's *not* Aussie drama production. It is Aussie drama produced in Australia plus foreign drama filmed in Australia. Foreign and Australian, should be treated *completely separately* in such reports, as in, *never* combined. And total expenditure shouldn't be talked about breathlessly for all the reasons this paper raises. It is arse about to give the impression that everything is fine because expenditure is up. (2022, p. 42).

George refers to the 2020/21 drama report. Screen Australia's 2021/22 drama report (op. cit.) has since been released and continues the same category error. As an industry participant myself

[3] George here refers to the recently ousted conservative federal government and neoliberal economic ideas.

who moves between managerial and shop floor roles, I concur that this is spin. Australia's creative community needs greater reporting transparency if their situation is to improve. Chapter 5.3 will attempt to provide some disentanglement through discussion of the precarity creative practitioners are currently experiencing compared to technical crew for whom there is an employment boom driven by offshore production using Australia as a filming base.

Yet the screen industry relies on optimism despite frequent economic failure and precarity (discussed below), so perhaps spin is not just inevitable, but necessary. The problem is that while spin may have rhetorical force, it has little explicatory power. Caldwell (2008) notes "a kind of 'inverse credibility law': the higher one travels up the industrial food chain for insights, the more suspect and spin-driven the personal disclosures tend to become" (p. 3). These public declarations can find a counterweight in a different register, which Caldwell refers to as the "private or bounded disclosures to production personnel themselves" exposing the industry's "deep texts, rituals and spaces" (ibid). So we move another layer down, to:

3.3 The micro level

Here we encounter a more granular form of analysis, which prioritises the embodied experience of screen creatives who labour away at the coalface of production itself. McIntyre (2018) links the concept of embodied experience to notions developed by sociologists including Pierre Bourdieu and Robert N. St Clair, where we find "choice-making 'agents' [filmmakers] who possess the 'habitus' [knowledge and experience] necessary for the area they work in" (p. 89). This accumulation of competences empowers such choice-making agents with "cultural capital", which allows them to make cultural distinctions in different "fields":

> …Habitus, which accrues from a process of deep inculcation in the culture, then predisposes agents to act and react in certain ways allowing them to strategically position what [knowledge] capital they possess within structured and dynamic spaces that are labelled fields (McIntyre 2009, p. 161). Fields are arenas of social contestation, where an agent's habitus is deployed, as struggles for dominance take place. Bourdieu claims that 'the generative and unifying principle of this "system" is the struggle itself' (1996, p. 232, cited in McIntyre p. 89).

This neatly characterises the creative clashes that occur on most screen productions, and is of particular relevance at times of industrial change. It is congruent with Dwyer's theory of media

production, which predicts the power struggles that emerge as filmmakers are required to demonstrate “flexibility” and “innovation”, whilst simultaneously battling with radical uncertainty (both their own and their superiors’), in a bid to make something they can be proud of whilst surviving professionally to work another day (see also Caldwell, op. cit.).

Hesmondhalgh and Baker, in successive contributions (2008; 2010) refer to a balancing act required by media workers. While made well over a decade ago they have retained their currency. Due to the media’s ability to influence people they describe it as a dominant and powerful industry, however that power is unequally distributed, with media workers (including creative originators such as producers, writers and directors) often in positions of disempowerment. They observe that:

> …a considerable commissioning apparatus has developed in British television, one which often involves a tug-of-war relationship between production teams and commissioning editors over who has creative control in the production process (see also Born, 2004). Indies rely on commissioners for the survival of their businesses. Like many people in dependent relationships, indie executives express ambivalence about the object of their dependence. They express strong feelings of admiration and respect for particular editors, and deep mistrust of commissioners in general… Further pressures come from the production team’s tenuous control of editorial matters in the face of the commissioner’s power.
> (2008, pp. 105-6)

Because many such practitioners struggle to reconcile demands from broadcasters that may be strongly in opposition to their own creative beliefs, the authors to link the unequal distributions of creative autonomy and power that accrue, particularly at times of precarity, to Bourdieu’s notion of ‘the dominated fraction of the dominant class’, as detailed in *The rules of art: genesis and structure of the literary field* (1996). The conflicts are both external, (i.e., with other people and organisations), and internal (as they pit pragmatism against their own values), exacting profound emotional tolls.

Extending this work, Zoellner (2016) has shown what happens when the “habitus” of individual filmmakers comes into conflict with such industry realities. Looking at the production of factual programs in Germany and the UK, she examines the power imbalances between broadcasters and the independent producers who provide them with local content, which subject producers to considerable economic and editorial dependency; the impacts on professional identity for these independents; and the role this identity plays in their attempts to negotiate these tensions-

discussed further in Chapters 5.3.3 & 5.6.2. Lavie (2020) conducts a similar investigation, in this instance of Reality TV producers in Israel; while locally, Hart (2019) captures useful observations from documentary makers, required to cut down their feature productions for television, around the protection of their content's integrity. Working in this vein are also Curtin and Sanson (2016). Chapter 6 of this exegesis seeks to build on these contributions through a granular examination of its case study, with particular attention to the question of creative autonomy.

In *The rules of art* (op. cit.), Bourdieu speaks of threats to the creative autonomy of artists brought about by the "increasingly greater interpenetration between the world of art and the world of money" (p. 344). I have cited Born on the effects on innovation in British public broadcasting. To expand, she quotes an interview she conducted with British documentary filmmaker Peter Dale in 2000, in which he describes changes to programming that occurred on Britain's ITV network[4], when ratings were prioritised in the UK's 1990 Broadcasting Act as criteria for awarding lucrative broadcast licenses:

> Suddenly all the challenging ITV documentaries began to disappear. As gold fever led to a land-grab for ratings, big audiences weren't a bonus- they were a necessity. Then one day someone invented the docu-soap, bastard child of the "important" documentary… What's wrong with this kind of television is not that it's popular. It's the way it's made. There's no time and no point in doing research. Any relationship between producer and subject is impossible. A producer told me that accurate portrayals were not part of the ethos. The whole exercise was the avoidance of ambiguity, the denial of complexity… (Born 2004, p. 438).

Dale refers to "docu-soap", in which the relationship between producer and subject is de-valorised. It is particularly pertinent to this case study: as will be seen in Chapter 6, the ABC's preference for us to deploy the genre tropes of docu-soap became a site of the "social contestation" referred to by Bourdieu, in which the "habitus" of our gatekeeper contested with our own.

[4] ITV is also classed as a public service broadcaster, albeit with a commercial business model comprising independent franchisees clustered onto one network.

3.4 Conclusion

This exegesis will show the consequences of intertwined cultural and economic goals on the creative agency of practitioners. In so doing I seek to provide a level of detail to the creative practice of documentary filmmaking and its challenges that remain largely unavailable beyond the practitioners who experience them. Even though many books and journal articles use a 'real' industry project as a case study for research (see, for instance, Kerrigan & Callaghan 2018), there remains room in the Australian academic literature for 'insider perspective' from practitioners working on industrial responses to this country's cultural policy challenges; especially analysis directly addressing the genre of arts documentary as an attempt to create public value content for a PSB facing existential threat.

In 'Surviving the post-broadcast era: The international context for Australia's ABC' (op. cit.), Turner cites Bourdieu to explain the pressures felt by public broadcasters to justify their position by making programs with mass appeal as industrial conditions shift:

> It is a shift in which the influence of the cultural field, and the power of the state, is displaced by the power of the economic field. The ambivalences that Bourdieu (1984: 229) describes in the cultural institution seeking to popularise, on one hand, while maintaining the cultural capital invested in its products, on the other, are slowly resolving in favour of a single, commercial, logic (Turner 2016, p. 24).

Elsewhere, Turner expands on the erosion of cultural nationalist agendas, pointing out that nationing's decline has potentially worrying consequences:

> The fragmentation of audiences, platforms and publics also carries another possibility: the fragmentation of community, of any sense of identity that goes beyond one's own set of preferences or established social network. Cass Sunstein (2009), in Republic.com 2.0, has warned of the dangers of the 'cyber-balkanisation' that comes from the complex of developments that we have talked about, and which he places within a context of nation formation. In my view, that fragmentation is of particular concern in relation to the consumption of news, and the US is the perfect laboratory case to demonstrate what happens to political debate in such circumstances (2018b, pp. 72-3).

Turner specifically mentions news, but I suggest his point may be extended to the wider arena of non-news programs, including documentary and drama. There is a symbiotic relationship between aesthetic vitality and the informational role of television, particularly public service broadcasting; core to my approach to documentary is a belief that diversity of cultural forms and

the freedom to express them in surprising ways creates shared meaning, essential to participatory democracy and an engaged citizenry. The point has been elegantly made by Born, so I conclude this Introduction with her remarks:

> …good television condenses a variety of expressive commentaries that extend the way we understand the human condition. It follows that the democratic role of broadcasting includes the responsibility to foster evolution in the cultural properties of each genre, and of the broadcasting mix *in toto*, so as to enrich the imaginative and affective contours of audience experience. Television's aesthetic and expressive dimensions cannot be divorced from its informational role, as they tend to be in notions of the aesthetic as a mere delivery mechanism. The informative/cognitive and the cultural/aesthetic are integral to good television, and at best they co-evolve. Aesthetic vitality is an essential component in the political and cultural value of public service broadcasting (2004, p. 381).

4 A MACRO VIEW: BACKGROUND - "THEN AS NOW; NOW AS THEN"

This chapter will attempt to show, through a brief historical overview of broadcasting in Australia, that contemporary forces acting on practitioners in the Australian screen industry are direct outcomes of conditions set at the beginnings of broadcasting in this country, accounting for their depth and pervasiveness. They are born of a quartet of technology, government regulation, business models and audience behaviour that I will argue have a uniquely Australian accent and flavour; their longevity effectively hardwiring them into the screen industry's operating environment.

Australian broadcasting has been well researched over many years, in works that include *Radio In Australia* (Potts 1989), *The Magic Spark* (Walker 1973), *Supertoy: 20 Years of Australian Television* (Hall 1976), *Moran's Guide to Australian TV Series* (Moran 1993), *Television Culture* (O'Regan 1993), *The Australian TV Handbook* (Turner & Cunningham 2000), *This is the ABC* (Inglis 1983) and *Whose ABC?* (Inglis 2006); while, as noted above, recent industrial changes have been mapped and analysed by Lotz, Potter, Sanson, McCutcheon and Eklund (op. cit.). I will draw on the above sources as well as my own industry knowledge, concentrating on areas of relevance to my central argument rather than attempting an exhaustive retelling.

4.1 Regulation and gatekeepers

The story of broadcasting as a technology begins with early twentieth century radio. Originally conceived of as an extension of telegraphy, which conveyed point to point messages, by the first decade of the twentieth century wireless radio sets constructed by home enthusiasts began to proliferate, and this ability to cast voice and music over distance between increasing numbers of listeners may thus be construed as the start of broadcasting in Australia. Importantly, these devices could operate bidirectionally, both receiving and sending signals, making every user not simply a passive listener, but a defacto content creator (Walker 1973).

By the 1920s industry had stepped in, both to manufacture receiving sets and to centralise transmission of signals. Government regulation was not far behind. Potts observes:

> European governments were fully aware of the immense political power represented by the control of the medium. At the end of World War One, a British MP announced that 'if transmission is allowed to everyone…the Bolshevist element would very soon make full use of the opportunities given to the detriment of the country'.[5] Strict state control of radio throughout Europe ensured that broadcasting developed as a closely regulated system, with the listener seen as a passive recipient of messages.
> (Potts 1989, p. 14)

As in Europe, radio in Australia became a one-way technology. Except for a small coterie of ham-radio operators, power to create content overwhelmingly aggregated to the private owners of radio stations, who assumed the role of gatekeeper. This centralisation of power may effectively be regarded as foundational to the operating environment of creative practitioners, whereby they have since needed to apply for admission to the broadcaster's schedule.[6]

A dynamic now developed between changing technological affordances, business models, audience behaviour, and government regulation, in which the latter struggled to keep pace – a struggle which, I will argue, has continued ever since.

One of the first examples of this concerned the regulatory arrangements put in place in 1923. Listeners were required to purchase "sealed" radio sets locked to only those frequencies for which they paid a licence fee, which was split between industry and government (Potts 1989 p.16). Audience behaviour had a ready answer: piracy promptly abounded. It was fuelled by a general fascination amongst the listening public with the "splendour of 'the magic ether waves'" and the "romance and mystery of wireless", as well as a general sense of outrage the new regulatory system gave "no facilities for the Australian to apply his well-known initiative", and was facilitated by the easy availability of inexpensive crystal radio kits that could be customised to listen to any station for free (ibid, pp. 17-8).

Walker (1973) provides an entertaining account of what followed:

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[5] Potts does not identify the British MP.
[6] A power structure that has only recently been challenged by self-publishing platforms such as YouTube and TikTok.

> Tracking down the pirates so pre-occupied the Post Office [the Post Master General's department, tasked with administering regulation of the new technology] that they were compelled to issue a general appeal:
>
> > *Owners of…sets, either through indifference or carelessness are showing a laxity which is retarding the growth of broadcasting service and militating seriously against the provision of improved programmes*.
>
> The degree to which the finer nature of our citizens has always responded to such moving pleas over the years may be gauged from the fact that one of Australia's leading advertising agencies reported in 1972 that 'it would appear that about 25 per cent of Australian homes have a radio but no licence' (pp. 17-8).

The sealed set system was overturned after just nine months, to be replaced by a system of 'A' and 'B' class broadcasting licences; the former funded by a limited amount of advertising along with listening licenses purchased by the public (at least, those who were honest enough to do so); and the latter entirely by advertising. Entrepreneurs from retail, theatre, press and publishing industries acquired broadcasting licences (Inglis 1983, p. 9), and attempted to maximise audience numbers, and hence income, by a mix of popular music, religious shows, news, and "general information of use to shoppers" (Walker 1973, p. 28). By 1929 the number of homes holding licences had surged to over 310,000 (ibid, p. 25), with actual audiences potentially four times greater once co-listeners were factored in (Inglis 1983, p. 22). However, the new regulatory regime only allowed for a limited number of stations in four cities, and by 1928 the system's shortcomings were most keenly felt by rural Australians.

Geographical isolation is a fundamental driver of the Australian broadcasting story. A Royal Commission in 1927 had recommended the owners of A class stations underwrite the considerable cost of expanding radio's footprint across Australia's vast geography. Unsurprisingly, they demurred (Walker 1973, p. 29). It was not to be the first time a free-market solution failed Australian broadcasting; government was left to step in. This too has direct relevance to the conditions under which creative practitioners now operate; especially for this exegesis inasmuch as it led to the formation of Australia's national broadcaster, the government-funded Australian Broadcasting Commission (now Corporation, more commonly referred to as the ABC). The following section will discuss the domestic forces leading to creation of the ABC in greater detail, its models, and its shaping ideologies.

4.2 The BBC, Australian cultural nationalism, and the creation of the ABC

Australia's politicians had no desire to repeat broadcasting's earlier regulatory missteps, and sought proven models for the new service. Non-Indigenous Australians who still largely regarded themselves as the children of England could look to the UK, where broadcasting had produced a handy template for their consideration.

Britain's first live public radio broadcast had occurred in 1920, and quickly caught the public imagination with the inclusion of famous Australian soprano, Dame Nellie Melba. By 1922 the UK government was being widely petitioned with broadcast licence requests. With an eye on the rapid expansion of wireless radio stations in the USA (some 560 by 1922 (Walker 1973, p.6)), the British government decided to take a more orderly approach; a single broadcast licence would be issued to a newly-formed British Broadcasting Company, who thus had a broadcasting monopoly (Curry & Seaton 2009, p. 107). The service was not free; rather it was (and still is) underwritten by a licence fee levied on listeners. Popular uptake was rapid, with listener numbers reaching some three million licences by 1930, representing an audience of around twelve million (British Broadcasting Corporation 1931, p. 26).

Central to the BBC's vision of itself was a sense of cultural mission instilled by its founding general manager, Sir John Reith, who believed that pure entertainment was "a prostitution of broadcasting" (British Broadcasting Corporation 2021). This mission is summarised by Moran (1993):

> The task of public broadcasting, according to Reith, was not to give the public what it wanted but what the public broadcaster thought it should have. This task was to inform, educate and entertain by continuously exposing the listening…public to the most culturally uplifting material. Thus national broadcasters saw their job as one of preserving and extending the tradition of high culture (p. 505).

In Australia, by the early 1930s arguments in favour of a national broadcasting service were being widely promulgated, not only around the concerns of rural Australians, but – importantly for this exegesis – including cultural-nationalist agendas (Inglis 1983, p. 17). Government involvement in the creation of a national broadcasting network was not only motivated by a desire to develop the communications infrastructure of the nation, which included the construction of roads, ports,

and railways, but also to exert a binding influence on Australians' sense of themselves; one might say a form of conceptual infrastructure with philosophical, moral and cultural dimensions.

As outlined in my introductory chapter, David Rowe, Graeme Turner and Emma Waterton, in *Making Culture, Commercialisation, Transnationalism, and the State of 'Nationing' in Contemporary Australia* (2018), have coined the term 'nationing' to describe a "production and representation of the nation"; in connection with which they argue that:

> The construction of a national identity was thought to underpin the social viability of the nation-state while also figuring as a fundamental component of the modern sense of belonging. In Australia, that project was articulated to a cultural nationalism which was highly influential in cultural policy over many years, as well as supporting a long history of economic protectionism aimed at securing employment for Australian citizens. At the level of the social, Australia shares with many other settler-colonial societies the challenges of constructing a shared identity for a population that was created, after the dispossession of their Indigenous peoples, by successive waves of immigration from other, more historically and culturally defined nations (p. 3).

An essential element of Australia's broadcasting story is therefore its role as a nation-builder for the recently-born Australian federation. In 1932 Australia's federal government legislated the Australian Broadcasting Commission into being, substantially modelled on the BBC. The Reithian mantra of "inform, educate and entertain" (in that order, a point I will return to below), was highly influential to the conceptual foundations of the new Australian national service. Its founding Act provided little guidance about how this should be achieved, saying only that:

> The Commission shall provide and shall broadcast from the national broadcasting stations adequate and comprehensive programmes and shall take in the interests of the community all such measures as, in the opinion of the Commission, are conducive to the full development of suitable broadcasting programmes.
> (*Australian Broadcasting Commission Act (No.14) 1932* (Cth), Part III s16)

Crucially, the ABC took over the former A class licences, whose stations' program mix sought to entertain first, and so was not 'pure', in the Reithian sense. They brought to the national broadcaster a ready-made audience it had no wish to lose (Moran 1993, p. 556). Thus was embedded into the ABC from its very first days a dialectic between populism and high culture, or to use the terminology of the time, "lowbrow" audience chasing versus "highbrow" cultural mission (Inglis 1983, p. 21).

Such a dialectic extended beyond the ABC to the very fabric of broadcasting in Australia. While the ABC might have taken philosophical inspiration from the BBC, it was not created as a broadcasting monopoly as the BBC had been. With the ABC given A class licences, B class licences were left to private enterprise. The ABC was not (and still is not) permitted to take advertisements, leaving clear mercantile space to the former B class stations who were; a uniquely Australian dual system of public and private sector services that endures to this day in both radio and free-to-air television. Then, as now, the ABC was (is) expected to operate a service that was (is) complimentary to commercial alternatives (*Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act (No. 6) 1983* (Cth), Pt II s6(2)(a)(i); Inglis 1983, pp. 18-20). The inevitable implication was (is) that for the ABC to seek audiences through populist programming in service of its 'nationing' mission would be to improperly cross that clear space.

These self-contradictory imperatives have resulted in nine decades of internal debate and external commentary on the ABC's role; contests which have been well documented (Lotz, Potter & Johnson 2022; O'Regan 1993; Turner 2016; Turner & Cunningham 2000, to name but a few). Inglis (1983, pp. 42-3) refers to "battles of the brows", with outcomes that included the resignation in 1935 of the organisation's first General Manager, Walter Conder, for pressing a populist agenda. Over the years, particularly as political and funding pressures on the organisation have increased (discussed further below), the organisation's internal contradictions have continued to claim the scalps of successive Managing Directors: *viz* David Hill in 1994 (Inglis 2006, pp. 324-7); Jonathan Shier in 2001 (ibid, pp. 508-16); Michelle Guthrie in 2018 (ABC News 2018), closely followed by the resignation of Chair Justin Milne (Dodd 2018).

4.3 The arrival of television, ownership and local content

The rollout of television services from as early as the 1930s onwards in the UK, Germany and the USA brought with them the inevitability of a television service beginning in Australia. But when? Then as now, the introduction of a major piece of communications infrastructure was to be a protracted affair, as nationing and commercial agendas collided. In a pre-echo of Australia's twenty-first century National Broadband Network rollout, the matter became an ideological football, resulting in long delay. Still mindful of the regulatory missteps of radio's early years, from the early 1940s the federal government instituted no fewer than five enquiries into what

form the new service should take (Moran, 1993, p. 8; Hall 1976, pp. 14-5). Television was not introduced for a further seven years, and when it was in 1956, it replicated radio's dual public-private system, with commercial owners (at that time predominantly newspaper proprietors) owning two out of the three available licences in each major metropolitan market, and the ABC receiving the third (Inglis 1983). By comparison, New Zealand's television system remained a state monopoly until the 1980s (as did many in Europe) (Given 2016, p. 111), while in the UK different commercial owners were clustered onto one station where they shared airtime (ITV), leaving the publicly-owned BBC as their monolithic counterpart. Australia's dual system skewed influence toward the commercial sector (Cunningham 2000, p. 17; Lotz, Potter & Johnson 2022, p. 277). As a consequence, the ABC did not enjoy the powerful position of the BBC in influencing the types of content shown on Australian television, or in terms of political power- factors of relevance to my case study.

Local content swiftly became a locus of debate. Radio programmes had in the main been locally produced. They spanned multiple genres including drama, music, and panel shows; were major employers, played a powerful nationing role by disseminating cohering cultural norms to Australians, and were relatively inexpensive to make. By contrast, television was a much more expensive medium- at the time, drama in particular cost up to eight times more on television compared to radio (Inglis 1983, p. 204). With just 3250 television sets operating in 1956 in Sydney and a similar number in Melbourne (Jones & Bednall 1980), the oligopoly of commercial operators had a tiny base of advertising to fund content, while the publicly-owned ABC was no better off, given scant additional resources to fund television.

There was a plentiful supply of programmes available from overseas at a fraction of the cost (Moran 1993, p. 10), and the implications for local content were not lost on the creative sector, which waged an early campaign to enshrine quotas in the forthcoming regulatory system. In a pamphlet signed by over 300 leading members of the arts community: *We Believe* (The Australian Television Rights Council 1955), they announced:

> The advent of television in Australia without a guaranteed minimum percentage of Australian-made programmes presents a grave threat to the future of musical, acting and allied talents in this country…if these protections are to survive, let alone flourish, protection must be given by the Government…Those responsible for the control of television policies have a unique opportunity to perform a great service for Australian artistic talent, and, indeed, for ALL Australians [their capitals].

The effects of Australian television's limited financial firepower on local drama and documentary production were evident from the outset. An examination of primetime television schedules on all FTA stations from 1956-63 by Cunningham shows that almost all program material came from overseas; 83 percent from the USA and the rest from Britain (2000, p. 17). Inexpensive quiz and variety shows were to be virtually the only local content other than news for a number of years. No locally written dramas were made in television's first year; one in 1957 (*Take That*, ATN, 1957-58); two in 1959 (*Autumn Affair,* ATN & GTV*,* 1959-59; *Emergency*, ATN & GTV, 1959-59); with the ABC's first local drama, *Stormy Petrel,* not being made until 1960 (Jones & Bednall 1980, pp. 22-5). These early offerings were humble and, unlike quiz/variety shows[7], not enthusiastically embraced by audiences accustomed to the larger budgets of more confident overseas offerings, with average ratings just 19% of the viewing audience (ibid). Naturally this acted as a disincentive to produce more. The similarities to the situation that applies now with regard to budget pressures on, and exhibition outlets for local content are considerable, as shall be seen in subsequent chapters.

By 1963, eight years after The Australian Television Rights Council (op. cit.) had warned of precisely this outcome, low levels of local content had resulted in a new Senate Committee chaired by Victor Vincent[8] recommending a levy or quota system to mandate minimum levels of Australian production on commercial networks, arguing the present mix had "undesirable sociological and cultural consequences" (cited in O'Regan, 1993, p. 71). The Committee's concerns were not simply about employment, but arguably were strengthened by notions of cultural nationalism that had long since gained a purchase in the Australian psyche (ibid, pp. 91-97). One could point, for example, to the visual arts' Heidelberg School, whose revisioning of Australian landscape painting was equated with a new Australian national spirit in the late colonial and early Federation decades of 1890–1930 (Berryman 2016); or literature's nativist Bulletin School of the 1890s, inspired by that popular magazine's radical republicanism which

[7] *In Melbourne Tonight* on GTV-9 began a 13-year run in 1957 and launched the remarkable television career of comedian/compere Graham Kennedy. *Revue* was produced the same year at ATN-7 in Sydney, as was *Pick-a-Box*, running until 1971 with popular compere Bob Dyer.
[8] The Senate Committee on the Encouragement of Australian Productions for Television, 1963, a.k.a. Vincent Committee.

argued for Australian national independence (Clarke 2002, pp. 71-2). Other art forms had thus responded to a demand for, and consciously reproduced, a distinct brand of cultural nationalism.

Yet a lack of enthusiasm by the then Menzies government resulted in legislative delay of some two years (and then only the broad tenets of the Committee's report, and none of the specific recommendations, were acted on). As will be discussed below, this pattern of slow and minimalist regulatory response to calls for local content protection continues to the present day.

O'Regan notes that by the late sixties a confluence of several factors resulted in a considerable increase in local production levels (1993, pp. 70-1). Quotas were introduced for local content across drama, documentary and advertisements, with drama subquotas designed to encourage higher-budget and children's production. Additionally, a third commercial television licence was granted in 1963 for what became the 0-10 Network. In combination they fuelled a boom in demand which ran until the late 2000s. The first audience hit was Crawford Production's *Homicide* (1964-1977), conclusively demonstrating the creative and commercial viability of local drama. Independent production companies proliferated, producing shows for both public and private broadcasters, and included Cash-Harmon Productions' *Number 96* (1972-1977); JNP Productions' *A Country Practice* (1981-1994); Grundy Television's *Prisoner* (1979-1986), *The Young Doctors* (1976-1983)*, Sons and Daughters* (1982-1987)*, The Restless Years* (1977-1981)*, Neighbours* (1985-2022 resumed 2023), as well as a slew of game and talent shows; EveryCloud Productions' *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries* (2012-2015); and Millennium Television's *McLeod's Daughters* (2001-2008). Local documentary series such as *This Fabulous Century* (1979, remade 1999), which celebrated and reflected Australia's history to Australians, also attracted large audiences.

The vision of Australia put forward by these productions was largely white and Anglo-Saxon, failing to keep pace with Australia's pluralising demographies. I can personally attest to vigorous debate in writer's rooms, whose composition was majority white Anglo-Celtic, when attempts were made to broaden the representation of Australia, particularly on commercial television. Where, to take but one example, were the Indigenous characters in top-rating commercial TV drama *McLeod's Daughters*- a show whose outback setting would surely call for their inclusion? Why were all the families on *Neighbours'* Ramsay St Anglo-Saxon? (Indeed, the first culturally diverse family was not introduced to that show until 2012). Resistance to change was invariably

on commercial grounds; the perception being that audiences would decline if presented with "too much diversity"[9]. This begs the question: "nationing for whom?" – underpinning the creation of Australia's second national broadcaster, with profound ramifications for the ABC.

4.4 'Nationing' for whom? - changes to Australia's public broadcasting system

As has been discussed above, the ABC had long been challenged by what might be termed "the public broadcaster's dilemma": how to retain audiences despite a Reithian commitment to 'serious' and 'minority' fare (explained further shortly). The arrival of television had added fuel to the fire; by 1962 the ABC's Commissioners were telling staff that "something would have to be done to increase ratings if it was to justify the budget increases television was making necessary" (Hall 1976, p. 66). The linkage of economic measures of success (ratings) to justify funding outcomes was in effect a continuation of the national broadcaster's longstoried 'highbrow-lowbrow' dialectic, a point that will become increasingly pertinent in subsequent chapters.

The early-mid 1970s had been a time of temporary abundance for the ABC, as a reformist Whitlam Labor government poured money into the public sphere, including the national broadcaster. That short summer was steadily reversed from 1975, with the rise of neoliberal free market ideas that prioritised a smaller public sphere and increased competition, and the election of a conservative Fraser Liberal government, who implemented austerity measures throughout the economy. During the period 1976-81 the ABC's funding collapsed by 25%, from $200M in 1975 to $150M in 1981 (Dempster 2000, pp. xiv-xv; Jacka 2000, p. 59).

The ABC was in a difficult position, seen by public figures on the political right as having a "bias toward radicalism"[10], yet by commercial networks as being stuffy, elitist and boring, well-deserving of its low ratings and slightly derogatory nickname: 'Aunty' (Inglis 1983, p. 391). Yet

[9] A personal anecdote summarises what was a widely-held position on the subject amongst commercial FTA producers and executives. When I proposed greater cultural diversity in casting on a popular show I directed, I was rhetorically asked: "Why sacrifice ratings on the altar of someone's progressive social agendas?- that's what the ABC was for". Influential research into diversity by Screen Australia: 'Seeing Ourselves. Reflections on diversity in Australian TV drama' (2016), suggested that audience preferences for culturally diverse casting, crewing and content well-preceded what risk-averse broadcasters were willing to produce.

[10] The BBC has long been accused of the same (q.v. Born 2004; Curry & Seaton 2009).

those same commercial networks resented any moves the ABC made to broaden its audience, fearing for their bottom lines (O'Regan 1993, p. 7). Hall (op. cit.) notes a third vector of consternation for Aunty, who did not feel able to talk publicly about its drive to larger audiences because of its obligation to minority audiences, which at the time the ABC was created referred to regional parts of the country, women and children. However, by the 1970s Australia's pluralising demographies had created a shift in alignment for the term towards racial, ethnic and cultural identity (Hawkins 1997), accompanied by the adoption during that decade of the term "multiculturalism" (O'Regan 1993, pp. 98-120). Yet this was not an area of perceived strength for the ABC; in other words, nationing agendas that underpinned the ABC's formation were seen to have evolved beyond its capabilities to service. This applied especially to providing programs in languages other than English to people from non-English speaking backgrounds, as well as providing multicultural perspectives that were unavailable on the Anglo-Celtic ABC (Jacka 2000). In response the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) was created as a radio network in the late 1970s, adding television in 1980, funded at least in part by savings made from cuts to the ABC.

Besides its three commercial free-to-air networks, Australia now had two public service broadcasters, plunging the ABC into what O'Regan neatly refers to as "a characteristic identity crisis" (1993, p. 7).[11] A committee of enquiry into the ABC was established (The Dix Committee 1981) which made numerous recommendations, resulting in a new Act (*Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act (No. 6) 1983* (Cth)) and transforming the ABC from a Commission into a Corporation. Of particular significance for content creators ever since (and driving such programming commissions as my own case study) was the inclusion of a new 'Charter of the Corporation', which stipulated that the ABC's responsibilities included:

> (i) broadcasting programs that contribute to a sense of national identity and inform and entertain, and reflect the cultural diversity of, the Australian community; and

[11] O'Regan says this in the context of the ABC's relations to commercial networks, where the same program (the comedy *Mother and Son*), rated better on moving to the commercial TEN Network than it did when on the ABC. However, the term "identity crisis" is also "characteristic", so applicable to other contexts including the one used here.

(ii) broadcasting programs of an educational nature
(Part II s6(1)(a)(i-ii))

It is interesting to note the revision of word order from the earlier Reithian mantra of "inform, educate and entertain". "Entertain" moves from third to second place, "cultural diversity" enters the field, and "educate" comes next.

The Act further obliges the ABC to take account of -

the multicultural character of the Australian community
(Pt II s6(2)(a)(iv))

-yet later the Act instructs that:

In performing its functions, the Corporation must have regard to the services[12] provided by the Special Broadcasting Service Corporation
(Pt IV s26)

It is further obliged to take account of:

the broadcasting services provided by the commercial and community sectors of the Australian broadcasting system
(Pt II s6(2)(a)(i))

and to:

…provide a balance between broadcasting programs of wide appeal and specialized broadcasting programs.
(Pt II s6 (2)(a)(iii))

"Specialized" here refers to programs that may have less audience appeal, but which are deemed socially beneficial, such as religious, arts or educational programmes. One might therefore distil these different requirements down to:

- Servicing nationing agendas by being simultaneously commercial (i.e. with ratings appeal), and specialist (i.e. where ratings are deprioritised) -
- - without stepping into the terrain of commercial and community television;

[12] I.e. broadcasting services.

- Servicing nationing agendas by addressing Australia's multicultural nature -
- - without stepping into the terrain of SBS.

To this should be added the expectation the ABC will provide news and information that is "accurate and impartial" (Pt II s8(1)(c)).

Finally, the first stated duty of the ABC Board, is:

> To ensure that the functions of the Corporation are performed efficiently and with maximum benefit to the people of Australia
> (Pt II s8(1)(a))

This primary duty carries a responsibility to provide its services for the benefit of the public (i.e. its 'public benefit') in measurable ways, with consequences that will be explored in detail through my case study in Chapter 6.

These multiple priorities, often in conflict, have elicited protective and contradictory behaviour from the organisation over many years. It has been defended as "…a space of experimentation and innovation in the television form. It has acted almost as a research and development unit for television as a whole" (Jacka 2000, p. 64). Yet, even before changes to the Act the ABC had also been characterised by journalist and longtime employee Selwyn Speight as "an amorphous animal with a life of its own, both sensitive and resistive to pressure, frequently baffling friend and foe by its ability to change shape when change will ensure its survival or further its purpose" (quoted in Inglis 1983, p. 394). As will be detailed in Chapter 6, our experience of producing local screen content for the ABC show these inherent contradictions continue unabated.

4.5 Accelerating change- subscription television, digitisation, and effects on local content.

The 1990s brought sector-wide change to the broadcasting environment, with contingent effects on the ABC. Although this exegesis relates most particularly to the ABC, discussion in the next two sections will therefore substantially include the commercial sector.

Historically, broadcast spectrum has been a limited resource in any country, which Australia carefully managed from earliest days by regulation that ensured there were a limited number of broadcasters and channels. However, in the 1990s new technological affordances made possible a dramatic increase in channels delivered not by signals over the airwaves, but via dedicated cables connected to individual premises, available by subscription. Subscription television (Pay TV) had been in operation in Europe and the USA for several decades already (with signals carried by satellite as well as cable), yet, as with the introduction of free-to-air television in Australia, its arrival here was a protracted affair mired in regulatory delay. This was driven by an unusual coalition of interests: existing commercial FTA licensees who resisted new competitors, and community and academic sectors who disliked the neoliberal: "'economic rationalist' policy discourse which positioned TV as a commodity…explicitly tied to market considerations and, arguably, less responsive to social needs…" (Flew & Spurgeon 2000, p. 71).

When Pay TV did finally arrive in 1995 it was not the step-change local content creators might have hoped for by virtue of there now being new outlets for new program commissions. In another echo of television's early years, local content initially made up only 7% of total expenditure, and it was not until five years later that legislation was introduced to raise this to just 10% (ibid p. 75). Elsewhere Turner observes Pay TV created:

> …a new sector that was relatively free of the cultural policy requirements imposed upon the broadcasters, and so this is arguably the point at which Australian television begins its transition from cultural institution to commercial industry (2016, p. 21).

Turner here refers to television organisations in general, i.e. both public and commercial broadcasters. As we have seen, the commercial sector was never a champion of 'nationing' as a project when it involved compulsion; Pay TV was a repeat demonstration from television's early years of the negative consequences for local content when market forces were left to themselves without the intervention of cultural-nationalist regulation[13].

[13] To bring a personal anecdote to the table, a veteran executive at a commercial FTA network once told me they liked Australian content because it rated, however they might never have started making it unless they had been forced to by regulation.

The transformation of Australia's broadcasting environment was accelerated by digitisation, which permitted multichannelling over the airwaves from 2009; by the time analogue signal was switched off in 2013 the country's five FTA channels had mushroomed to sixteen, and twenty-eight by 2021. This marked the end of spectrum scarcity, with wide-ranging effects that are still rippling through the entire broadcasting ecosystem. Recent work by Potter and Lotz (2021) maps these effects with particular focus on the ramifications for production of local drama and children's content. They explain the new channels have:

> …altered the dominant logic of Australian television from attracting a mass audience among scarce options to one featuring more choice that resulted in audience fragmentation and more narrowcast strategies (p. 96).

By "narrowcast strategies" they refer to attempts by broadcasters to attract their audience by demography and area of interest which they then split across the new channels. To take an example with which I have direct personal experience as director, producer, and executive producer, the serial drama *Neighbours* moved from the Ten Network's so-called 'main' channel (ie channel 10) to a new channel which they focussed on younger audiences (channel Eleven, later rebranded 10 Peach).

These new channels did not magically create new viewers, so ratings figures were now diluted across the increased number of outlets. To continue with *Neighbours* as an example, analysis of OzTAM[14] ratings figures compiled by the federal screen funding agency Screen Australia, show that in 2008 it attracted an average 764,000 viewers per episode (Screen Australia 2021c). By 2012 (a year after it had moved to Eleven) that had dropped to around 250,000 (OzTAM)[15]. Another example with which I had direct experience as both director and producer was the crime drama *City Homicide* (7 Network, 2007-2011). Although it remained on the main channel its

[14] OzTAM is official source of Television Audience Measurement (TAM) in Australia.

[15] Potter and Lotz also cite *Neighbours* as an example and refer to correspondence with the then-CEO of the show's production company Chris Oliver-Taylor, who noted an immediate drop of audience figures by 400,000 (2021, p. 101). I took over as Executive Producer of the show just after the changeover and can personally attest to the sense of near-panic that ran through us as we attempted to determine how much this was due to creative factors which were within our control to change, and how much was systemic and therefore outside our control. At that point it was unclear whether there was a fundamental shift of audience taste underway, and if the days of longform serial drama were therefore numbered.

ratings dropped from an average of 1.6M viewers per episode in 2007 to just 650,000 in 2011 (ibid).

Adding complexity to an already complex environment, during the period 2007-2012, other screen-based leisure activities were emerging which began to draw off audience attention from FTA television - online gaming and social media especially. Analysis of participation rates for screen media by Screen Australia from 2005-13 show online gaming rising from 5% to 13% of the total viewing audience, and social media use on mobile devices going from 0% to 23% (Screen Australia 2014). The percentage of Australian adults watching FTA declined 4% between 2010-11 and 2014-15 (ACMA [Australian Communications and Media Authority] 2015, p. 68). By 2018/19 the figure had declined a further 10% (ibid 2020, p. 17) - an inexorable downwards trend.

Commercial television ownership in Australia had generally been highly profitable thanks to tight regulation of the market and low competitive pressures (O'Regan 1993; Given 2016; Turner 2016, 2018a, 2018b). But now, the changing environment had dramatic consequences for FTA business models as new channels pushed up their costs but did not generate additional income. Data from the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) shows television advertising revenues remained the same from 1995-2014 (Potter, A & Lotz 2021, p. 99), and declined 5% from 2015 (Lotz, Potter & Johnson 2022, p. 282). Their share prices plunged: Network TEN from $2.50 per share in 2005 to just 20 cents by 2015; Seven West Media (owners of the 7 Network) from $4 in 2009 to 80 cents in 2015 (44 cents as of November 2022 (Australian Stock Exchange 2022)); Nine Network required recapitalisation in 2013, and within two years their shares were below the issue price (Given 2016, p. 117).

Financial pressures began to feed through the television ecosystem. There was no local production bonanza from the new multichannels (echoing early Pay-TV); in fact the reverse was true. While commercial broadcasters were still obliged by existing quota requirements to commission local content at the same rate on their legacy channels, additional obligations for the new digital channels were relatively light at some four hours per day by 2015 (Potter, A & Lotz 2021, p. 98). Facing declining profitability, commercial networks now reduced their program expenditure on expensive forms such as drama, placing additional burden on producers to make up the resulting budgetary shortfalls (ibid, p. 100). I experienced the results on the ground: reduced numbers of shoot days, reduced art department resources and crew across multiple

productions; and to name one show specifically, the annual budget for *Neighbours* was cut by $5M in 2010 while it simultaneously increased its output hours by 20%.

Changes to the program mix on commercial FTAs were inevitable and would result in independent producers increasingly relying on PSBs, especially the ABC, for commissions; effects which will be examined in detail in Chapter 5.1. They were to be exacerbated by another technological development: an increase in the availability of fast(er) internet, which ushered in a new stage of technological development and digitisation.

4.6 The Arrival of Netflix (and friends)

Pressures built with second stage of Australia's digitisation: the commencement of Subscriber Video on Demand (SVOD) services. The first to arrive was Netflix in 2015, just fifteen months after analogue switchoff. Compared to the relatively slow adoption of Pay-TV two decades earlier (Potter, A & Lotz 2021, p. 97), the rapidity of Netflix's uptake by Australian audiences was remarkable, reaching 10% penetration of the market in just six months (Thomsen 2015).

It is worth taking a moment to note how patterns of audience response to technological affordances in Australia seem to repeat over time. As described early in this chapter, crystal radio sets, then a new technology easily customisable by enthusiasts, were widely hacked in the early, 'sealed set', days of broadcasting by listeners unwilling to be bound to just one station. Ninety years later the home PC - a technology also easily customisable by enthusiasts - facilitated identical behaviour. The rise of overseas streaming services (particularly Netflix) that were geoblocked from the Australian marketplace presented tech-savvy users a tempting cookie jar of content. Ramon Lobato and James Meese detail how such users circumvented geoblocking filters by deploying Virtual Private Networks, with an estimated 200,000 unauthorised Australian Netflix subscribers by 2014 (Lobato & Meese 2016, p. 120). Such numbers certainly demonstrated the commercial viability of Netflix' formal entry into Australia, which occurred just one year later in 2015- comprehensively altering the television landscape in this country, and the operating environment for creative practitioners.

Since that time digital affordances have seen a multiplication of other streaming services 'over the top' (OTT) of broadcast television - to name but a few: Britbox, Apple, Stan, Amazon,

YouTube, Fetch, Disney+. Importantly, OTT services are almost all transnational enterprises, at the time of writing still not bound by local content obligations (although, as mentioned in the Introduction, local content obligations may soon be introduced). Their arrival has dramatically magnified the pace of industrial change already well in train from the first wave of digitisation, with complex and overlapping effects in numerous areas, leading to post-broadcasting "end of television" narratives (Given 2016), and analysis concluding that FTA television is in the decline stage of its economic life cycle (ACMA 2020, pp. 27-8).

As mentioned, detailed mapping of these effects has been undertaken by others, particularly Lotz, Potter, Sanson, McCutcheon and Eklund (2021), only some of which lie within the scope of this exegesis to further explore. The catalogue includes: declining advertising revenues on FTA TV; changes to local content rules that have seen children's content obligations dropped from commercial FTAs and challenges from the commercial sector to all remaining obligations; PSBs becoming the principle outlet for local fictional and factual content (i.e. drama, comedy, documentary and longform current affairs); a new government regulatory body[16]; changes to ownership rules, and the increasing mulitnationalisation of ownership in both the production and distribution sectors.

4.7 Challenges to PSBs

To this catalogue of effects should be added a further element of crucial importance for independent producers, and my case study: the widely-discussed challenges to PSBs over the past several decades within Western liberal democracies (Dempster 2000, Flew & Spurgeon 2000, Turner & Cunningham 2000, Jacka 2000, Born 2004, Martin & Lowe 2014, Tracey 2014, Turner 2016, Given 2016, Lotz, et al. 2022). Turner notes that:

> In many locations, the rationale for the public broadcaster – the provision of information, education and entertainment for the public good – has not easily survived what has been

[16] The Australian Communications and Media Authority, formed in 2005 by the merger of the former Australian Broadcasting Authority and Australian Communications Authority.

> dubbed the postbroadcast era, increasingly shaped by commercialisation, neo-liberalism, de-regulation and privatisation (2016, p. 17).

We have cited Born's historical account of these challenges to the BBC. That they retain their immediacy may be gauged by the fact that recent freezes to the BBC's licence fee are set to cost the organisation £285M over the next five years, leading in early 2022 to sweeping cuts to commissioned content, the axing of two linear channels, and the loss of over 1000 jobs (Whittingham 2022). Furthermore, serious consideration has been given by the UK government to terminating the licence fee altogether when current regulatory arrangements sunset in 2027 (Medhurst 2022). While this is yet to play out, if enacted it would put under threat 71% of the BBC's funding – some £3.52Bn – and see the potential end of the organisation as it has been construed since its founding a century ago, in 1922 (Lawes 2022).

Political hostility towards public broadcasting in the UK has been mirrored in Australia. Both Australia's PSBs have seen their funding steadily reduced, especially in recent years (Dr Tyson Wils 2018). Analysis by Dawson for Per Capita Research (2020) shows the full extent of reductions to the ABC: $783M since 2015 (Figure 3):

Figure 3: ABC Funding Cuts Accumulated Impact 2015-2023

Federal Budget	Type of funding cut	Financial Year Impact								
		FY15/16 $M	FY16/17 $M	FY17/18 $M	FY18/19 $M	FY19/20 $M	FY20/21 $M	FY21/22 $M	FY22/23 $M	TOTAL
May 2014 Budget	**Core Funding**									
	One per cent reduction	-8.8	-9	-8.7	-8.8	-9	-9.1	-9	-9.3	**-71.7**
	Cross-portfolio budget savings	-0.4	-0.8	-0.8	-0.8					**-2.8**
May 2014 Budget	**Terminated contract**									
	Australia Network	-18.6	-18.6	-18.6	-18.6	-18.6	-18.6	-18.6	-18.6	**-148.8**
Nov 2014 MYEFO	**Core Funding**									
	Efficiency Dividend		-20.4	-47.6	-55.3	-67.7	-53.3	-54.2	-55.2	**-353.7**
May 2016 Budget	**Tied Funding ***									
	Enhanced News Gathering and Digital Content Delivery			-20.7	-20.5	-20.3	-20.3	-20.3	-20.3	**-122.4**
May 2018 Budget	**Core Funding**									
	Indexation Freeze						-14.6	-27.8	-41.3	**-83.7**
TOTAL FUNDING CUTS 2015 - 2023		**-27.8**	**-48.8**	**-96.4**	**-104**	**-115.6**	**-115.9**	**-129.9**	**-144.7**	**-783.1**

**Tied funding for enhanced news gathering was reduced in 2016, and then renewed at the reduced rate in 2018. Tied funding for Digital Content Delivery was not renewed in 2016.*
***Source:** author's calculations taken from Portfoilio Budget Statements and information provided by the ABC at Senate Budget Estimates 2018*

Source: Per Capita. Reprinted with permission.

While political hostility toward the ABC has somewhat abated since Australia's change of federal government in May 2022, the figures above show indexation freezes alone resulted in a reduction of $83.7M, forcing the organisation to shed some 250 staff positions and a number of flagship programs in 2020 (Worthington & Hitch 2020). The October 2022 federal budget has restored indexation over the four year forward estimates, and funding security for the national broadcasters forms part of the government's recently-released cultural policy, "Revive" (Commonwealth of Australia 2023), but despite this so far only 10% of the organisation's accumulated losses since 2014 have been restored (Ahern & Saxon 2022).

As noted, both Australia's PSBs have developed commercial arms to diversify their income streams.[17] SBS has additionally taken advertising since 1991, whereas the ABC is prohibited from doing so by its Charter. At some $29M per annum the ABC's earnings from commercial activities are miniscule in proportion to its losses from government appropriations (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2021). Yet even this small amount led to protest from the commercial media sector, as their business models came under increasing pressure (Turner 2016). The commercial sector has long held that the central role of the ABC, if it must exist at all, should be purely as a corrective to market failure. Yet ironically, commercial protest also arose when the ABC performed precisely that role by introducing online and catchup services in 2008, several years ahead of commercial alternatives.[18] The organisation is equally criticised if it does as if it doesn't.

In the context of the atomisation of a formerly coherent body of viewers across a multiplicity of platforms and special interests, Turner's 2016 analysis of the challenges to PSBs appears accurate:

> I want to suggest that it is increasingly the case that support for a public broadcaster, in Australia as elsewhere, runs against the grain of the ways in which the social and political functions of the media have mutated since the beginning of the post-broadcast era. What I have in mind here includes the fact that what counts as the media now addresses an increasingly individualised audience rather than a community of citizens, that what the media now produces as content is increasingly focused on entertainment rather than information and that the ethical foundations of the fourth estate model of journalism – the key link between the media and the democratic state – are under severe strain as the media increasingly identifies itself as belonging to the commercial entertainment, rather than the information, sector (p. 21).

Turner's pointing to the fourth estate model of journalism is particularly relevant here since my case study, *Getting Their Acts Together*, belonged to what is broadly termed a 'factual' genre. The tensions he identifies between entertainment and information have become commonplace, and

[17] This followed on from the BBC massively expanding its own commercial operations from 1987 (Born 2004, p. 59). In this respect, as in others already noted, the BBC has been a trailblazer, with pressures and responses in the UK leading Australia by 10-20 years.

[18] Indeed, when I was EP of *Neighbours*, broadcast on the (commercial) TEN Network, we received frequent viewer complaints that the network's catchup service was barely functional. This was in 2013, five years after the ABC had introduced its fully-functional service.

as the following chapter will show, increasingly normalised amongst the production community and the viewing audience.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the tensions between technological change, industrial business models, audience behaviour, and government regulation go back to the very beginnings of broadcasting in Australia. While change in the first three categories has only gained in speed and magnitude, regulatory response has been slow to arrive, confused, and mired in contradictory priorities (c.f. Hall, 1976; Regan, 1993; Inglis, 2006).

Significantly, Lotz, Potter and Johnson (2022) point out that twentieth century audiovisual policy, designed for conditions of scarcity (in spectrum and physical infrastructure) cannot address twenty-first century conditions where these are now in abundance. This has ramifications for the production of culturally representative local content. Elsewhere Potter and Lotz (2021) observe:

> The situation evident in 2021 consequently might seem familiar as Australian policymakers again find themselves facing extraordinary technological change and increased difficulty operating with national norms that support the production of distinctly Australian stories amid a complexly interconnected transnational industry (p. 106).

To this must be added the increasingly precarious position of the ABC, recent federal political changes notwithstanding. Taken together with funding cuts to Australia's largest screen funding agency, Screen Australia, of $1M per year over four years from 2015, these multiple forms of disruption have compromised the cultural nationalism that long underpinned Australia's policy agendas and have fuelled a sense of crisis in the industry. Inevitably the pressures described in this chapter flow through to screen practitioners.

To illustrate this, in the following chapter the focus will move one layer down, to encompass more specific effects of industrial change on screen production businesses and individual filmmakers.

5 A MESO VIEW: INDUSTRY CHANGE

This chapter will examine the effects of industrial change and precarity at the structural level of individual organisations and labour. I will begin by concentrating on the two areas most directly relevant to *Getting Their Acts Together*; namely the altered program mix on commercial networks, and the corresponding shifting of local content responsibilities to Australia's PSBs, which has the potential to exacerbate the ABC's longstanding structural contradictions. Discussion will then expand to encompass the effects of precarity on practitioner agency, with theory by Dwyer (2019, op. cit.) that places competition for creative agency into a politico-economic framework.

The effects of increased precarity in global media on local labour has been the subject of an influential volume edited by Curtin and Sanson: *Precarious Creativity: Global Media, Local Labour* (2016), in which they point out precarity has become a common condition for workers worldwide. Included are film and television workers - "highly trained industrial elites" – who are subject to the same forces of globalisation as other industries:

> No longer can individual workers expect a single career; instead they must ready themselves for iterative change and persistent contingency as standard employment and its associated entitlements become artifacts of a bygone industrial era. Precarious livelihoods are indicative of a new world order of social and economic instability (pp. 5-6).

In the past, 'above-the-line' screen practitioners[19] such as this author have been able to rely on training and employment opportunities offered by a steady stream of Australian drama productions on FTA television, especially on commercial networks. That has now changed. Section 5.1 will show how the FTA program mix has altered over the past fifteen years, which includes a substantial reduction of local drama on commercial FTAs. Section 5.2 will show how this is practically materialising for practitioners by an examination of my own filmography, contextualised in Section 5.3 by discussion of the internationalisation of the industry, cross-

[19] 'Above-the-line' refers to practitioners who originate and produce screen content, generally writers, producers, directors, as well as principal cast. In screen budgets these roles are placed in the upper sections of the budget, while technical and other crew are placed in subsequent sections demarcated by a horizontal line, ie 'below the line'.

referenced with observation by industry colleagues of the effects this is having on the promotion of local content with cultural value.

Section 5.4 will show there has been an increase in documentary/factual production, shown on PSBs (here I follow current industry practice by using the terms 'documentary' and 'factual' interchangeably[20]). Funding models, especially for documentary, will be examined in Section 5.5 as part of a discussion of power relationships between practitioners and gatekeepers. In most cases funding is contingent on a marketplace attachment - usually a local exhibitor/broadcaster - and government support programs. This hands considerable power to gatekeepers who commission and finance projects. Given that PSBs have become the main commissioners of local factual content there is enormous pressure on their limited broadcast slots as large numbers of potential projects vie for inclusion. The tension between the industry's economic imperatives and the individual practitioner's desire to have creative and moral agency is the source of a power dynamic that will be discussed at some length in Section 5.6. This will set the scene for a detailed examination of these issues in practice through my case study - Chapter 6.

Analysis will include empirical data from Screen Australia, the Australian government, Ampere Analysis; my own professional biography; interviews with industry colleagues; and work by Lotz et al (2021), Dwyer (2019b), Hambly (2020), Zoellner (2016), and Zubrycki (2018).

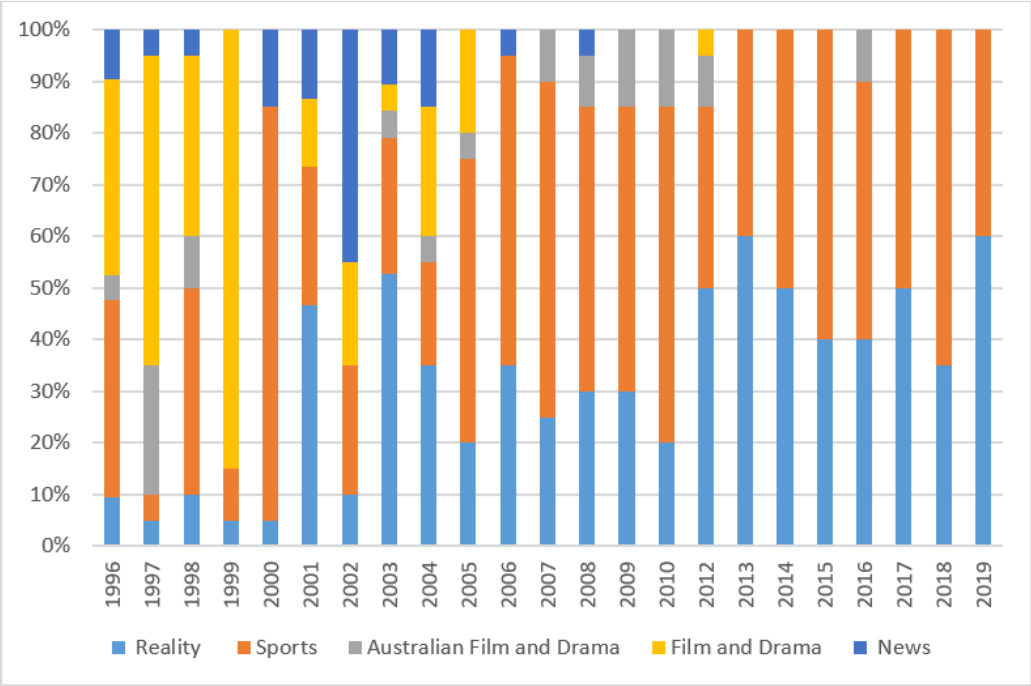
5.1 A snapshot of the present position: changes to program mix and employment opportunities in drama

The program mix on FTA television has undergone a profound shift over the past fifteen years. Figure 4 reproduces research conducted by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) for an Options Paper which offers pathways to regulatory overhaul: *Supporting Australian stories on our screens* (2020). It shows that from 1996 reality television (RTV) and sports genres have progressively pushed drama and news out of the top 20 shows on FTA

[20] However, the conflation is contested by some filmmakers (e.g. Zubrycki 2018), as will be discussed in Section 5.6.2.

television. In 1996, before digital disruption took hold, drama and sport overwhelmingly rated in the top 20, with RTV under 10%. By 2019 the top 20 shows are entirely RTV and sport.

Figure 4: Top 20 shows on FTA television by genre



Sources: OzTAM, Screen Australia and TV Tonight, Bureau of Communications and Arts Research (BCAR) analysis. (ACMA [Australian Communications and Media Authority] 2020)
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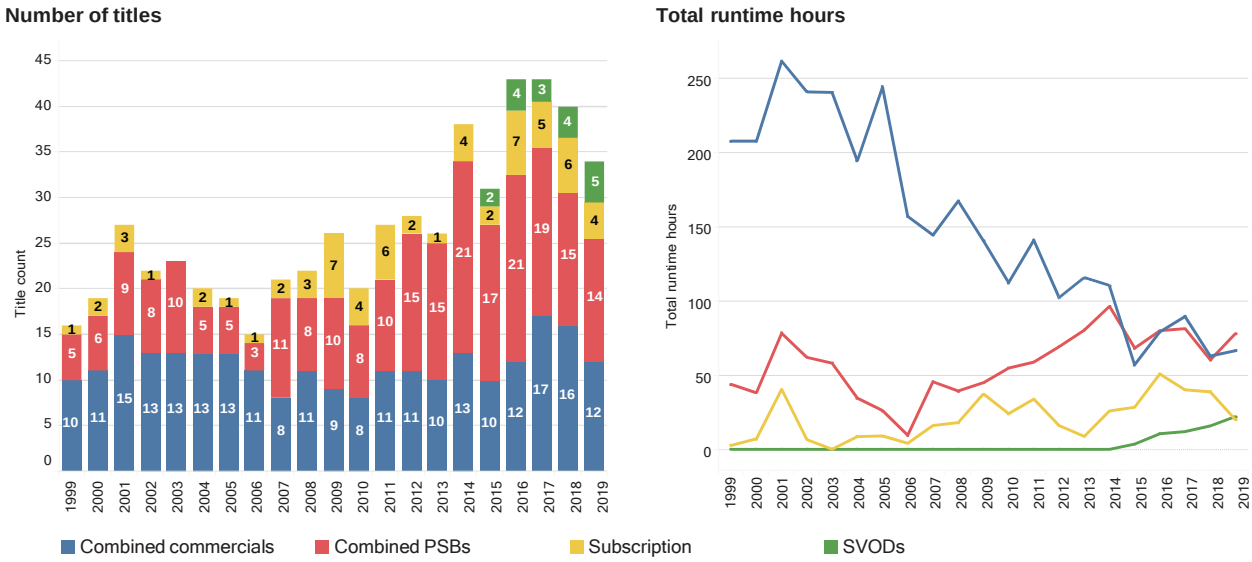
This is a result of the better value proposition of drama on streamers compared to the stretched budgets available on FTA networks, while program genres best experienced live have demonstrated resilience in drawing audiences across a wide demographic (i.e. they keep the 'broad' in broadcasting)[21] (Potter, A & Lotz 2021, p. 100). In the industry such genres are referred to as 'event' television, and predominantly comprise sport and RTV formats, particularly RTV with competitive elements (c.f. *Big Brother* (2001-present), *The Block* (2003-present), *Farmer Wants a Wife* (2007-present), *Masterchef* (2009-present), *The Voice* (2012-present)).

Recent research by Lotz, Potter, McCutcheon, Sanson and Eklund, who collectively form the Making Australian TV in the 21st Century Research Team at Queensland University of

[21] For example, in 2018 two critically-acclaimed 'prestige' local drama offerings, *Safe Harbour* on SBS and *Riot* on the ABC, were comprehensively eclipsed in the ratings by the Nine Network's reality show *Married at First Sight* (Knox 2018).

Technology, provides further insight into drama between 1999 and 2019 (Figure 5). It shows that in adult television, while the number of *titles* commissioned across FTA, subscription and SVOD platforms has risen since 1999, the number of *hours* declined by 68% on commercial FTAs; with other platforms, including SVODs, far from making up the shortfall.

Figure 5: Yearly Total Titles and Hours of Adult Drama by Provider Type



Source: Making Australian TV in the 21st Century Research Team, 2021
Shared unchanged under License Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial Share Alike 4.0

Note the figures do not include serials (soaps), however if they are factored in the decline is 45% (2021, p. 12)[22].

So, although more adult dramas are being made, they are shorter runs. The longform shows of twenty or more episodes per year that generated significant employment for local writers and directors have almost all ceased, with only two currently remaining: the Seven Network serial *Home and Away* (1987-present), and Australia's longest-running show, the serial drama *Neighbours* (Network TEN, 1985-2022; resumed 2023 for TEN and Amazon). Children's titles and

[22] The visibility of drama has also fallen on commercial FTAs. The authors explain: "Notably this data does not identify the extent to which the declining hours of commercial adult dramas have been scheduled on multichannels with lower viewership or received limited on-air promotion since 2011. Commercial broadcasters continued to meet the hours-based requirements for Australian drama, however, the visibility and presence of Australian drama on their linear television services have been strongly diminished." (Lotz, Potter, McCutcheon, et al. 2021, p. 13). Screen Australia's since-released 2021/22 Drama Report cited in the Introduction shows the trend continuing, with combined FTA and BVOD drama hours falling to just 278 in 2021/22, compared to 715 hours in 2000/01 (Screen Australia 2022a, p. 17).

hours have remained relatively stable at around 100 hours per year (Lotz, Potter, McCutcheon, et al. 2021, p. 13), however this low number is not sufficient to generate compensating industry employment. Industrial change has led to a drying up of employment opportunities in drama, impacting emerging and established professionals alike. This has certainly affected my own career, as will be shown the next section.

5.2 Industry change at ground level: a personal diachronic survey

Following is a brief diachronic survey of my professional biography as a means of illustrating the effects of industrial change at ground level, which I will then cross-reference with observations from colleagues and empirical data. It will show a move from drama to documentary, in line with the reduction of drama hours shown above, and increased precarity.

By way of context, I graduated from Australia's national training institution: The Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS), in 1988, with a BA in Television Direction. I was mentored by pioneering television director William Fitzwater (1935-2021), whose training regime included switched multicamera techniques[23] as well as single camera and bluescreen. This gave me a wide variety of skills. My graduate work (*A Soldier's Tale*, 1988) experimented with form and bluescreen technologies to combine classical music by Igor Stravinsky with live action drama. This was followed by my first professional engagement as director on a similarly experimental bluescreen work (*Son of Romeo,* SBS TV, 1989), which recast the story of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* for solo mime artist Chris Willems in the style of a Warner Brothers cartoon with a rock soundtrack. Both works won awards (listed in footnote[24]).

Although they lay stylistically far outside the commercial mainstream, their success, coupled with my training in switched multicam, helped me attain a shadow directing position in 1993 on the longrunning drama series: *A Country Practice* (JNP Productions 1981-1994), which at that time

[23] This refers to the live editing of a scene between two or more cameras that are deployed to observe the unfolding action.
[24] *A Soldier's Tale:* AFTRS/Qantas Travel Scholarship, 1988; Australian Video Festival Student Category, 1989; selection to Montbelliard Video Festival, France, 1989. *Son of Romeo*: Australian Cinematographers Society 1990; Australian Television Society (Production Design) 1990; Australian Television Society (Direction) 1990.

utilised switched multicam. In this role I was attached to an established director and given a block of scenes to direct amounting to half of one episode. On the strength of that attachment, I was then employed as director in my own right on the show, which effectively launched my career in drama. It will be seen from this how important were the training opportunities provided by local content production.

The television industry's employment strategies were (and remain) apparently self-contradictory: new talent has always been in demand, yet there is a countervailing reluctance to employ artists who are unproven. Drama is an expensive medium and producers are naturally careful when selecting both cast and crew, a situation that has only intensified as drama budgets have doubled in the past decade (George 2022, p. 13, citing Fair). Australia's drama production peaked in the early 2000s at nearly 400 hours per annum (Figure 5), generating significant demand. My body of work by the mid 1990s satisfied the necessary criteria and drama became my mainstay for the next two decades, as is evident in Fig. 6 below:

Figure 6: List of works on which I had an above-the-line role [25]

Drama **Documentary** **Other**

YEAR	TITLE of WORK	TYPE of WORK	MY ROLE	PRODCO and BROADCASTER
1988	*A SOLDIER'S TALE*	Bluescreen music drama	Director, Writer	Australian Film, Television and Radio School graduate work
1989	*SON OF ROMEO*	Bluescreen cross-genre special	Director	Light Image Productions for SBS TV
1990-93	*Various corporate and educational projects*		Director	Various
1993	*A COUNTRY PRACTICE*	Series	Director	JNP Films for 7 Network
	NEIGHBOURS	Serial	Director	Grundy TV for 10 Network & BBC

[25] Here I use terms as they are generally understood in the Australian industry and codified by Screen Australia. 'Series' means a collection of a limited number of episodes, "where each episode tells and resolves a story unto itself". 'Serial' means a run of potentially unlimited numbers of episodes "telling long-arc stories that unfold incrementally" (Screen Australia 2018, p. 12). Note these definitions can vary across jurisdictions; in the UK for instance the definitions of 'series' and 'serials' are reversed. Other terms are self-explanatory.

	A COUNTRY PRACTICE	Series	Director	JNP Films for 10 Network
	HOME AND AWAY	Serial	Director	7 Network
	Corporate videos for live satellite broadcast		Director	Communicon Television
1994	*SOUNDS MAJESTIC*	Live orchestral outside broadcast	Director	SBS TV
	NEIGHBOURS	Serial	Director	Grundy TV for 10 Network & BBC
	***PASSION:** LOVE SEEN IN LAUNDROMAT; THE GUN IN HISTORY*	Teleplays	Director	Mise-en-scene Productions for SBS TV
1995	*BLUE HEELERS*	Series	Director	Southern Star Entertainment for 7 Network
	NEIGHBOURS	Serial	Director	Grundy TV for 10 Network & BBC
1996	*HEARTBREAK HIGH*	Series	Director	Gannon Television for ABC TV
	PACIFIC DRIVE	Serial	Director	VRP Production Services
	BLUE HEELERS	Series	Director	Southern Star Entertainment for 7 Network
	MURDER CALL	Series	Director	Hal McElroy/Southern Star Entertainment for 9 Network
1997	*HEARTBREAK HIGH*	Series	Director	Gannon Television for ABC TV
	ALL SAINTS	Serial	Director	Amalgamated Television Services, 7 Network
	BLUE HEELERS	Series	Director	Southern Star Entertainment for 7 Network
1998	*MURDER CALL*	Series	Director	Hal McElroy/Southern Star Films for 9 Network
	BLUE HEELERS	Series	Director	Southern Star Entertainment for 7 Network
1999	*STINGERS*	Series	Director	Simpson Le Mesurier Productions for 9 Network

	BLUE HEELERS	Series	Director	Southern Star Entertainment for 7 Network
	SOMETHING IN THE AIR	Serial	Director	Simpson Le Mesurier Productions for ABC TV
2000	*HORACE AND TINA*	Children's Miniseries	Director	Jonathan M. Shiff Productions for 10 Network
	BLUE HEELERS	Series	Director	Southern Star Entertainment for 7 Network
	THE SECRET LIFE OF US	Series	Director	Southern Star Entertainment for 10 Network
2001	*SOMETHING IN THE AIR*	Serial	Director	Simpson Le Mesurier Productions for ABC TV
2002	*PIRATE ISLANDS*	Children's Miniseries & Telemovie	Setup Director	Jonathan M. Shiff Productions for 10 Network
	McLEOD'S DAUGHTERS	Series	Director	Millenium Television for 9 Network
2003	*WICKED SCIENCE*	Children's Miniseries & Telemovie	Director	Jonathan M. Shiff Productions for 10 Network
	SCOOTER- SECRET AGENT	Children's Miniseries	Setup Director	Jonathan M. Shiff Productions for 10 Network
	THE VEIL	Short Film	Producer/Director, Writer	Independent
2004	*McLEOD'S DAUGHTERS*	Series	Director	Millenium Television for the 9 Network
	NEIGHBOURS	Serial	Director	FremantleMedia Australia for 10 Network & BBC
	HEADLAND	Series Pilot	Director	7 Network
2005/6	*McLEOD'S DAUGHTERS*	Series	Director	Millenium Television for 9 Network
2007/8	*McLEOD'S DAUGHTERS*	Series	Director	Millenium Television for 9 Network
2008/9	*CITY HOMICIDE*	Series	Director	7 Network
	DRIVEN TO DIFFRACTION	Oneoff Documentary	Creative Producer, Director, Writer	Kojo Productions for Institutional release

2010	*CITY HOMICIDE*	Series	Producer	7 Network
	MICROBES TO MACROBES	Oneoff Documentary	Creative Producer, Director, Writer	Kojo Productions for Institutional release
2011	*NEIGHBOURS*	Serial	Producer	FremantleMedia Australia for 10 Network Australia & C5 UK
2012/3	*NEIGHBOURS*	Serial	Executive Producer	FremantleMedia Australia for 10 Network Australia & C5 UK
2014	*8MMM ABORIGINAL RADIO*	Comedy Series	Director's Mentor	Princess Pictures for ABC TV
2016	*LOST IN PRONUNCIATION*	Short Comedy Series	Director	JDR Screen ABC iView
2017	*MAKING A MARK*	Oneoff Documentary	Executive Producer, Writer, Director	SLA Films for the Adelaide Film Festival
2020	*GETTING THEIR ACTS TOGETHER*	Oneoff Documentary	Executive Producer, Director, Writer	SLA Films for ABC TV
2021	*TINY OZ*	Documentary series	Field Director	Northern Pictures for ABC TV

It will be seen that between 1994 and 2009 my employment was exclusively in drama, for both commercial and PSB FTAs. It spanned multiple dramatic genres, including crime, medical and children's, on series, mini-series and serial formats. I had more than enough work; indeed frequently had to turn offers away as I was fully booked. My income during this time was comfortably above the national average.

It is not practical to cross-tabulate the above data with hours of content I personally directed or produced, however it is noteworthy that a tapering off of my employment in television drama from around 2013 coincides with the analysis in Figure 5, showing a particularly steep reduction in drama hours produced in Australia by FTA networks at that time.

It will also be seen that my documentary work has increased over the past decade, and that since 2014 none of my work has been for commercial FTAs. Section 5.4 below will examine documentary output in Australia in greater detail, however here I point out that the increase of my documentary work has not compensated for the reduction in my drama work; it is therefore an employment environment of increased precarity. My income has dropped to levels that, were

I to be joining the industry now without the benefit of accrued savings, would not sustain me as a fulltime filmmaker.

As the industry evolves there is a natural process of renewal, reinforced by industry support initiatives to encourage social goals such as cultural and gender diversity; for example, Screen Australia's Gender Matters program (Screen Australia 2022c), or Screen Queensland's Equity and Diversity Taskforce (Screen Queensland 2021). Whether my own biography is generalisable in terms other than natural renewal or self-preference therefore warrants some scrutiny. First, however, it is important to understand the internationalising context in which the industry increasingly operates, and to clarify the different effects this has on employment for originating artists (writers, producers and directors), compared with technical crew (gaffers, grips, wardrobe and makeup, caterers, assistant directors, post-production workers, etc).

5.3 Employment opportunities and cultural goals in the context of the internationalisation of the industry

At the time of writing there is an employment boom in the industry for technical crew (Jasek 2021; Screen Australia 2022a). To understand the apparently contradictory assertion that conditions of precarity simultaneously obtain, it is therefore necessary to disentangle the creation of local content in service of cultural goals from economic and industrial questions. As noted in the Introduction, Australian government support programs intertwine cultural (nationing) and economic goals; a picture complicated by the fact that the Australian screen industry is internationalising. As also noted, this has been extensively mapped by the Queensland University of Technology (Lotz & Potter 2022; Lotz, Potter, McCutcheon, et al. 2021; Lotz, Potter, Sanson, et al. 2021; Lotz & Sanson 2021), and the intention is not to repeat that work here. However, I point out that internationalisation takes multiple forms, two of which have particular relevance to this discussion. One is the attraction of overseas, 'footloose' production through government support mechanisms; the other is a focus by government-funded screen agencies on supporting local content perceived to have international appeal.

5.3.1 Footloose production

Footloose production is not, in the main, 'local content' in the sense that footloose productions do not generally tell Australian stories by Australian artists; Australia is simply a production and/or post-production destination (e.g. Marvel Studios' feature film *Thor: Love and Thunder* (2022), or the ten part Disney+ series: *Nautilus* (2022-23)). Footloose productions are mostly written elsewhere and come with their key creative roles already filled, and therefore predominantly create local jobs for technical crew, line producers, and some cast, but not for local writers, producers and directors. It is substantially responsible for the present high employment level of technical crew and so provides a sugar hit to industry employment figures, but is fickle, affected by exogenous business and economic factors such as the US-Australian dollar exchange rate. It is noteworthy that when the Australian dollar was close to parity against the US dollar in July 2008, the level of US feature films shot in Australia (one of the largest footloose employment categories) fell to zero (Screen Australia 2021a). As noted in the Introduction, George (2022, p. 42), explains that the realities of employment precarity tend to be disguised because footloose production is counted alongside production of local content when Australia's largest screen agency, the federally funded Screen Australia, publicises Australian production figures.

Even when footloose production is generated by Australians, with significant cast/crew positions for Australians (e.g. the Baz Luhrmann biopic, *Elvis* (2022)), such productions do not generally reflect the local culture. As Lotz & Sanson (2021) have observed:

> Advocates for robust creative sectors indiscriminately conflate economic activity with cultural dividends, latching onto the passports of key creative talent or domestic filming locations as evidence of the value of content to the citizenry and as justification for government support. But these criteria often do little to explicitly facilitate stories about Australians and Australian experiences, even if they generate financial metrics (e.g., jobs, revenue) that bureaucrats and lobbyists can use to paint a picture of a robust creative sector (p. 16).

This leads to discussion of the second form of internationalisation of relevance here; the focus by screen agencies on promoting local content that will 'travel'.

5.3.2 Internationalisation of content

George (op. cit.) observes: "It is a relentless slog to finance local drama" (p. 23), and that cultural value should be "the number one driver behind the government's support" (p. 38). That is not currently the case, and the fact that cultural value is a diluted priority in government support mechanisms has employment ramifications for above-the-line content creators.

This is shown by recent research from filmmaker and academic Glenda Hambly (2020) into the policies of Screen Australia, which attempt to straddle cultural and economic goals. She provides examples of funding decisions for feature dramas that demonstrate, despite the agency's rhetoric in support of cultural goals, its focus since 2007 has in fact been on content globalisation, i.e. the valorising of productions with content thought to have global commercial appeal over projects deemed less likely to 'travel', but which may be more representative of local culture. Lotz et al (2021) argue on similar lines, noting that Screen Australia fails to apply its own cultural content tests[26] consistently; and:

> …'commercial potential' also plays a role in funding decisions. This works to the detriment of richly Australian content that is less likely to enjoy commercial success internationally because of its Australian specificity (p. 8).

A larger pool of lower-budget, "richly Australian" projects has in the past provided more employment opportunities for originating artists. Despite Screen Australia's belief commercial success will reinforce production of local content, Hambly shows its present policies have not resulted in either the levels of commercial success hoped for, or greater opportunity for local filmmakers, and that: "…given current government and film agency policy settings, the future of the local arm of the feature industry dedicated to telling Australian stories looks increasingly bleak" (p. 116). The conflation of cultural and economic goals permeates all genres and release platforms; Lotz and Potter (2022) describe the same forces at work in the small screen.

[26] Q.v. Screen Australia's enabling legislation, the Screen Australia Act 2008, to: *ensure the development of a diverse range of Australian programs that deal with matters of national interest or importance to Australians, or that illustrate or interpret aspects of Australia or the life and activities of Australian people* (*Screen Australia Act (No.12) 2008* (Cth), Section 6(3)(a); cited in Lotz, Potter, Sanson, et al. 2021)

5.3.3 Cross-references

This analysis contradicts industry discourse spanning many years that has tended to emphasise the opportunities soon to arrive due to exploding demand for content created by the proliferation of cashed-up digital platforms. I referred to optimistic industry spin in the Introduction. Further examples may be found in a collection of interviews undertaken by Jock Given (2016) in which 25 leading industry figures provide a snapshot of the present and a look ahead to 2025. For instance: “Australian content will be everywhere” (Gai Le Roy, digital media strategist, p. 10); or: “Because we live in a globalised world and we speak English, it’s an amazing opportunity for our production companies and content creators, to now operate on a global scale, and to take our culture out there” (Deanne Weir, digital media entrepreneur, p. 65).

I would contend that such discourse mistakes signs for wonders. Recently I conducted research into screen industry sustainability for the South Australian Film Corporation, interviewing a series of colleagues to discover their on-the-ground experiences of the changing operating environment (Jasek 2021). One producer said of the situation for independents who do not have the backing of large multinational partners: “it is tenuous and will remain tenuous” (p. 15). Another noted that: “…for the level of projects that we put into production, no we're not sustainable” (p. 24). The oft-cited ’strike rate’ of getting a major project into production was just one in five years (p. 7).

Separately I interviewed my colleague producers of *Getting Their Acts Together*, who have a mixed drama and documentary slate, specifically for this exegesis. On the subject of precarity for local producers, one said:

> I think that time will tell in 10 years, because you show me the pathway of how these emerging producers- they're only going to be producers for hire. I don't see them setting up big production companies.
> (Jasek, interview with Vincent & McBride, 2 July 2021)

Elsewhere in the same interview she noted:

> Many producers would get paid more working as teachers a hundred percent. They'd be paid more working at a senior school teaching media (ibid).

The larger picture is painted by the Queensland University of Technology's "Australian Television Drama Index" cited above, in which they note: "In 2019, twice as many companies produced 20 per cent fewer hours than in 1999" (Lotz, Potter, McCutcheon, et al. 2021, p. 3); "available work and revenue have become diluted, particularly in adult drama" (ibid, p. 5). Tellingly they go on to point out:

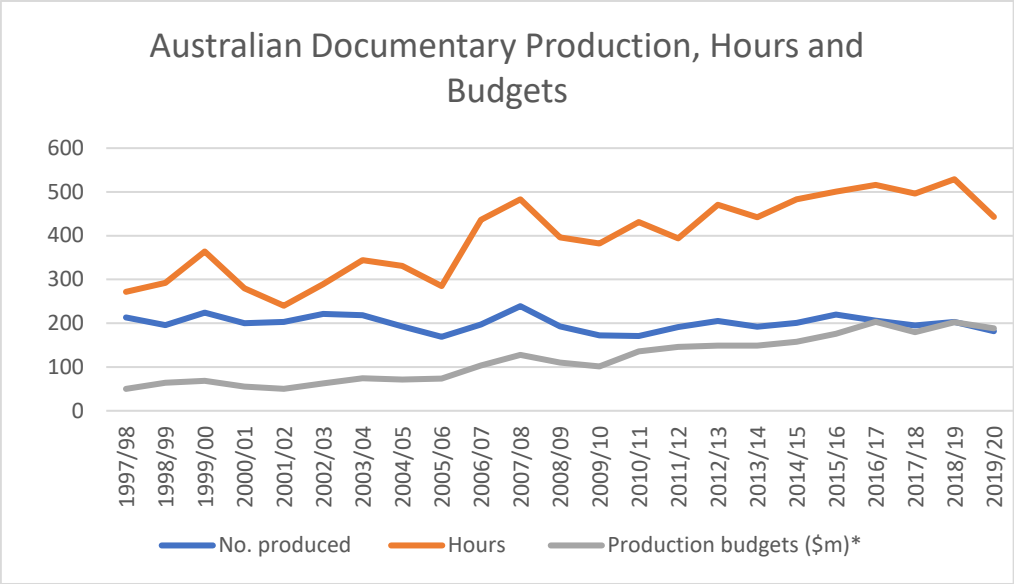
> Trends in Australian drama production indicate more production companies are creating Australian drama, however, very few of these companies have a production slate that make them sustainable producing drama alone. The underlying data reveal that 65 per cent of the 124 production companies making adult drama and 60 per cent of the 75 children's drama producers made fewer than 20 hours in total over the 21-year period. Of the 36 production companies with drama titles broadcast in 2019, exactly one half had produced six hours or fewer and 34 produced fewer than 20 hours. Such low levels of production suggest companies are either short-lived or exist with a multifaceted portfolio of work and rely on broader slates including factual or feature production or advertising and online production work (p. 11).

It is for precisely these reasons that I have had to diversify my production slate by the inclusion of documentary work. The move towards documentary/factual in Australia's local content outputs is now examined in greater detail.

5.4 Increase of documentary

While drama hours have reduced, the reverse is true of documentary/factual. Figure 7 shows that from 1997/98 to 2019/20, hours produced of Australian documentaries have risen by 62% (Screen Australia 2021b). Budgets have also increased (note RTV is not classified as documentary/factual).

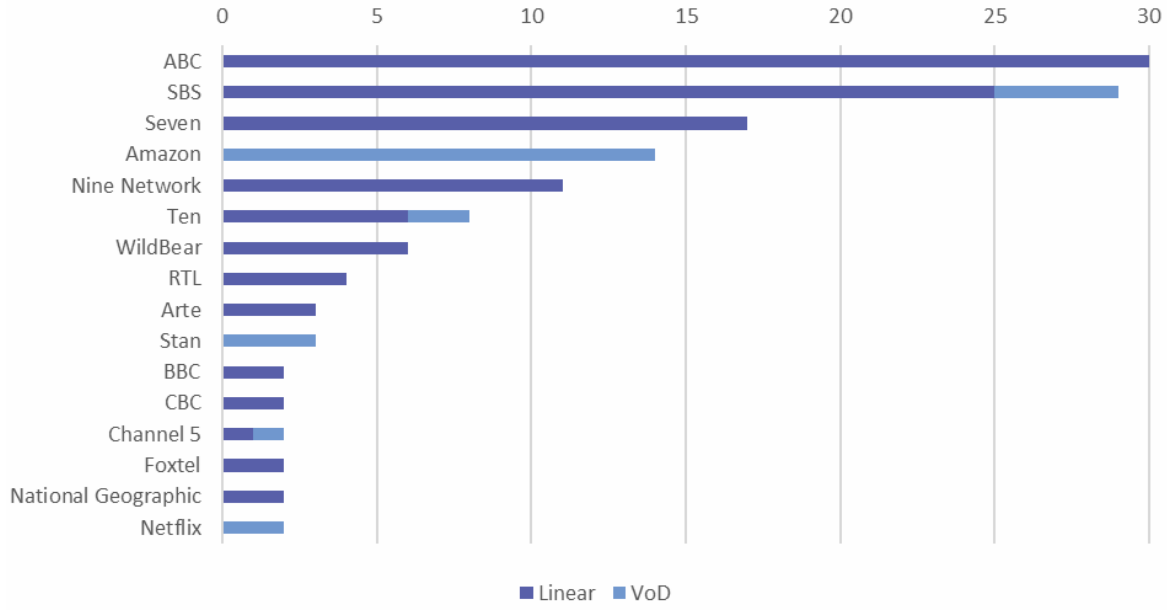
Figure 7: Yearly Total Documentary Across Commercial, Public and Subscription Services



Source: Screen Australia Documentary Production Activity Summary, 2021
Reprinted with permission

At the start of this chapter we referred to *Supporting Australian stories on our screens* (2020), an options paper created by ACMA, presenting pathways to regulatory overhaul. The federal government responded with a green paper (*Media Reform Green Paper- Modernising Television Regulation in Australia* November 2020). It contained the following synthesis of drama and factual commissioning numbers (referring to them simply as "Australian TV shows"), demonstrating that during the period considered (2019-20), Australia's PSBs overwhelmingly shouldered responsibility for commissioning and showing local content across genres (Fig. 8):

Figure 8: Top 15 commissioners of Australian TV shows between July 2019 and June 2020



Source: Ampere Analysis & Screen Australia; reproduced in Media Reform Green Paper, 2020. Numbers of shows are displayed on the x axis. Reprinted with permission

By combining the information from Figures 5 & 8 we can infer that PSBs carry the lion's share of local documentary/factual content. The numbers of *drama* titles in Fig. 5 are approximately evenly distributed between commercial and PSB networks, slightly weighted to PSBs, yet the overall numbers of *combined* titles in Fig. 8 is predominantly PSB, in an environment of rising documentary hours and falling drama hours. That this situation is ongoing is given empirical reinforcement by reference to Screen Australia funding data from 2021/22, which shows that of the eighteen Screen Australia-funded documentaries commissioned by broadcasters in 2021/22, fifteen are for PBS's, and of the remaining three, one is a coproduction between a commercial FTA and a PSB (Screen Australia 2022b). Current trends suggest that factual shows for PSBs are set to become ever-more significant windows for Australia's creative practitioners wishing to work on culturally representative Australian stories.

It should be pointed out Fig. 8 represents a relatively short date range, and the situation is extremely fluid. As noted, streamers have recently begun to increase their hours of commissioned local content (Screen Australia 2022a), with Netflix pointing to the success of its 2022 reboot of the hit 1990s teen drama, *Heartbreak High*, as evidence of its commitment (Kruger 2022); and Amazon picking up the television soap, *Neighbours*, in November 2022, which

had ceased production nine months earlier after being dropped by its FTAs. As outlined earlier, the federal government has recently announced its intention to impose content regulation on streamers in its recently released arts policy, "Revive" (Commonwealth of Australia 2023), although at the time of writing their scope is yet to be defined, and it is unknown whether commissioned hours may return to earlier levels.

An important factor in the rise of documentary is that budgets tend to be lower than for drama, despite the slow trend toward larger budgets shown in Figure 7, making them easier to procure. This can bring advantages to originating practitioners, helping even out structural power imbalances in the industry. To understand this, it is necessary to outline how funding models presently operate.

5.5 The relative funding advantages of documentary in an environment of precarity

While international streamers are able to use deep monetary pools to fund projects in their entirety, FTAs do not have the same resources. Production companies are therefore responsible for sourcing funding for each project they make; as was the case for *Getting Their Acts Together*.

The process is complex, and substantially similar for documentary and drama regardless of release platform. Sources include so-called 'direct' State funding in the form of grants and loans from government screen agencies, and 'indirect' State funding in the form of tax concessions and rebates from state and federal governments[27]. These are supplemented by marketplace buy-in, which in the case of television projects means broadcaster fees, and sales to distributors or foreign territories. Direct and indirect State funding usually provides a significant portion of any budget.

[27] Here I use 'State' with a capital to refer to the Australian polity, and 'state' all in lower case to refer to governmental jurisdiction.

Money that is provided in the form of grants or donations that do not have to be paid back is referred to as 'soft' funding. Money that requires repayment is 'hard' funding.

Indirect funding is generally an automatic entitlement for so-called 'qualifying expenditure' which is based on objective criteria which include the use of Australian crew, locations and content (although, as noted above, these criteria are contested- see George (2022) and Lotz et al. (2021)). The most important is a rebate known as the "Producer Offset", which provides up to 40% of qualifying expenditure to the producer as equity.

Direct funding from screen agencies is competitively sought and not guaranteed. Applications are assessed against criteria which include 'quality', 'commercial potential' and 'cultural impact' (ibid), which necessarily involve value judgements influenced by the perceived merits of the creative team and the project. This has long been the reason for an accrual of power to the gatekeepers of funding organisations, i.e. their management teams and selection committee members. It is generally acknowledged within the industry that success in applying for discretionary agency funding is a lottery, in which it is advantageous for a producer to be known and respected by agency gatekeepers (Jasek 2021) [28].

The same applies to broadcaster gatekeepers (i.e. their commissioning editors/executive producers), even if they publicly proclaim otherwise. While the websites and public utterances of PSBs encourage filmmakers from all areas to bring ideas to them[29], in practice producers are advantaged by having established relationships with broadcaster gatekeepers (Jasek 2021). Because market access in the form of broadcaster involvement is usually a prerequisite to trigger other funding, producers spend considerable time courting broadcaster gatekeepers and pitching

[28] I can cite a personal experience by way of example. During 2017-18 I undertook extensive research and development of a high-end television drama six-parter with two experienced colleagues. We received initial financial support and mentoring from a state agency whose senior management were familiar with our work and trusted our experience. Trust is important owing to the risks inherent in R&D regardless of industry. However, there was a changing of the guard at the agency when its senior management team's contracts expired. The new team did not know us, and this played a role in their risk assessment as they considered further development funding. Agency support ceased at a critical moment for the project, which then did not continue. This is not an unusual occurrence.

[29] E.g.: "We want to explore new partnerships and encourage program makers to experiment with form", from the ABC website's Independent TV Production page (Australian Broadasting Corporation 2022a).

for access to their limited pool of programming slots, as the first step in bringing a project into being. Anecdotally, most producers put their success rate at 1 in 10 (ibid).

Once the above sources have been tapped there is invariably a budget shortfall, known in the industry as “the gap”, which can be as high as 25% of the total budget. Producers may opt to deficit fund their gap, relying on subsequent sales for reimbursement, or find alternate sources of funding through private equity: both of which come with significant cost overheads. Typically gap funding is the most difficult part of a project’s finance plan, and experienced producers will carefully weigh the practicality of finding it before committing to a project.

A significant advantage for public value projects with a social impact or cultural remit, particularly lower budget projects, is that they may turn to philanthropic and/or crowd funding for their gap. *Getting Their Acts Together* fell into this category. With it comes a second advantage, captured by the Washington, DC political saying: “If you aren’t at the table you’re on the menu”. Producers who bring equity to the broadcaster’s table, which includes the Producer Offset and gap funding, gain a theoretical increase in strategic power and agency.

However, it is important not to draw totalistic conclusions. The Producer Offset does not apply to all productions, including smaller documentaries such as *Getting Their Acts Together*. And Chapter 6 will demonstrate that, although the larger portion of funding for *GTAT* including gap funding came from us as filmmakers, power to shape the project nonetheless vested strongly with our broadcaster.

Lotz & Sanson put this into wider context:

> It’s also important to remember that production companies have never possessed full autonomy in choosing what they produce, regardless of their resources. Commissioners read the audience market in light of corporate priorities and decide what programs are made and thus occupy a strategic position of power in the field of production (2021, p. 14).

This power relationship is largely normalized in the industry, with the following being a common view:

> [It’s] our obligation to deliver them the product that they are specifically requiring. So it's a balance to what degree we can protect the writer-director's creative vision, and to what degree we'd have to balance that with the commercial reality or the requirements of the financier…if you're taking money from somebody, you are obligated to deliver them the product that they're paying for. <u>It's really simple</u> [their emphasis] and if you do that well, and

> then you have a good relationship, you can continue to work with them.
> (Jasek, interview with Vincent & McBride, 2 July 2021)

Vincent and McBride refer to "the writer-director's creative vision". When this comes into conflict with what Lotz & Sanson call "the audience market" and "corporate priorities", a bidirectional dynamic is generated that runs throughout the production process, in which forms of expertise are pitted against each other. A theory to explain the dynamics and outworkings of this conflict is now discussed.

5.6 A theory of power economies, and its consequences for practitioners

5.6.1 The theory

As mentioned in the Introduction, Paul Dwyer has produced a wide-ranging intervention into industry studies: *Understanding Media Production* (2019b), which brings together discourses of technology, political economy, labour relations, production forms and strategies, and resultant texts, in an attempt to use economic theory to understand media practice. I will now examine it in further detail.

Dwyer proposes a distillation of elements from several modes of economic analysis, leaning towards the more recent evolutionary economics, which replaces the neoclassical economic idea of "agents making substitutions in markets (i.e., a reorganization of who has what)", with *knowledge* as the central means of solving problems (p. 20). Evolutionary economics as described by Dwyer:

> …assume[s] businesses are continually looking for ways (new knowledge) to make money. However, because businesses have limited time to search out, process and evaluate all the relevant information about potential solutions (they have "bounded rationality", see Simon and March, 1976) […] they do not find the perfect solution to problems. Instead production knowledge reflects a simplified model of reality; "human beings never depict reality in a one-to-one map, but need to economize on scarce cognitive resources by throwing a net of simplified models over a complex reality" (Dopfer and Potts, 2008, cited in Dwyer, p.20).

The simplifications are achieved by creating a set of templates Dwyer calls a "dominant design". In the screen industry we refer to these as 'genres', which are accompanied by standardised production techniques. As new technologies or "forms of knowledge" arise, they engender a process of change referred to by evolutionary economists as an "Industry Life Cycle", in which

previously normalised product designs (screen genres or production techniques) are challenged (p. 21). The process generates intense competition and uncertainty requiring resolution. This is provided by a new dominant design, which is made up of a new series of templates (p. 22).

Dwyer's framework is a useful tool to examine how people involved in screen production create and deploy new technical and creative forms as an adaptive response to changing circumstances. This is an iterative process, complicated by the fact that all participants in ecosystems undergoing change experience radical uncertainty. Radical uncertainty occurs because:

> …dominant media designs (features, studio shows etc.) constitute very "open" architectures rather than detailed blueprints… what this means in practice is that a media product design is never completed, even at the stage of a detailed continuity script for a feature. Instead, the design continues to be developed throughout the production process. Media producers are continually applying their knowledge of genre and discourse strategies (and relevant technical knowledge of recording/editing etc.) to interpret and develop the original design, through the production of subgenres; treatments, script drafts, page layouts, storyboards, rough edits etc (ibid, pp. 28-9).

The stage is thus set for a competition of ideas, in which practitioners are hired for their knowledge and skill, but are constrained by the insecurities generated by radical uncertainty. In the Introduction we referred to Pierre Bourdieu's notion of "habitus", and its power to explain struggles for dominance at times of industrial change. The past decade has seen change accelerate and globalise, amplifying the effects of radical uncertainty and justifying Bordieu's earlier-quoted assertion that 'the generative and unifying principle of this "system" is the struggle itself' (1996, p. 232).

The outworkings of this struggle are now examined to provide context to Chapter 6.

5.6.2 Outworkings and consequences

Unequal power relations between creative practitioners and gatekeepers can produce moral hazards that impact on the former's sense of identity and self-worth, a point made in considerable detail by Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2008; 2010). While this applies across all genres, I will focus further discussion on what the industry has come to term 'factual' genres as they are of most relevance here, particularly when made for PSBs.

As has been noted above, the terms 'factual' and 'documentary' have become conflated in the industry as part of an evolution of forms that would be described in Dwyer's schema as new "dominant designs". Assertions of habitus in this field are therefore contextualised by longstanding discourse around what constitutes 'documentary', starting with Grierson's coining of the term in 1926[30], and includes questions of truthfulness and authorship (e.g. Beattie 2004; Eitzen 1995; Nichols 1991). It is not my intention to rehash this, but rather to note the effects on practitioners as they grapple with industrial change. Dwyer states:

> …particularly in journalism and public service broadcasting, media occupations have been able to present their professional/craft autonomy as a guarantor of the legitimacy of media content against commercial or political/ideological pressures (p. 25).

Perhaps that may have been more generally the case for producers in earlier decades, however the European academic Anna Zoellner has shown what happens when a filmmaker's habitus collides with contemporary industry realities. As part of Banks, Connor and Mayer's volume exploring the experiences of media workers in local, global, and digital communities: *Production Studies, The Sequel!* (2016), Zoellner studies a selection of freelance employees of companies involved in the production of factual programs for PSBs in Germany and the UK, where broadcasting has been experiencing similar shakeups to Australia. These show how power imbalances between broadcasters and independent producers subject producers to considerable economic and editorial dependency, the impacts on professional identity for these independents, and the role this identity plays in their attempts to negotiate these tensions. Her study finds that:

> …commercial imperatives dominated the objectives of commissioning editors even at these stations [i.e. at PSBs], both with regard to cost saving and presumed audience popularity.

- and as a result:

> the nature of broadcaster requirements repeatedly opposes the values, intentions, and judgments of practitioners, leading to frustration in everyday production (pp. 152-6).

She finds there is demoralising conflict between what her subjects believe PSBs should be making to service their public value remits, and commercial pressures in PSBs to cut costs and raise

[30] In his February review of Robert Flaherty's film *Moana* for the New York Sun newspaper.

ratings. Referring to the replacement of the term 'documentary' with 'factual' in an environment that prioritises "commercial imperatives", Zoellner says:

> Producers perceive themselves as service providers for broadcasters rather than as authors, [contributing to]…a shift of their professional identity to that of 'factual producers', which is based on a broader genre definition in contrast to being a 'documentary maker'" (p. 160).

The difference in terminology is therefore linked to notions of creative autonomy, where "documentary" is valorised over the broader genre definition of "factual". For her study participants, the exercise of creative and craft skills that are unique to each practitioner (i.e. 'talent') are constrained by what Dwyer would term this new "dominant design":

> …frustration about the increasingly rare opportunity to meet genre expectations in their own work compared to the dominance of commercial influences and considerations can create a dilemma for practitioners between 'using one's talents for a purpose and having them used for none except the survival or commercial success of the organization for which the work is done' (Zoellner, p. 159).

In the past, filmmakers have been able to accrue career capital and professional legitimacy through their involvement with public value projects for PSBs. Born (2004) documents the breakdown of that process with regard to the BBC as a result of the neoliberal Birtist reforms of the 1990s. Is a similar breakdown now occurring in Australia's PSBs? The question is raised by veteran Australian documentary filmmaker Tom Zubrycki's *Platform Paper*: 'The changing landscape of Australian documentary' (2018). He links the rise of cheap and quickly-made 'factual' forms, which include serialised productions that may be formatted (i.e. used as a template) and remade in other jurisdictions, to a reduction of depth, complexity and diversity in storytelling:

> … documentary has its own character and imperatives. Sure, some can be made quickly, especially if the subject matter is contained. Historically, however, documentaries have had long gestation periods; they grow organically, are strongly authored, often question the status quo; and the story often develops in unpredictable ways (p. 65).

PSBs are now commissioning fewer one-off documentary projects because they are harder to promote and lack series' ability to amortize costs over more content-hours. This has fed concern in the industry they are de-prioritising documentary in favour of multi-episode formats. The strong authorship values referred to by Zubrycki are subordinated in template shows to

economic imperatives, as may be seen by his quoting of respected fellow documentarian Bob Connolly:

> "Our public broadcasters are transforming our industry—concerned with artistry and high endeavour—into a sausage factory, turning out, with some very honourable exceptions, what can only be described as fodder […] it's like shrinking the national creative gene pool for genetically modified factual television" (pp. 35-6).

Zoellner reports similar concerns in Europe:

> Broadcasters' focus on commercial success in an industry where demand is notoriously uncertain leads to risk-averse commissioning strategies that favor familiar, formatted, and extreme content that has previously proven to have potential for audience success. This climate does not prioritize textual experimentation and innovation that television producers value but instead requires them to think inside the box and develop projects along familiar lines and to demand. This suggests a potential "disjunction between the heroes and ideals of an occupation and the reality of the work situation" [Elliot, 1977] and raises questions about how practitioners respond to this situation (2016, p. 152).

The dilemmas examined by Zoellner are crystallised by her observation that, on one hand, many creative artists "feel high personal investment or attachment to a topic, for example, when the idea is their own brainchild or when they are convinced of the value or worthiness of the program" (ibid), while on the other, compliance with a broadcaster's wishes brings a form of symbolic capital in which the filmmaker's skills are valued for their flexibility. Zoellner notes this: "…may contribute to a potential shift in the power relationship with broadcasters in the long term, but primarily this perception of professionalism supports commercially conformist behavior through its emphasis on professional service and execution" (ibid, p. 154).

Getting Their Acts Together was a project we as filmmakers and our ABC Executive Producer all referred to as a 'documentary'. However, Chapter 6 will show that differing expectations over contemporary documentary norms resulted in similar affects to those experienced by Zoellner's subjects.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the changed program mix on FTA television, with movement of local content away from commercials and toward PSBs, an overall decline in drama hours and increase

in documentary/factual, and associated impacts for filmmakers on their employment prospects and creative agency. Longterm reductions of funding for the ABC compounds these effects.

The fact PSBs now carry the lion's share of local content has been recognised in the government's media reform green paper, referred to earlier in this chapter, which argues for explicit legislation of nationing requirements for the ABC and SBS, "to provide, or invest in, new Australian programming", proposing that:

> An Australian programming obligation for the national broadcasters would put a floor under the national broadcasters' commitment to producing and screening this content, codifying what they already do (*Media Reform Green Paper- Modernising Television Regulation in Australia* November 2020, p. 38).

It would, however, be premature to assume this suggests a turnaround is imminent in the fortunes of Australia's PSBs, and for the production of culturally reflective local content. There is no mention in the green paper of protecting the budgets of PSBs, only of formalising their local content obligations. This is especially important because FTAs already lack the resources to fund production. To expect PSBs to pick up the pieces of commercial market failure, without providing means to do so, is only likely to magnify the structural issues faced by the ABC as it attempts to fill its many, and wide-ranging, Charter obligations.

Those obligations have a hidden dimension. Public broadcasting is not only concerned with depictions of the culture it resides within, but is also a culture in its own right. Public broadcasting *as a culture* to foster a wide range of cultural outputs with originality is implicit in its mandate. We cited Born in this regard at the end of Chapter 3: "Aesthetic vitality is an essential component in the political and cultural value of public service broadcasting" (2004, pp. 380-1). This brings PSBs up against the need to connect to audiences. Born asserts that, contrary to the neoliberal position that sovereign consumers arrive pristine to the marketplace, with fully-formed tastes which it is the duty of broadcasters to serve-:

> Audience tastes are not autonomous. They are cumulatively and historically conditioned by interaction with what is produced. In the ecology of broadcasting, production precedes, conditions and sets limits to consumption […] Broadcast culture exists in a double relation with wider cultural and ideological movements: in a centripetal motion it draws them in, selectively metabolising them in its operations; and in a centrifugal motion it sends them out, refracted in its programming (ibid, pp. 491-2).

It is a perspective that three decades as a filmmaker have taught me to share. The guiding values of PSBs in Australia require precisely such forms of exchange as this, and it is substantially on these grounds that creative artists attempt to assert their agency, in a bid to exceed audience expectations. In theory, this means there should be complementarity of objectives between broadcaster and producer. The commissioning of an increasingly rare one-off such as *Getting Their Acts Together* might therefore have been a fertile site to promote these ideals. However, in an operating environment where the ABC finds itself threatened, leading to homogenising pressures on content, and filmmakers are challenged by industrial precarity, there was instead a sharpening of creative debate. As will be seen in the following chapter, areas of contest included how much our content should be informed by the conventions of fictional genres to generate emotional outcomes on screen regardless of the cost to factual accuracy- a form of neologistic 'factional' television that prioritises the relationship between filmmaker and viewer over filmmaker and subject; and a raft of issues relating to creative micromanagement.

6 A MICRO VIEW: NEGOTIATING POWER ECONOMIES - THE MAKING OF *GETTING THEIR ACTS TOGETHER*

Figure 9: Getting Their Acts Together flyer and synopsis

Follow joint artistic directors Neil Armfield and Rachel Healy in their most challenging year yet as they scour the globe and battle the clock to find and deliver the 2020 Adelaide Festival in its all-important 60th year […] Filmed across the world's pre-eminent arts festivals, artistic directors Neil Armfield and Rachel Healy will face injury, tragedy and an impending pandemic to deliver the 2020 Adelaide Festival program. History, pedigree and ambition run head-to-head in this high-stakes documentary that reveals the bickering and respect, accessibility and poise, intellectual brilliance and pure gut instinct required to land an extraordinary event, with narration by Annabel Crabb.

Reproduced from Getting Their Acts Together press kit (SLA Films 2020)

Earlier chapters have detailed how technological and business change at national and transnational levels have transformed the Australian screen industry, and the effects on the production ecosystem at the level of local organisations and labour. This chapter will bring analysis to a point of focus on a single object. While every project has its own unique dynamics, the contention of this exegesis is that *Getting Their Acts Together* represents the logical outworkings of these forces, particularly in the context of neoliberal challenges to PSBs, allowing us to detail their ramifications on the creative agency of practitioners, the central research question of this exegesis.

As explained in the Methodology chapter, *GTAT* is used here as a field work in the realm of practice-led research. It is a site of research, not an object of research; in other words, the film is a case study to examine the industry, its processes and outcomes, as opposed to being an active embodiment of research findings in the realm of research-led practice. These processes and outcomes, along with the power dynamics central to my research question, revealed themselves progressively, i.e. chronologically, so accordingly the structure of this chapter is substantially chronological. I acknowledge it differs from the more conceptual approach that is the norm in academic documents such as this, however the intention here is to move the reader iteratively and cyclically between new information as it presented itself to the filmmaking team, and situating it relative to academic ideas about industry practices and power dynamics.

I begin with a short explanation of the original intention behind film we as a production team wanted to make, to provide context and set a baseline measure for discussion of what changed. This leads to a narrative precis of the actual film, in which I note its structural relations to three act dramatic form. Next, I lay out the film's production schedule, flagging items of relevance for further discussion, and spend the rest of the chapter stepping through this timeline, returning to flagged items to broaden out discussion, with particular focus on the dynamics of our relationship with the ABC. This will demonstrate that the ABC's embrace of economic forms of measurement creates conflicts with its social benefit/public value remit, corroding the practitioner creative agency the organisation requires to service that remit.

I will extensively reference a detailed production diary I kept during the making of the film as a primary source (Jasek 2019-2021), supplemented by notes I made immediately after phone calls

and conversations. Reference will also be made to documentary theory (Barbash & Taylor 1997; Beattie 2004; Bruzzi 2006; Eitzen 1995; Nichols 1991).

6.1 The intention behind the film, and overview of its structure

The ABC asked us to provide a 'look behind the scenes of what it takes to make Australia's pre-eminent arts festival'. In subsequent sections I will detail how we as a filmmaking team hoped to achieve this, by describing our chosen documentary form and the reasons for that choice. However, an essential point I note here is that our intention was to achieve this 'experientially', i.e. by showing the viewer rather telling the viewer. We therefore wished to avoid a journalistic approach which would involve thick exposition or devices such as narration.

At the ABC's request the narrative is structured in classical dramatic three-act form (q.v. Goldman 1983; McKee 1998), and includes devices common to that form such as 'protagonists', 'antagonists', 'stakes', 'goals' and 'obstacles'. Such an approach is not uncommon in documentary storytelling as it provides a template that is widely understood in the industry and therefore increases the filmmaker's chances of success in wooing gatekeepers and investors (c.f. "media product design", Dwyer 2019b).

In accordance with the conventions of the form, a 2-minute prologue (commonly referred to as a 'teaser') introduces the viewer to the world of the Adelaide Festival of Arts, its two 'protagonists', and glosses some of the key moments that will follow. Its goal is to beguile the viewer into committing their time to view the whole film (c.f. "attention markets", Dwyer 2019b; Lotz, Potter & Johnson 2022).

The first act provides a brief history of the Adelaide Festival, explores the nature of Armfield and Healy's relationship, introduces us to their work colleagues and financial supporters, and follows them overseas and back to Australia as they hunt for shows worthy of inclusion. Its primary goal is to establish 'stakes' - in other words, what our protagonists seek to achieve and why this matters to them - and the 'obstacles' they expect to encounter.

The second act expands on the obstacles. These include disagreements between Healy and Armfield over what to program, logistical and other challenges for acts they agree to program,

and various stresses on their relationship. They are filmed in their homes and interviewed about their private lives, with insights dovetailed into how they are personally affected by their work. By the middle of the second act, with curatorial obstacles mounting, the effects on Healy are especially pronounced, particularly as they are unable to secure a headline theatre piece while their deadlines loom ever closer. Tragedy strikes late in the second act as a work colleague of Armfield's dies. The act concludes with a moment of reprieve as a long-sought circus piece agrees to participate, but tension over the ongoing lack of a headline theatre piece provides a 'cliffhanger' to retain viewer attention.

The third act jumps forward five months to the days before the Festival opens. Complications multiply, including the last-minute cancellation of a show due to injury, and logistical issues caused by the inexorable approach of the COVID-19 pandemic. The headline theatre piece is revealed, along with the story of how it was secured, while in a last-minute reversal the circus act pulls out. Obstacles are resolved as the film ends with joy and relief; fireworks light a night sky as our protagonists delight in an audience of 16,000 people cheering an outdoor concert by musician Tim Minchin. However, a final caption informs the viewer that the day after the Festival ended Australia went into COVID lockdown, and commemorates the world community of artists, whose lives were so profoundly affected.

The film includes interview, archival footage, and deploys fly-on-the-wall observational filming techniques, attempting minimal interference with the subjects. A narration track binds story elements together- an important change from our original intention that will be unpacked in subsequent sections.

6.2 Schedule sets initial conditions

An overview of the film's production schedule is at Figure 10 below. It was driven by the ABC's desire to go to air (TX) as soon as possible after conclusion of the Adelaide Festival to capture residual public interest. Explanation follows.

Figure 10: Getting Their Acts Together Production Schedule

Getting Their Acts Together Production Schedule	2018		2019												2020					
	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J
CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT																				
Initial ABC approach																				
"Sizzle reel" shoot																				
Further development and ABC approval																				
Sourcing and finalising funding																				
Pre production																				
SHOOT STAGE 1																				
Pre-Festival shoot																				
POST PRODUCTION STAGE 1																				
Rough cut first two acts (6 weeks)																				
Network notes on cut																				
SHOOT STAGE 2																				
Festival shoot																				
POST PRODUCTION STAGE 2																				
Completion of cut (budgeted for 6 weeks)																				
Network notes on cut																				
Graphics, sound post production, tech checks																				
Delivery																				
PROMOTION & RELEASE																				
Publicity/promotion/marketing																				
TX (proposed to be late April/early May)																				
Online release																				

Source: author

Concept development was initiated in November 2018 by an approach from an ABC Executive Producer (EP) with the idea. The ABC provided funding for an exploratory one-day shoot, which the filmmaking team conducted in December and edited into a three-minute video, known as a "sizzle reel". These are often created for documentaries to satisfy gatekeepers of the camera-worthiness of the film's central characters and the viability of potential narrative content. In parallel we wrote a series of development documents which codified our creative approach and proposed storylines. Our ABC EP was highly engaged during this process.

It should be noted that although our ABC EP had canvassed the possibility of the project, she still needed to win internal approval for it to become a reality. This was a two-stage process:

1. Approval from an ABC programming committee known as the "ABC Content Executive", which would trigger a draft list of the terms of engagement (known as a "term sheet") for approval by all parties. If approved at this stage, the project is referred to as "greenlit" but is not yet formally commissioned.
2. Formal scrutiny and acceptance of the finalised term sheet by a separate ABC committee known as the "ABC Commissioning Body". At this point the project officially becomes part of the ABC production slate.

Approval at either stage (particularly the first) is not a foregone conclusion. The ABC EP champions a project internally, assuring the organisation that it is viable, within the ABC's remit, and worthwhile selecting from amongst a crowded field competing for limited program slots. Their judgement is thus exposed to internal scrutiny; a point I will return to later.

As explained in the previous chapter, the ABC, like other FTAs, does not have the resources to fully fund projects[31]. Despite the fact we did not yet have full ABC approval we immediately began to look for additional funding from outside the ABC; i.e. from government, screen agency and philanthropic sources[32]. Each process – development and funding – was mutually interdependent. The ABC wanted to see we could properly resource the project by bringing in the external funding necessary to realise the film's creative goals; and our external funding sources wanted to see broadcaster involvement before committing funds. This Catch-22 is commonplace, and typically the source of various grand promises by producers, who must juggle pressures to be everything to everyone. I will provide examples later in the chapter.

The shoot was scheduled to span a twelve-month period from March 2019 to March 2020, broken into a nine-month period as the Festival program was constructed, and a three month period immediately before and during the Festival. Our budget allowed for a total of eleven full shooting days and twenty half-days, which is low for a long-duration documentary, although this did not take into account the fact that I was able to undertake shooting on my own at no extra cost. My solo shooting forms some 15-20% of the final film, however, as will be explained below, we minimised mention of it in our discussions with the ABC.

The edit schedule, like the shoot, was broken into two parts, with provision for network feedback at each stage. It totalled twelve weeks- exceptionally tight for an observational documentary and not ideal. There were three reasons for this:

1. Our small budget meant we could not afford living wages over a longer post-production;

[31] This stands in contrast to most streamers (although not Australia's STAN), who then fully claim the IP. At the time of writing, terms of trade with streamers are the subject of considerable debate within the industry (Jasek, notes taken during Screen Forever conference, 28-30 March 2022).
[32] See 5.5 for description of funding models; our ultimate budget is described in Section 6.3.4.

2. As is common practice in the industry, the ABC's final payment did not occur until delivery of the film, so a longer edit would have created cashflow issues for us;
3. Because the ABC wanted transmission of the film to be proximate to the Festival's rollout, a longer edit would push the next TX window back to the following year's Adelaide Festival. The ABC believed this could result in loss of audience as the content would no longer be fresh.

The ABC originally informed us the film's TX would be April 2020, however during production they shifted it back to June, then forward again to May. Meanwhile, for reasons that will be discussed below, the edit blew out to 16 weeks, creating budget and post-production workflow problems.

6.3 Practitioner agency strongly determined by foundational power relationships

While the point may seem self-explanatory, it is important to emphasise that practitioner agency is highly sensitive to power relationships that are established at a project's inception. As this is core to the research question of this exegesis, a more detailed discussion of the case study's origins now follows, to establish the foundations of its power relationships. Discussion consists of four components: 1) the ABC's approach; 2) selection of the production company; 3) the roles of Executive Producer; and 4) the composition of the final budget.

6.3.1 ABC approach

As noted in the Methodology (Chapter 2), the project was somewhat unusual because it was initiated by an approach from an ABC gatekeeper to the filmmakers, rather than the other way around; whilst this is not unheard-of, it nonetheless remains relatively unusual. One might assume this emphasised the ABC's creative authority, however the reverse can also be claimed; that it was our track record that led to the approach, implicitly placing authority into our hands that may have been greater than for more junior producers without the same industry track record.

It is important not to extract totalising assumptions about creative autonomy from the fact of the ABC's approach. Regardless of who makes the initial approach, the process of winning over a

broadcaster is seldom clean-cut. The filmmaker may have tailored their approach based on market intelligence of what the broadcaster is looking for (Jasek 2021). Commonly there is back and forth between the parties as an idea is tested and measured against the gatekeeper's assessment of their organisation's priorities, and the original concept is massaged by mutual agreement to improve its alignment with those priorities. When this leads to a commission it can be difficult to dissect and attribute the ensuing project's 'creative DNA'– it has generally assumed a hybrid quality in which both parties become its 'parents'.

6.3.2 Selection of production company

The specifics of the ABC's approach are relevant. As mentioned, a newly appointed ABC EP for arts television (having taken up the role some five months earlier) contacted a South Australian production company (prodco) respected for its work in arts content, who in turn sounded me out to direct portions of the project alongside their own in-house team, based on my experience in arts documentary (*Making a Mark*, SLA Films, 2017). That film followed a selection of finalists who vied for a valuable art prize in its inaugural year. The ABC EP had proposed following the Adelaide Festival's artistic directors as they constructed the 2020 program, and was keen to see the project commissioned quickly to capture the process before too much of the program was locked in. As the prodco and I discussed creative and narrative pathways we formed a judgement the film would be best served by similar non-invasive filming techniques to those used in *Making a Mark,* characteristic of the genre referred to as Observational Documentary (Barbash & Taylor 1997; Nichols 1991). Further discussion of documentary form will follow in Chapter 6.4.2, and as will be seen, was an important site of the creative debate central to the research question. Its relevance at this point is that it required an extended professional commitment which did not align with the production company's then-business priorities. They recommended to the ABC that I remain with the project as Writer-Director, and dropped out, leaving me in a position of increased influence.

Neither the ABC nor I had any wish that I undertake the project solo, and we discussed alternative prodcos. I had collaborated with production company SLA Films on *Making a Mark*; they were recommended by the previously-attached prodco; and their expertise in the field had

been amply demonstrated by a portfolio of award-winning documentary and drama projects[33]. SLA came on board, with ramifications for who would become the project's Executive Producers (EP).

6.3.3 Roles of Executive Producer

The role of EP has relevance to the question of creative autonomy. The degree to which an EP has power to overdetermine the decisions of a Director varies from project to project, however it is generally the case that the role of EP comes at the minimum with a measure of moral authority, by which is meant a recognised capacity to make trustworthy decisions. This may take the form of 'friendly advice' when requested by the production team, or arbitration when difficult creative debate occurs, although in practice it is seldom called upon explicitly in the event of disagreements. The role need not only be filled by a broadcaster employee, but can include industry freelancers (indeed, usually does). The duty statement varies, however three important functions often included are:

1. Construction of a project's core creative team
2. Assisting the Producer to procure funding, often through privileged access to sources of money
3. Creative consultancy

Not all EPs fulfill all these functions, however I had now contributed to constructing the project's core team. I was also able to assist with procurement of funding. The project was an appropriate candidate for philanthropic money from sources focussed on the arts. I have strong connections in that domain, which I could parlay relatively quickly into funding commitments that would more than cover the budget's all-important gap requirements (see 5.5). This increased my centrality to the project. My role consequently expanded from Writer-Director to include Executive Producer.

[33] SLA's filmography may be viewed here: https://www.slafilms.com/

SLA consists of two key members, who could procure the balance of external funding from non-philanthropic sources and provide valuable creative input throughout the duration of the project. One therefore came on board as EP, the other as Producer in charge of the day-to-day running of the project. *Getting Their Acts Together* therefore had three EPs: our ABC EP, an SLA EP, and me.

When a project has multiple EPs (a not-uncommon occurrence), power sharing arrangements are mutable. Generally, there is mutual respect and a shared desire to make a project as good as it can be. That was true of this production, with the addition that the broadcaster had made the initial approach to us, which we believed implied trust in our creative judgement. This was counterbalanced by the fact that the ABC represented the market, to which we owed our employment, placing us in something of a master-servant relationship[34]. These countervailing forces remained in a state of dynamic interplay throughout the life of the production.

6.3.4 The funding matrix of *Getting Their Acts Together*

Chapter 5 contained discussion of the power implications attaching to the producer's share of budget equity. What follows is an examination of the finance plan for *Getting Their Acts Together* and its ramifications on our creative agency.

The film's finance plan was similar to other cultural/public value projects, relying entirely on 'soft' money (i.e. grants, not loans) comprising indirect funding, direct screen agency funding, a broadcaster component, and philanthropic donations (Fig. 11):

[34] Although the term "master-servant" was not commercially accurate as we were not formally employees of the ABC; further discussed in 6.8.

Figure 11: Finance Plan: Getting Their Acts Together

Budget	$359,050
Finance Plan	South Australian Film Corporation (grant) $80,000 Producer Equity Program (via Screen Australia) $61,250 ABC Licence Fee $120,000 ABC Investment $52,800 Philanthropic Funding $45,000 _____ Total $359,050
ABC Cash Contribution	$120,000 (includes ABC Development Funding of $10,000)
ABC Services and Facilities Contribution	Archive: $52,800 (being up to 10 minutes of ABC archive material).

Source: Getting Their Acts Together production documentation

The South Australian Film Corporation (SAFC) is a state agency who provided their funding as a non-recoupable grant. The production team (SLA Films and I) is based in South Australia, is respected by and has a good relationship with the SAFC. Contact with SAFC gatekeepers is frequent, both through formal meetings and informal industry gatherings.

We were unsuccessful in gaining funding from the highly competitive main documentary funding streams offered by federal agency, Screen Australia, which is the largest and best resourced. Screen Australia is based on the eastern seaboard of Australia, and our relationships with their gatekeepers are less well-established. Distance issues have been noted by other South Australian producers as a barrier to market entry they often struggle to overcome (Jasek 2021).

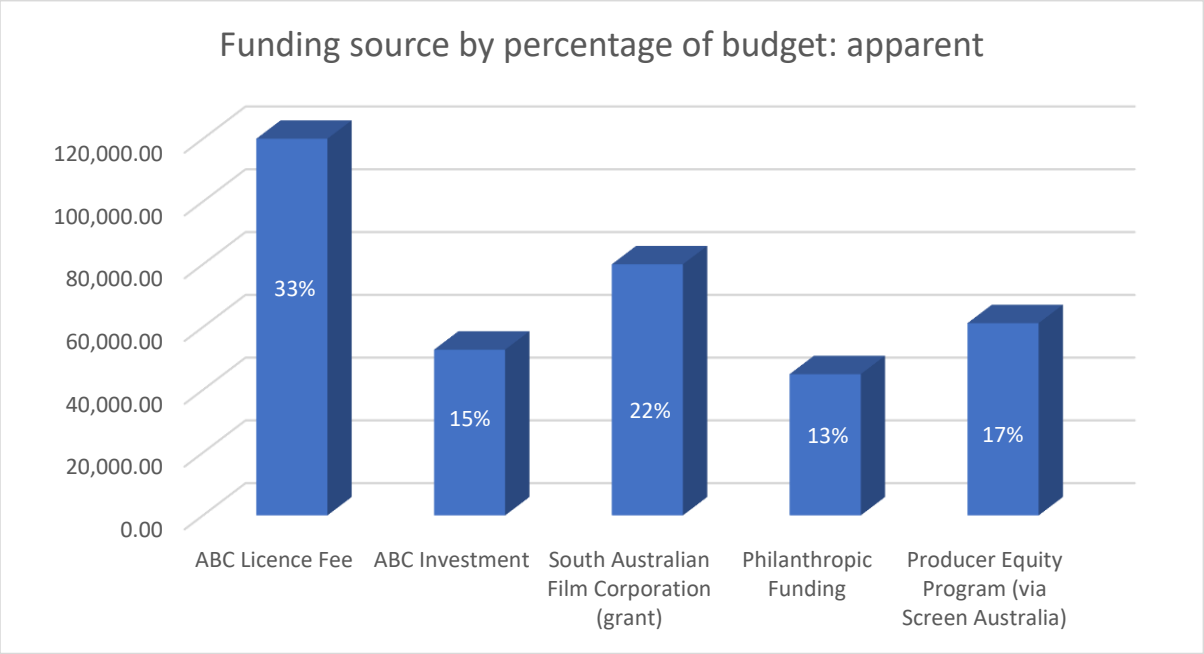
We qualified for automatic indirect funding from a scheme operating at that time for documentaries with budgets under $500,000 known as the 'Producer Equity Program', which was administered by Screen Australia; a preferable alternative in our case to the Producer Offset scheme referred to in Chapter 5. This funding was not subject to a competitive process or value judgement by agency gatekeepers.

The project received its gap funding from philanthropic sources closely connected to this author, without which it would have only been able to proceed in truncated form, if at all. This point became important in post-production, as will be shown below.

All funding was triggered by the ABC's involvement. The ABC's funding was divided into a license fee and so-called "investment", totaling $172,800.

Figure 12 shows the *apparent* percentage breakdown of all contributions. The significance of the word 'apparent' will shortly become clear:

Figure 12: Funding source by percentage of total budget: apparent



Source: author

The ABC's total contribution to the $359,050 shooting budget appears to be 48%; State funding sources (i.e. The South Australian Film Corporation and the Producer Equity Program) a combined 39%; and philanthropic sources 13%. So the total of funds brought to the table by the filmmakers appears to be 52% of the budget. There appears to be rough parity between the ABC and the filmmakers in budget contribution.

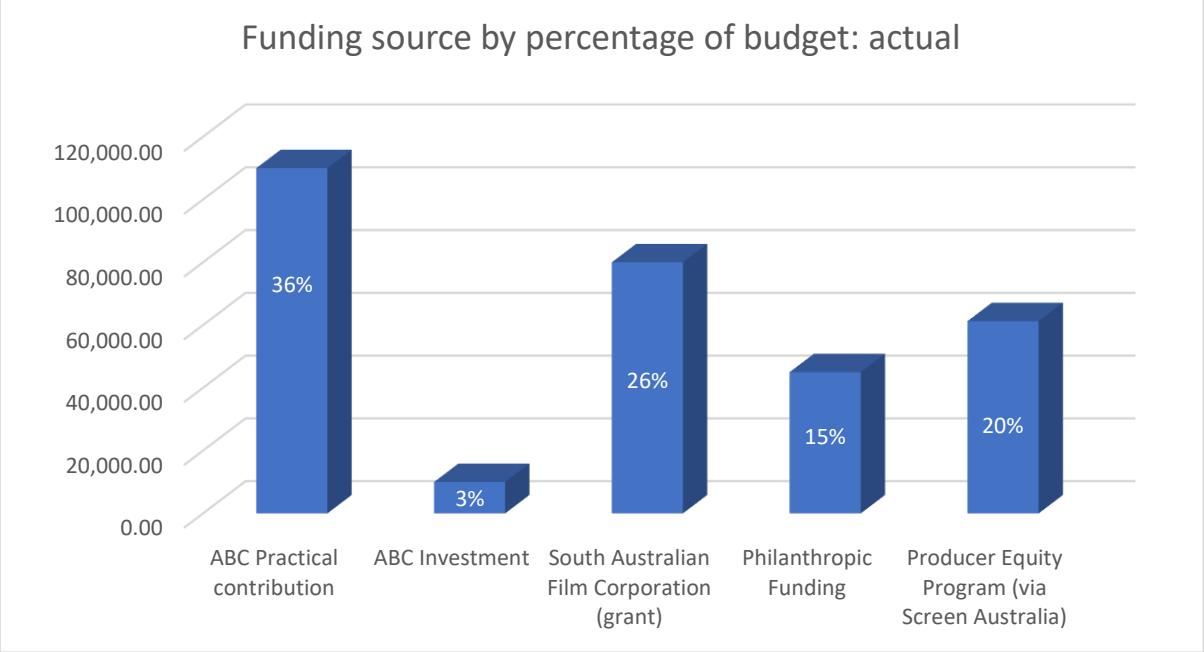
However, two points should be borne in mind:

Firstly, the ABC termed $52,800 of their contribution an "investment", giving it the appearance of an equity contribution. However, it was actually an 'in-kind', i.e. non-cash, allowance for archive material, and was a number far exceeding its true value to our budget. Had we actually paid to bring in archive material from other sources it would not have exceeded $10,000 (and probably been less).

Secondly, the ABC's cash contribution of $120,000 included $10,000 of early-stage development funding which they provided some six months before the project was formally commissioned. Therefore the ABC's *actual* contribution to the shooting budget was $110,000.

If these points are taken into account, the shooting budget falls to $306,250 and the percentages change (Figure 13):

Figure 13: Funding source by percentage of budget: actual



The figure of 3% ABC Investment assumes $10,000 for archive footage.

Source: author

The ABC's combined contribution drops to 39%, State funding rises to 46%, and philanthropic funding rises to 15%. The balance of real dollar funding brought to the table by the actions of the filmmakers is 61%, significantly higher than the ABC's.

This did not, however, guarantee our creative autonomy. Section 6.8 will show our autonomy was only raised late in post-production as pressures built; and only then to allow the film to be completed to the satisfaction of all parties.

6.3.5 Summary

To draw the previous six pages together and conclude this section, I note that three fundamental points had foundational effects on creative agency in this case study:

1. Ambiguity was generated by the fact the project originated from an approach by the ABC to the filmmakers
2. The project had three EPs, one of whom was employed by the broadcaster
3. The production budget was substantively derived from the actions of the filmmakers but could not have occurred without the involvement of the ABC.

It is not unusual for screen projects, regardless of platform, to experience similar background conditions. They generate forces that inevitably remain in a state of dynamic interplay throughout the production process, often resulting in tensions as creative questions arise. That was certainly the case for *GTAT*. I therefore now turn to their impacts on the project's creative development.

6.4 Foundational power relationships inform subsequent creative development

6.4.1 Audience outreach

The question of how to reach audiences is a staple for most screen projects, generating strong dependencies in their creative development, and providing sources of potential conflict over creative agency in which foundational power relationships can play a decisive role.

The quest for audience is substantially driven by economic considerations. These are naturally front and centre for profit-making exhibitors including streamers and commercial FTAs, however they also apply forcefully to the ABC. Earlier chapters have detailed pressures felt by PSBs in several Western liberal democracies to justify their public financial appropriations by chasing ratings, including the ABC. Often-contradictory programming directives ensue from this, which are extremely difficult for filmmakers to navigate.

To illustrate, the ABC's website contains the following advice to filmmakers wishing to pitch ideas:

> When submitting your proposals think about scale, innovation and how you can play with form to deliver something we haven't seen before…
> (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2022b)

In our case this received apparent reinforcement by the organisation's in-person advice. My production diary records that in our first conversation our ABC EP explained to me:

> … that with ABC funding getting tighter and tighter, Arts TV needed to simultaneously take risks, and reach out beyond an arts cognoscenti to find audience, in order to ensure its survival.
> (Jasek 2019-2021, p. 1)

"Arts cognoscenti" here refers to a segment of audience, of relatively limited number, that preferentially chooses content relating to art/cultural subjects. The first part of our ABC EP's advice accorded with the organisation's public exhortations to creative novelty, and the second part concerned the need to capture larger audience viewing figures, i.e. ratings. Novelty can be a useful pathway to audience, creating a syllogistic implication that the ABC had an appetite for experimentation with form.

I noted a third factor in the Preface: that the combination of art documentary and populist serial drama in my professional outputs was clearly of interest to our ABC EP, as evidenced her additional observation that:

> With my personal background in the high arts, and professional background in mainstream commercial drama including having been showrunner of *Neighbours* before doing the very different *Making A Mark*, I might be well-positioned to bring audience outreach to this project[35].
> (ibid)

These three points combine to illustrate that in its ninth decade the ABC still experiences a tension between the 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow' imperatives discussed in Chapter 4, which one might argue translates in the 21st century into a desire to push creative boundaries while fulfilling a populist remit. This tension is exacerbated by chronic funding shortfalls that, as discussed earlier, existentially threaten the organisation, and that the ABC therefore looks to ratings success to shore up its position by demonstrating it delivers public value for the outlay of public money. This is consistent with observations by others including Martin and Lowe (2014) who note that the institution of the PSB in many Western liberal jurisdictions: "…is torn between

[35] Note this is my paraphrasing, not a direct quote.

evidencing market value, a concept strongly embedded in commercial logic where success depends on achieving sufficient popularity, and embodying its mandate as a not-for-profit institution with values that are in principle contrary to that logic" (p. 20).

In that context, our ABC EP also explained:

> …she would be taking quite a hands-on approach to development, but once that was done she would step back and just let me do my job. Once the film got to the cutting room she would ramp up her involvement again, but she still wanted us to make the film we like (Jasek 2019-2021).

Here can be seen the broadcaster EP's assertion of the right to creative agency by "taking a hands-on approach", while at the same time attempting to leave room for the creative agency of the filmmaker "to make the film we like". To deploy the analytical framework discussed in Chapter 5, it may be seen as an attempt to reconcile potentially conflicting "habitus" (Bourdieu 1996) in the context of the "open architecture" of a "media product design" (Dwyer 2019b). The "media product design" here is the proposed form of the film, and I will therefore now turn to discussion of documentary form, the reasons for our choices, and the resulting grounds for creative debate.

6.4.2 What does 'Observational Documentary' mean?

Documentary scholarship has broadly divided traditional documentary forms into four groups, with labels and definitions that vary slightly from scholar to scholar. Barbash and Taylor (1997), for example, refer to these forms as 'Expository', 'Impressionistic', 'Observational' and 'Reflexive'. Bill Nichols' taxonomy will suffice for a general overview, presented in his canonical text, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (1991). He refers to documentary forms as "modes" which he labels: 'Expository', 'Interactive', 'Reflexive', and 'Observational (Direct and Verite)'. 'Expository' refers to films which "address the viewer directly, with titles or voices that advance an argument about the historical world" (p. 34); for example presenter-led films such as David Attenborough nature documentaries. 'Interactive' films, as the label implies, involve the filmmaker in the storytelling, in which the "veil of illusory absence is torn away" (p. 45) and may include devices such as interview; for instance Michael Moore's *Bowling for Columbine* (2002). In 'Reflexive' films the representation itself is questioned: "we see or hear the filmmaker also engage in metacommentary, speaking to us less about the historical world

itself…than about the process of representation" (p. 56), a seminal example of which is Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929). 'Observational' films: "cede 'control' over the events that occur in front of the camera [and] rely on editing to enhance the impression of lived or real time" (p. 38), and is a "mode" I will discuss in greater detail shortly.

Since Nichols wrote this, documentary forms have evolved. Keith Beattie, in: *Documentary Screens: Nonfiction Film and Television* (2004), notes the move toward a "broader range of visualisations within documentary formats", resulting in: "…a reworking of the notion of a 'divide' between information and entertainment. The forms and styles of popular factual entertainment demonstrate that 'documentary' is not a unified category but rather a continuum which involves both information and entertainment" (p. 203). It is not the goal of this exegesis to attempt an exhaustive taxonomy of the techniques of documentary's different forms, or to revise or extend the long discourse regarding how much it is possible to achieve "truth" in documentary filmmaking (Barbash & Taylor 1997; Eitzen 1995; Nichols 1991). However, to understand the grounds for debate that developed with the broadcaster on this case study, I will now discuss the reasons for our chosen form, and the points of discussion with our ABC EP.

As already noted, our preference was for Observational Documentary (which in the industry is generally shortened to "Ob Doc"). This was driven by the setting: an arts festival; and its central subjects: the artistic directors, one of whom (Neil Armfield) was a theatre director of international renown, celebrated for the honesty of his work, and from whom it was reasonable to expect material that would be engaging within this selected form. To win their trust and co-operation (and to satisfy my own creative preferences) I felt it would be necessary to adopt a purist form of Ob Doc. Relevant examples are the films of Robert Connolly[36] and Robin Anderson, seminal in the Australian documentary canon, including *Joe Leahy's Neighbours* (1988); *Black Harvest* (1992); *Rats in the Ranks*, (1996); *Facing the* Music (2001); *Mrs Carey's Concert* (2011)[37]. These films valorise the relationship between filmmaker and subject over the relationship between filmmaker and audience, an approach that draws on the Direct Cinema techniques

[36] Q.v. Connolly quoted in Chapter 5.6.2 on his critique of current trends in television factual formats.
[37] Which Connolly made with Sophie Raymond after the death of Robin Anderson.

pioneered by such filmmakers as Robert Drew and Richard Leacock (*Primary,* 1960) or the Maysles brothers (*Salesman,* 1969), with its philosophy of "documentary filmmaking as following action and argument rather than prompting or creating them" (Bruzzi 2006, p. 86). Operationally this is achieved by the cultivation of a non-judgemental relationship between filmmaker and subject, in which the filmmaker observes their subject with as little interference as possible (whilst acknowledging this can never be perfectly achieved [Biressi & Nunn 2005; Bruzzi 2006]), avoiding attempts to make the subject to say or do certain things even if such content may be something the filmmaker believes would engage audiences. Examples of such interventions include asking the subject to express opinions in interview more emotionally or sensationally, or engage in exchanges with others they would not have but for the filmmaker's request.

It was my belief that prioritising the filmmaker-subject relationship with Armfield and Healy would create necessary space for their entertaining relationship to emerge in ways that would win audiences, ironically without chasing ratings as a core goal. This was an important distinction. Beattie notes elsewhere in his study that:

> …when documentary is designed specifically as entertainment its forms of representation are radically altered. In this way the emphasis on entertainment in reality programming produces a fundamental shift in documentary – away from argumentation, analysis and exposition toward the pleasures of entertainment (Beattie 2004, p. 193) .

Beattie here canvasses differences between reality programming and other forms of documentary. Although I do not believe Beattie's "analysis and exposition" is the natural enemy of "the pleasures of entertainment", he nonetheless raises a distinction that was important for our approach. While reality TV (RTV) may utilise techniques of shooting and editing borrowed from Ob Doc, RTV is a genre distinct from Ob Doc, requiring an explicitly interventionist model to achieve the emotional affects key to its audience outreach (Beattie 2004; Biressi & Nunn 2005; Bruzzi 2006). The kinds of RTV interventions I refer to, and wished to avoid, include the engineering of events to appear spontaneous but which suit predetermined narrative goals; manipulative approaches to interview, where subjects are directed toward answers that are predetermined to suit the producer's priorities (q.v. Lavie 2020); and the reconstruction of events in the cutting room in ways deliberately designed to change or amplify their meaning to suit those priorities (Bruzzi 2006), such as the technique of 'frankengrabbing', where a reaction or utterance is moved in the edit from its native context to sit in a wholly unrelated context (Jasek,

quoting Jaala Webster from notes taken during Screen Forever conference, 28-30 March 2022). The use of such techniques is why RTV is also referred to in the industry as "constructed reality" (see, for example, Lichtenstein 2015).

My production diary notes that in early conversations with the ABC I had made it clear:

> … I had no interest in making another piece of template reality TV; it's not a genre I like and it wouldn't suit the Adelaide Festival. Nor is it likely Neil Armfield in particular would be interested in participating in a film like that… and we agreed the natural style for this project was Observational Documentary (Jasek 2019-2021, p. 1).

Our ABC EP's own freelance filmography in both above and below the line roles prior to joining the ABC had consisted predominantly of factual format television including RTV; a different filmmaking culture to the one now proposed. While we had apparently reached agreement that the film would not be RTV, that did not mean we agreed on precisely what "Ob Doc" meant, and what stylistic devices were appropriate to deploy.

Beattie refers to a version of Ob Doc that has developed over the past several decades and come to be known as the "docusoap". Using as examples works including *An American Family* (1973) and *Sylvania Waters* (1992), he defines docusoap as:

> …character-centred works which develop multiple storylines based on factual material in ways which, as the term itself suggests, are comparable to fictional soap operas…The programmes build tension through a focus on conflict and misadventures and generate suspense through cliffhanger endings (pp. 190-1).

As noted earlier, my production diary records that the charismatic nature of Healy and Armfield's relationship was key to drawing our ABC EP's interest, creating a natural alignment to this definition of docusoap. While the term was not used explicitly in our discussions, its tropes certainly informed them, including various conceits borrowed from fictional soap opera. As will be shown, these included "a focus on conflict and misadventures" and "cliffhanger endings"[38], or to use Stella Bruzzi's term: "crisis structure" (2006, p. 127).

[38] "Cliffhanger endings" can be taken to apply to key structural moments within a text (e.g. the conclusion of an act), as much as to ends of episodes.

Docusoap as a subgenre has led to division among documentary filmmakers, dismissed by some on the grounds it contains: 'no analysis, no insight, no unexpected side to the story, no light shed ... their only function seems to have been to turn the rest of us into peeping toms' (McCann 1998, cited in Bruzzi 2006, p. 123). For the record I should point out that I had no in-principle objection to the judicious adoption of docusoap storytelling techniques. As the respected British documentary filmmaker Peter Dale has pointed out:

> Documentary has never been a literal medium. It has always valued meaning more than facts. As a documentary-maker someone pays you to find out about your subject in great and unusual detail and to interpret that experience for your audience. It's a moral responsibility (quoted in Born 2004, p. 438).

That moral responsibility requires a process of continual negotiation between the filmmaker and the material they shoot to maintain nuance. Dale goes on to point out the dangers when this is overtrumped by a flattening out of the content in service of undemanding entertainment:

> What's wrong with this kind of television is not that it's popular. It's the way it's made. There's no time and no point in doing research. Any relationship between producer and subject is impossible. A producer told me that accurate portrayals were not part of the ethos. The whole exercise was the avoidance of ambiguity, the denial of complexity. It's hard not to see this approach as fundamentally dishonest… (ibid).

This clearly describes an outcome I wished to avoid, and is a key reason I did not want to use a presenter or narration. Bruzzi locates these devices amongst intrusive genre tropes designed to steer the audience in undemanding ways that prioritise entertainment:

> First docusoaps then the reality shows and formatted documentaries that followed in their wake all show to a greater or lesser degree how the manipulation and intrusion of their production teams, whether through voice-over (often condescending, nearly always directional) or other means such as editing style, the contributors talking to camera or the presence of a presenter.
> (Bruzzi 2006, p. 126)

In connection with this, Bruzzi also quotes the filmmaker Robert Drew: "Narration is what you do when you fail" (p. 38). I held up the Connolly/Anderson film: *Rats in the Ranks* (1996) as an exemplar that did not use narration; our ABC EP was at that time unfamiliar with it and after a viewing remained to be convinced. As will be seen, in subsequent months the use of narration became a site for debate with the ABC, and was emblematic of our joint attempt to negotiate an

appropriate line between undemanding entertainment, complexity and nuance, and audience outreach.

Before this debate fully emerged, however, the ABC required us to submit various forms of documentation in order to assess the project's worthiness to attract ABC funding. This process foregrounded several of the means by which power is deployed within the screen industry, and warrants discussion in further detail.

6.4.3 Writing the unknowable: power relations in action

As noted, the development process involved creating a "sizzle reel", followed by written documentation.

My production notes record an early telephone conversation in which our ABC EP explained her priorities:

> - The sizzle gives a sense of the style, but for her to pitch the film to her commissioning team she will need more sense of the projected narrative.
> - Especially WHAT'S AT STAKE?
> - Provide a skeleton framework/list of projected scenes in 3 act structure (she knows that's hard to do with Ob Doc)
>
> (Jasek, notes from call, 19 February 2019)

Explicitly referenced here are tropes historically associated with drama: "stakes", "scenes", and "3 act structure". To some extent these are storytelling basics, regardless of whether the formal domain is 'drama' or 'documentary'. However, three act structure, directly borrowed from the drama playbook, presents challenges to write in the context of non-invasive observational documentary methodology where future developments are ipso facto unknowable; a point underscored by our ABC EP's admission "that's hard to do with Ob Doc". In circumstances such as these, the practitioner, anxious to secure a commission, is forced to invent 'best-guess' scenarios that align with their understanding of their gatekeeper's requirements, underscoring the industry's inherently unequal power relations.

To reduce uncertainty, I conducted off-camera pre-interviews with our subjects, Armfield and Healy, to determine quantifiable metrics, including how many shows remained to be sourced,

their deadlines, and any issues they currently faced. In addition, I asked them private questions in a bid to pinpoint their goals and doubts to establish "stakes".

The resulting insights informed a draft treatment which I wrote with input from my SLA colleagues, in collaboration with our ABC EP (it is included in full at Appendix 10.1). The following two extracts provide examples of my attempt to "write the unknowable":

Act 2- Explore Neil & Rachel's private doubts and insecurities, and enlarge the story world

Late July: as Neil returns to his home town of Sydney to rehearse his production of *The Secret River* for this year's Edinburgh Festival, visit him to explore his own doubts around his creative process and how these effect his confidence in discussions he is having with Rachel.

Incorporate on-the-fly interviews with Neil in his own home as he undertakes mundane domestic activities such as cooking dinner or feeding his beloved dog. He is so often away this is where he will be at his most intimate and reflective. Round out his personal backstory here.

Probe his statement (garnered during research phase) that: *I've been floored by the shift towards what's appropriate to say and do, and am still trying to correlate my sense of what is great and important as the rules are changing."*

Intercut with sequences of Rachel getting on with planning alone.

In her domestic setting with her family, probe her own doubts, which she will inevitably have as she is now in the thick of things. They will be around her belief in her own taste and judgement. Also the personal costs of prolonged absences from her family.

[…]

August: we travel with Rachel to the Edinburgh Festival for her reunion with Neil, and into a world and an experience that most of us could only fantasise about. What does it take to travel overseas to woo & win acts at the original font and inspiration for the creation of the Adelaide Festival?

Observe them exhausted somewhere like a pub as they debrief after viewing up to 8 shows in a single day- how do they do it?

> High stakes as they see the show they have co-commissioned with Edinburgh for the first time -if they don't like it they will reject it, leaving a significant hole in their schedule just months out.
>
> Late August/early September: back in Australia, N/R front the board for final approval of the 2020 program. But as Rachel says: *"Things shift around all the time right up to just 2 months out!"* (Jasek 2019a)

The requirement to create imaginary scenarios had a compounding effect, demonstrated by a followup request from our ABC EP to: "break it down- how many sequences, what areas will they cover? (obviously this may change as it's Ob Doc)" (Jasek, notes from call, 20 February 2019).

Emphasising the repeated qualifier ("obviously this may change as it's Ob Doc"), in response we created a matrix of shoot days that sat within our budget, allocated to cover a range of scenarios that could not be known (Fig. 14):

Figure 14: Sequence/Shoot Day Matrix

Type	**Shoot days**		**Scenes**
	Half	**Full**	
N&R together (multiple locations, not just in office); key office production meetings; life of office	7	3	26
Rachel and Neil in domestic spaces and transit to and from	2		4
Follow Rachel and Neil overseas		3	12
Secondary character shoots and Neil in Sydney	3		6
Behind the scenes with headline acts		2	8
Festival events with N/R, behind scenes headline acts, audience Vox Pops.	8	3	28
Totals	**20**	**11**	**84**
Additional shoot days will be added as philanthropic funding can be secured to increase the budget.			

(Jasek 2019b)

Despite the impossibility of firmly grounding these assumptions in empirical reality, they triggered a series of conversations to confirm if we had enough shoot days in our budget. By mid-April these combined with additional concerns, escalating two weeks before the project was due to go before the ABC Content Executive for consideration. These concerns and their consequences are now detailed.

6.4.4 A moment of crisis and reassurance

I had operated camera extensively in my previous documentary, *Making A Mark* (op. cit.), so to allay concern we may not have enough shoot days, I offered to provide additional camera services at no cost to this production- indeed, I had speculatively shot a number of sequences for the film already. However, despite the fact the ABC had seen *Making A Mark* and appreciated its camerawork, this led to requests for further examples of my work. Rather than confronting the issue directly with the risks this could become an ever-deepening rabbit hole, the production team offered to fund additional days with a paid cinematographer if required out of EP fees.

However, our ABC EP had now become concerned that with funding still to be confirmed, opportunities for us to capture the curatorial processes at the heart of the film's premise were fast eroding, and may all be gone by the time we had budget in place to hire anyone. My production diary records additional concerns, including:

- How could we know what we had written in the treatment was actually going to happen?
- How could we be sure the teaser would work as proposed?[39]
- Would there be enough windows of opportunity to film Armfield and Healy together?
- Was our choice of cinematographer appropriate, as his showreel contained a lot of drama?

Given that as a creative team we had worked closely with the ABC in developing the concept since the previous December, this apparent desire to lock down minutiae as if the project were a

[39] In fact, the teaser as originally written was little more than a series of broad generalisations and was rendered completely redundant by the flow of actual events.

drama was somewhat exasperating; to use the language of Bourdieu, devaluing our "habitus". On the question of content my production diary records my attempts at reassurance:

> I also stated I felt more than confident there will be enough windows of opportunity to film N/R together. She wanted to know what kind of material this would be. How can you know when it's Ob Doc? – but I clearly had to come up with something, anything, so I gave her some hypothetical dialogue along the lines of: Rachel: "I've just seen show x and think it would be perfect". Neil: "But where will we put it because we don't have Her Majesty's Theatre?" R: "It could go into theatre y" N: "But that will involve scaling down the show, losing the elements we like" […] I said there would be a number of such narrative windows, both in Adelaide and elsewhere, and I felt these would provide ample material. This helped her…
> (Jasek 2019-2021, p. 4)

These several examples demonstrate my assertion in Section 6.2 that producers experience pressures to be "everything to everyone". When multiple issues such as these arise what is required is that solutions are on offer, regardless of whether those solutions are ever required.

The moment of crisis passed. Ably championed by our ABC EP, the project cleared its most significant hurdle in late April with official greenlighting by the Content Executive. Although formal contracting would take some time to complete (which is normal), greenlighting was sufficient to trigger other funding sources. We were now in a position to hire crew, and (my own earlier self-shot sequences notwithstanding), began 'official' filming on May 9th, 2019.

6.4.5 Summary

The examples in this section demonstrate the bottom-line pressures that now drive the ABC; and that radical uncertainty coupled with what Dwyer (2019b, op. cit.) calls the "open architecture" of "media product design", referred to in earlier chapters, subjects both creators and gatekeepers to significant emotional pressures, particularly in an environment of precarity. Our ABC EP felt genuine emotional attachment to the project and wanted to see it become a reality. As explained earlier, selection by the ABC Content Executive is not a foregone conclusion. The selection process, while collegial, is nonetheless competitive, which by implication involves a degree of scrutiny of a staff members' creative judgement, sharpening the process's emotional pressures. In this context, attempts to define the emerging concept by recourse to genre typologies may be understood as a strategy to mitigate risk, not only for the project but also the staff member. As a counterweight, we were attempting to deploy our own craft expertise to

create a flexible space in which the film's subject matter could emerge organically; a strategy we believed would yield not only better artistic results but also best satisfy the ABC's requirements.

From this point onwards I filtered my communications with the ABC to remove the inevitable daily doubts that plague every creative enterprise ("radical uncertainty"). As will be described below, this would create issues during the shoot and into postproduction as the production team provided draft edits without the benefit of contextual backgrounding to act as a buffer against creative doubt.

6.5 Managing relationships: production stage 1

The shoot occurred in two stages: first in the nine months prior to the Festival (March-Nov 2019), followed by a two month pause to create a rough cut of that material, then a second round of filming as the Festival rolled out (Jan-Mar 2020).

All shoots face day-to-day problems, most of which are not of relevance here. Two issues, however, were, presenting us as a team with a dilemma over how much to share in order to avoid unnecessary reactivity.

The first issue concerned our ability to capture key moments, such as Armfield or Healy succeeding or failing to secure a show. Well-timed access was part of our reassurances to the ABC. However, such moments are inherently elusive and unpredictable, and timing our presence became an exercise in crystal ball gazing that I came to liken to "grasping smoke". We repeatedly missed them, requiring us to resort to interview to backfill. This was vexing for two reasons. Ob Doc relies on 'present tense' for its audience outreach, but interviews of the anecdotal kind are necessarily 'past tense'. Furthermore, anecdote is slow and visually unedifying, violating one of the fundamental rules of filmmaking, which is self-explanatorily referred to in the industry as "show me, don't tell me".

Other storytelling forms circumvent this by techniques ranging from the mounting of fixed camera rigs that record continuously; to dramatic re-enactment; all the way to RTV's pre-engineering of scenarios to ensure they occur at times, and in ways, of the filmmaker's choosing.

Fixed rigs would have been unacceptably intrusive for the Festival, and the other alternatives were out of scope for our chosen form.

The second issue was related. Every show under consideration by our artistic directors required explanation to provide context, which I attempted to furnish via interview. It produced mountains of frankly uninteresting 'talking head' exposition, which I had no idea yet how to manage. Narration would have been more economical, but as discussed I had a strong creative preference to avoid it. Soon it was obvious we faced a difficult edit where we would have to winnow extensive swaths of exposition in a very tight post-production timeframe.

Gatekeepers, elevated as they are from the daily cut and thrust of production, can be helpful objective sounding-boards, especially if they are also a project's EP (see discussion of the EP role in Chapter 6.3.3). However, my updates concentrated on the positives, including two overseas shoots where we followed our subjects for days at a time, yielding high concentrations of engaging, and honest, 'present tense' material.

Throughout the shoot I operated second camera, and captured several sequences solo, and the subject did not come up again.

6.6 Pressures on creative preferences: post-production stage 1

This stage crystallised the difficulties mentioned above. Solutions became conjoined with our reading of the ABC's stylistic preferences, resulting in us adopting genre typologies that required adjustments to our original vision. As discussion below will make clear, the ABC's preferences were both *stated* and *unstated.*

6.6.1 Precarity and doubt

We commenced the first round of editing a few weeks prior to conclusion of the first round of shooting. My production diary notes my reaction as I watched a rough cut in early November 2019:

> Narrative and emotional strands feel disjointed and uncompelling and I privately despair for viable solutions, bar an intrusive narration to tell the audience what they are meant to be thinking and feeling. This would probably please the ABC but it doesn't please me, and I'd like

> to think there's a sufficiently large demographic out there that will go the journey without being spoonfed. But it still has to make sense in the first place!
> (Jasek 2019-2021, p. 22)

I did not share my concerns with the ABC. Meanwhile, an episode arose which impacted our strategies for shaping the film's narrative.

Our ABC EP had recently attended a Festival event at which one of our subjects, Healy, told her: "she had been nearly vomiting with nerves this year". The quote resonated with our EP because it established "stakes" and "emotional accessibility", items she had clearly *stated* as being important. This led to her asking several times if we had it and suggesting sequences to weave it into the narrative at a level of detail that was unusually high. Although I had captured similar quotes from Healy I did not have that exact form of words. This put us on the horns of a dilemma. It is certainly more efficient simply to tell your subjects what you want them to say, but on ethical and artistic grounds our interview methodology was to avoid what I earlier referred to as: "manipulative approaches to interview where subjects are directed toward answers that are predetermined to suit the producer's priorities" (see **Error! Reference source not found.**), a technique I associated with RTV. It therefore precluded us putting words into our subject's mouths.

Caught between these contradictory imperatives we chose the path of least resistance: in my next interview with Healy I gently attempted to capture the quote as a soundbite. It was unsuccessful- the moment had passed, and the words were no longer in her mouth honestly to say. My production diary noted: "It's artistically dangerous and potentially injurious to interpersonal relations with your subject to direct looking over your shoulder and I don't want to start scripting Rachel at this point" (pp. 21-2).

By "direct looking over your shoulder" I refer to the replacement of one's own sense of what is creatively and ethically appropriate with another's. The episode was an example of contrasting approaches to documentary filmmaking. Yet creative doubt ('maybe it could work') and industrial precarity ('I don't want this to be my last job') combined to create the conditions for acquiescence. The ABC had not explicitly instructed me to film the grab; rather the pressure was *unstated,* and it is entirely possible that our ABC EP was unaware the pressure her suggestion placed on us.

The episode provided triangulating guidance for our storytelling strategies. The ABC had hired us with a *stated* brief to provide a film that reached beyond an arts cognoscenti in order to gain ratings, and seen through the lens of this *unstated* request, we decided we needed to find a stylistic middle-ground between the ABC's traditional highbrow-lowbrow polarities. In effect we needed to find ways to make the film 'middlebrow', but without sacrificing our ethical compass or core commitment to truthful storytelling; a perhaps naïve idealism my diary makes clear:

> What I'm resisting is the manipulation of non-fiction that creates a blurring into fiction; in an era where objective fact is contested I think that's dangerous. Hence my dilemma. Filmmakers like me believe the high-end content now playing on streamers has enlarged the palate of what's acceptable for mainstream viewing, so you don't have to ask Rachel to repeat that she's "nearly vomiting with nerves". It's understandable that the ABC want to see their public dollars going on shows that generate noise and win viewers. But is all local content really to be held hostage to the limited horizons of *MAFS*[40] or *The Bachelorette*? A film about elite arts should aim higher (pp. 22-3).

When I wrote this entry I used the term "elite arts" as a form of shorthand. The Adelaide Festival's programming goals encompassed a broad range of material from modern opera productions to solo circus acts, that collectively could be more accurately referred to as "complex entertainment" or "thinking entertainment", driven by Healy's assertion in the film that they "looked for the best in the world". I believed that their goals should be reflected in our own, and that intelligent filmmaking, well-executed, can itself be a marketing hook to draw audiences.

I did not continue pushing her to say things she did not feel. But, notwithstanding my creative position, it was clear that if we were to satisfy the ABC we would need to take a more pragmatic approach, that prioritised emotional affect and narrative exposition – which in our case, meant moving towards docusoap.

6.6.2 Movement away from original intentions

We approached the problem in two ways.

The first involved moving sequences out of true chronological order to favour thematic clarity, which we believed would in turn build emotional accessibility. In this I was drawing on a legacy

[40] The popular RTV show *Married at First Sight*.

well-established by other observational documentary filmmakers. Born (op. cit., pp. 444-6) speaks of sitting in the cutting room as documentary filmmaker Peter Dale worked on *The Return of Zog* (BBC, 1997). Dale shot a defining interview at the start of filming, but in the cutting room the story was refashioned as his quest to achieve the interview, not achieved until the end of the film. Similarly, Bruzzi (2006, p. 128):

> Michael Waldman, series director on *The House,* commented at the time of making the series that, 'getting narrative from observational documentary is hard. We had to impose a structure [during editing] and that is what took the time' (Bishop 1996: 13). Waldman then explains how this need came to affect the shooting process, that, for the early weeks of filming, they cast their net wide and filmed what material they could, whilst by the last two months the direction in which the series was going had emerged, so they 'had a shopping list' (*ibid*).

These quotes from Waldman establish how recursive loops emerge between the cutting room and the shoot on productions where the two process overlap: as Waldman discovered what they needed in the cut he actively sourced them in the shoot.

Our second solution followed this well-trodden pathway. Without going as far as scripted interview, I asked Armfield and Healy to recount certain events that had occurred in the past as if they were occurring in the present (Jasek 2019-2021, pp. 23-4). Although instrumentalising interview in this way meant compromising our original approach it was an attempt to guide the viewer through the narrative without recourse to narration. However, it also raised questions around what Bruzzi refers to as "the spectre of falsification" (2006, p. 130).

Beattie (op. cit.) and Bruzzi both speak of observational documentary in evolutionary terms from Drew's direct cinema of the 1960s, through the rise of docusoap in the 1990s, to contemporary reality TV, in connection with the progressive valorisation of entertainment over accuracy. Taken in combination our two solutions required an ethical calculus, made clear in my diary:

> You'd like to think you're questioning your yardsticks so the story doesn't move from thematic clarification to outright dishonesty. But actually you're just trying to make the damn story work in a way that won't have audiences switching off. David[41] and I agree the dividing line between our approach and reality TV is that we have not scripted events, forced our

[41] My editor, David Scarborough.

> subjects to make up arguments, or recharacterized them into people they are not (Jasek 2019-2021, p. 24).

Note this quote omits any form of words to describe my earlier wish to avoid "manipulative approaches to interview where subjects are directed toward answers that are predetermined to suit the producer's priorities" (Section **Error! Reference source not found.**). In my attempts to conform to docusoap typologies whilst simultaneously avoiding one of its key tropes: narration, I was effectively sacrificing one of my key creative boundaries on the altar of pragmatism.

Ultimately, we were able to break strict chronology while remaining true to the spirit of events in ways artistically acceptable to us, however my attempts to direct Armfield and Healy in interview were not successful on either count, and little of those interviews were used.

By late November the rough cut was ready to send to the ABC; an important milestone in the project's evolution. First viewings of early-stage drafts are frequently when unresolved points of creative discussion come to a head, with potential to exacerbate unequal power relations. The management of expectations is therefore a delicate matter as one attempts to provide context without pre-empting kneejerk reactivity. To some extent one relies on the professionalism of the viewer to forgive the inconsistencies common to this stage of a cut's evolution. We provided a cover email that outlined our vision for subsequent works, and awaited response.

6.6.3 Exercising moral authority: ABC response to rough cut

While our ABC EP's response was predominantly positive, it came with creative proposals that highlighted the position of power exercised by gatekeepers in the field of production.

6.6.3.1 Docusoap

Suggestions were substantially informed by dramatic tropes, which included a request for "more stakes", as well as a clearer outlining of the protagonists' "short term and long term goals". Explicit reference to "the soap-opera-esque Rachel/Neil relationship", along with positive

feedback on any material that concerned their relationship[42], firmly located our ABC EP's vision for the project in docusoap genre typology.

6.6.3.2 Narration

The question of narration now arose again, this time definitively. Our ABC EP, whilst acknowledging I had wished to avoid narration, reiterated her earlier belief it would benefit the film by sharpening the storytelling throughout. She proposed a sparing, factual style that: "…conveys information in a literal, almost dead pan way […] Not trying to dumb it down but clarify mileposts. Eg: 'today there was bad news- *Medea* fell over'"[43].

My SLA EP colleague concurred. This was a case where two of the project's three EPs were in agreement, representing an exercise of the 'moral authority' referred to in Section 6.3.3[44]. Given that our attempts to avoid narration had resulted in me violating my own creative rules, I was ready to cede ground:

> …despite my longstanding preference for a purist approach, [I] have to admit I can see the point, especially if we use narration sparingly and largely factually (Jasek 2019-2021, p. 25).

Making the decision more creatively palatable was that narration of this kind does not 'drive the cut', by which is meant that it does not deploy the technique, generally associated with current affairs journalism, of a line of narration followed by a shot that illustrates the narration, repeated shot after shot. However, as will be seen below, locking down the narration's style and script would become problematic in subsequent months, as the ABC pressed for ever-greater quantities of narration. The brief incrementally moved from "sparing" to "frequent", and "factual" to "expository".

6.6.3.3 Vomiting with anxiety

Our ABC EP remained keen to see Healy saying she had been "vomiting with anxiety" and provided additional script suggestions for its incorporation. My diary is unclear on when we

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[42] Jasek, production notes file #23 taken after ABC EP phone feedback on rough cut, 3 December 2019.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Defined there as: "a recognised capacity to make trustworthy decisions".

explained we did not have it. I recall we addressed the matter in an unlogged phone communication where we proposed that existing material worked equally well, and that the ABC required some reassurance the alternatives would still generate “stakes” and “accessibility”.

6.6.3.4 Shock jocks and naysayers

A final suggestion placed us in a delicate position. My original treatment had imagined the inclusion of figures critical of the Festival, such as radio shock jocks (announcers whose stock in trade is an opinionated mode of address). As we could not know at the time of writing it what was to unfold, we had speculated they could energise and propel the narrative, much as does the antagonist in drama. Actual, as opposed to imaginary, events quickly overtook the idea, rendering it redundant. However, the ABC now proposed revisiting it, arguing not only would shock jocks amplify stakes in the film’s third act, but their inclusion would demonstrate the film was editorially independent of the Festival (who would clearly not enjoy seeing themselves criticised), thus satisfying the ABC’s Charter obligations to provide “…news and information [that] is accurate and impartial…” (*Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act (No. 6) 1983* (Cth), Pt II s8(1)(c)). The episode is a further example of the flowthrough effects to on-the-ground practitioners of pressures that are by definition unique in Australia to the ABC, and of the inherent pitfalls discussed in Section 6.4.3 “writing the unknowable”. Taking up the suggestion would have required complex ethical management of our subjects, who had placed their trust in us, as well as a wholesale reimagining of the film’s narrative drivers, which by now centred around the hunt for a headline theatre act; a reworking we did not have editing time to achieve. After internal discussion we felt the film stood on its own merits, and without declaring our intentions overtly, simply overlooked the suggestion.

6.7 “Habitus” and “dominant design” in the field of screen production: filming and post-production stage 2

We resumed filming in early 2020 as the Festival rolled out, with the final stage of editing commencing as shooting wound down. As deadlines loomed to complete the film this phase was to become our most difficult, bringing to a head the case study’s application to my core research

question regarding creative agency. This was marked by three significant sites of debate: the selection of a title, the final cut of the film, and its narration script.

6.7.1 Settling on a title

The ABC changed our TX date several times during this period, finally settling on mid May. However, we had based our post-production schedule on their previously proposed air date of early June, i.e. several weeks later. Coming forward required us to compress the final edit to a very short eight weeks, placing us under considerable pressure.

A significant knockon effect regarded the need to decide the film's title. Titles provide what is commonly referred to in the industry as "the promise of the premise", and are regarded as particularly important by ABC to help cut through in a crowded marketplace (Jasek, notes taken at SAFC industry forum with Jennifer Collins, Acting Director, ABC Entertainment & Specialist, 29 September 2022). My preference was to delay committing to one until the film was nearly complete to ensure an appropriate reflection of the emergent work. Our compressed timeframe required a decision by late March - well before completion - to allow the ABC's marketing and publicity departments time to begin promoting the project. Without great enthusiasm we proposed: *17 Days in March*. The ABC counterproposed: *Get Your Act Together.* Although a catchy option, my diary entry of 18/3/2020 records our caution:

> … [They explain] it's essential we have a hooky title to get and retain audience in this difficult slot, but we think it misses on multiple fronts. It doesn't match the film's style, tone or content. By the time it goes to air we will be even deeper in COVID angst and I think it will alienate audiences. And the Festival will almost undoubtedly push back on grounds the title implies they are incompetent.
>
> ABC marketing and publicity love it. It's characteristic of a commercial mindset: you look for tactical advantage and not a significant link to the content. As program makers it's our job to protect that content, without shooting the project in the foot. We don't want marketing and publicity offside, especially when ABC Arts is not top of the promotional priorities list, and we need that promotion to drive audience […] Having spent a thirty year career in commercial drama I completely get this. But it's just too far off-spec.
> (p. 32)

The extract provides an example of how the habitus of makers and exhibitors competes in the field of production (Bourdieu 1996), sharpened by precarity. After some discussion the agreed title became the slightly softer: *Getting Their Acts Together.* As will be seen in Section 6.8.1, the

organisation did not provide substantial promotional resources to the finished project, and the degree to which the compromise over the title played a role is unknown.

6.7.2 The fine cut: holding on to our intentions

We reworked the cut to include the ABC's notes whilst trying to maintain alignment with our creative preferences. We loosely included docusoap tropes, including foregrounding relationship elements between Armfield and Healy and their "personal journeys", but attempted to avoid rigid adherence to any one form of genre typology.

Sparing narration was included to provide topline information, context, and linkages between scenes. As per our discussions with the ABC, it did not "drive the cut". At their suggestion, it was to be spoken by author and ABC journalist Annabel Crabb, using a stand-in voice until the cut was finally approved. Knowing Crabb would want to bring her own stamp to the narration script, we opted for a simple, utilitarian approach to writing the stand-in version that allowed ample room for her input. This is typical of the working process I have established with my editor (who also cut *Making A Mark*), which occurs in layers rather than as a one-pass *fait accompli*. Due to the ABC's favourable reaction to our rough cut, we operated on the assumption they understood our process, even though we had not explicitly detailed it to them.

As will be seen shortly, this was a mistake.

The new elements required a recut of the teaser. As noted earlier, teasers are given high priority by most exhibitors, including the ABC, to persuade audiences to commit to watching the rest of the film. Because they generate strong dependencies for the minutes that follow, and due to our looming deadlines, we sent the revised teaser to our ABC EP for early comment but received no response. Without time to wait we completed the fine cut.

By late March it was ready to send to the ABC. As before, we discussed how much we should include in a cover email to create context:

> I would normally set out our thoughts on strengths, weaknesses, and ideas for next steps. This would include noting that the narration is only temp and we haven't yet attempted to finesse the wording because the narration is not meant to drive the cut. However […] we do not want to burden her viewing with potential trigger points, and instead we send a very

> generic “hope you like it” kind of note.
> (Jasek 2019-2021, p. 33)

While we awaited ABC feedback we received positive reactions to the cut from several industry colleagues, along with the state funding body supporting the project, the South Australian Film Corporation.

With five days left in the editing schedule we received a strongly negative response from the ABC.

6.7.3 ABC concerns over fine cut

My production diary summarises our ABC EP’s position as: “the film was not landing properly for her”. It goes on, in bluntly frank terms, to list the issues:

> She does not have a clear sense of Neil and Rachel’s relationship, goals, purpose, the scale of the Festival, a sense of Adelaide as a place… the list seems endless.
>
> She hates the teaser.
>
> She hates the narration because it does not drive the cut.
>
> She is coming from a good place, trying to maximise the audience for arts content, but […] we wonder if she has been watching the same film.
> (Jasek 2019-2021, p. 34)

It should be noted that my diary entry does not present the inner thoughts of our ABC EP, only her response to the cut, and therefore leaves analysis to be conducted on one-sided evidence. We do not know, for instance, whether institutional imperatives or other viewpoints within the ABC not imparted to us are represented in her feedback. However, I believe her reaction was prompted by the film’s attempt to work outside the formalism of strict genre templates. Our non-adherence resulted in concern the film would fail to connect with audiences, effectively pitting our aesthetic and commercial judgement against the ABC’s, creating emotional stress for both parties.

Our ABC EP’s followup email provided highly granular notes, sometimes at a shot-by-shot level, which my diary characterises as “a 14-page stream of consciousness through which we must now

attempt to find a thread" (p. 36). If followed literally, the feedback would have involved a complete recut of the film which was impossible in our timeframes.

6.7.4 Summary: uncertainty and stress

We have cited Dwyer's theory of media production (2019b) on the creation of sets of templates referred to as a "dominant design", and that these templates are subject to continuous review, a process that generates intense uncertainty that subjects its participants to emotional stress, requiring resolution. In Chapters 3 & 5 we also cited Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2008; 2010) on the emotional stress created by editorial conflict. The situation we now found ourselves in, and my diary's frankness, may be regarded as a field demonstration of both Dwyer and Hesmondhalgh-Baker.

The implications of this exegesis' title: "Precarity, Public Value and Power Economies" are now further examined.

6.8 Precarity, public value and power economies- our response

We spoke in Section 6.3.3 of being in "something of a master-servant relationship" with the ABC. The reference there was to the ambiguities of power division. However, the specifics of our contractual relationship with the ABC are relevant. *Getting Their Acts Together* was outsourced to us to produce, with a licensing agreement committing the ABC to showing the project, albeit with rights of approval over its principal creative elements, including the cut. Strictly speaking, the formal relationship between parties in outsourced projects is not master-servant; we were private contractors, not the ABC's employees. Under such arrangements there is an expectation commonly held in the industry but rarely fully stated, to receive notes which summarise desired outcomes but not the specifics of how they might be achieved. In my own experience, from early-stage directing roles through to executive producing, it has not been standard practice for

gatekeepers to become defacto writer/directors on outsourced projects, nor to attempt to micromanage creative detail in the ways were now experiencing[45].

The agency notionally imparted by our contractual arrangements lay in delicate balance with the industrial precarity examined earlier. This precarity applies as much to the ABC as an organisation as to the practitioners it engages. Industrial precarity now conjoined with radical uncertainty, constraining our options:

> In the end we opt to serve her notes as much as we can, for three reasons:
> 1) We aren't saying the film can't be improved
> 2) We want the ABC to back it so it finds an audience
> 3) We don't want to jeopardise future work
> (Jasek 2019-2021, p. 36)

In addition to these points is the obligation faced by all practitioners to provide the exhibitor, without whom there would generally be no project, with the outcome they require[46]. This leads to complications with reference to Point 3, the jeopardization of future work. Here it refers to our wish to avoid damaging our relationship with the ABC. However, jeopardization carries an additional meaning: a compromised work that fails creatively also has potential for reputational damage to the filmmaker. The two meanings merge in the industry maxim: "you're only as good as your last job".

With regard to narration, the ABC had previously quoted other films as models, including *The Armstrongs* (BBC, 2006), *W1A* (BBC, 2014-17), and *The Casketeers* (TVNZ, 2018-present). Common to these were a form of deadpan irony that we believed would have set our film's voice in an adversarial relation to its subjects in ways that were inappropriate and creatively damaging[47]. Subsequent notes called for ever-greater quantities of narration, exacerbating our dilemma (Jasek 2019-2021, pp. 37-9). They placed us in a paradoxical position, where to support

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[45] The comments of Adrian Swift, Nine Network's Head of Content, Production and Development, at the 2022 Screen Forever conference may be taken as commonplace industry practice. Whilst saying they are "very involved in the production process", he qualifies it by adding: "You need to be careful you don't make things worse by being the dead hand" (Jasek, notes taken during Screen Forever conference, 28-30 March 2022).

[46] Q.v. Vincent & McBride, quoted in Section 5.5: "[It's] our obligation to deliver them the product that they are specifically requiring."

[47] See the quote from Bruzzi cited in Section 6.4.2, on how such techniques: "…show the manipulation and intrusion of their production teams…" (Bruzzi 2006, p. 126)

our relationship with the ABC in the short run potentially risked undermining our position as practitioners in the long run.

All parties wanted the same thing: a film that finds an audience. It was to be shown in a difficult ratings timeslot: Tuesday 9.30PM (about which more below), leading to the ABC's increased sensitivity to its form. In response we added additional docusoap elements. However, in parallel we felt it was necessary to reinforce our agency, reminding the ABC of the following points:

1) We had brought essential equity to the project including its gap finance
2) The film was licensed and was not an inhouse ABC project
3) The ABC had chosen to work with us due to our professional experience, which implied faith in our judgement.

Our pushback appeared to register, with the ABC clarifying their priority was actually to strengthen the impact of the first few minutes of the film (ibid, p. 36). The exchange cost several days; coupled with the time required to make adjustments we dipped into our budget reserves to buy extra editing time.

6.8.1 No promotions or publicity: internal silos

Very shortly afterward our ABC EP notified us the organisation would not be promoting or publicising the film. The promotions division is under-resourced, and one-off projects represent a poor investment as costs cannot be amortised (discussed in Chapter 5). The economics are common to all FTA exhibitors and one of the principal reasons one-off projects are increasingly rare on FTA television.

Promotions, publicity and marketing are separate internal divisions to the commissioning branches, and this was equally disappointing for our ABC EP as for us; ABC Arts were effectively relegated to their own devices in finding pathways to audience. They created an engaging 3-minute Facebook video (ABC Arts 2020) which garnered several thousand views, and helped broker a small number of print media articles (Hooton 2020; Keen 2020), but this represented the extent of the organisation's commitment to publicity or promotion. The Adelaide Festival also promoted the film and shared the Facebook video through its own networks (Adelaide Festival

2020), however this predominantly reached audiences already predisposed to view the film, not new audiences.

The implication for overnight ratings was substantial. Audience members require additional persuasion to keep watching a 9.30PM slot. Our lead-in was the first episode of *Miriam Margolyes Almost Australian*, a series with a popular presenter which the ABC promoted heavily. We had hoped promotions for *GTAT* would generate carryover audiences, after which it would survive on its own merits.

The development casts another light on our ABC EP's response to the fine cut. It is possible she already had intelligence that the film might not be promoted, even if formal notification of the decision was yet to arrive, contributing pressure for the film to adhere more closely to genre typologies.

6.9 Conclusion: what the film ultimately became, and how it was received

Post-production was completed over the next four weeks, and the film was delivered to the ABC just in time- one week ahead of TX. Considerable discussion continued to surround the amount of exposition preferred by the ABC compared to our own preferences, especially narration, up until the last moments of post-production.

The final film represented a compromise. More narration was recorded than was finally included, reflecting our pushback. Yet, as outlined at the start of this chapter, our original intention had been for a purist form of Ob Doc; an immersive "show me don't tell me" film with less exposition and no narration. As originally conceived it would probably have required the viewer to work harder, however that outcome will never be known. Our vision was challenged by the realities of the ABC's preferences, and the moments we were able to capture in the field which perhaps vindicated our ABC EP's instinct to include narration. The film became a hybrid of Nichols' 'expositional mode' (op. cit.), docusoap (Beattie), and Ob Doc. Our ABC EP expressed her pleasure with the end result.

Getting Their Acts Together received favourable media commentary (e.g. Keen 2020) and aired on May 19th, 2020. Both we and the Festival were immediately inundated with positive feedback.

The overnight ratings told another story, and are reproduced at Fig. 15 below. Our lead-in, *Miriam Margolyes' Almost Australian,* averaged 573,000 viewers over its hour, coming 13th for the night. We averaged 180,000 over the hour, coming 44th:

Figure 15: Overnight Ratings 19/5/2020 (All People)

1	SEVEN NEWS	Channel 7	1,187,000
2	NINE NEWS	Channel 9	1,166,000
3	SEVEN NEWS AT 6.30	Channel 7	1,135,000
4	NINE NEWS 6:30	Channel 9	1,099,000
5	MASTERCHEF AUSTRALIA TUES	Channel 10	992,000
6	ABC NEWS	ABC	874,000
7	A CURRENT AFFAIR	Channel 9	762,000
8	THE CHASE AUSTRALIA	Channel 7	673,000
9	HOME AND AWAY	Channel 7	653,000
10	THE PROJECT 7PM	Channel 10	637,000
11	7.30	ABC	628,000
12	HOT SEAT	Channel 9	614,000
13	MIRIAM MARGOLYES ALMOST AUSTRALIAN	ABC	573,000
14	FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT	ABC	483,000
15	ABBA: SECRETS OF THEIR GREATEST HITS	Channel 9	476,000
16	BORDER SECURITY	Channel 7	475,000
17	THE CHASE AUSTRALIA-5PM	Channel 7	434,000
18	HOW TO STAY MARRIED	Channel 10	428,000
19	WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?	SBS	417,000
20	10 NEWS FIRST	Channel 10	407,000
21	THE PROJECT 6.30PM	Channel 10	393,000
22	THE FORCE - BEHIND THE LINE	Channel 7	392,000
24	MAMMA MIA: HERE WE GO AGAIN	Channel 9	338,000
25	ABSENTIA	Channel 7	337,000
27	ABSENTIA-EP.2	Channel 7	293,000
30	THE DRUM	ABC	245,000
34	NCIS TUES RPT	Channel 10	214,000
35	INSIGHT	SBS	210,000
37	BLUEY-AM	ABCKIDS	205,000
38	OUTBACK TRUCKERS-PM	7mate	203,000
44	GETTING THEIR ACTS TOGETHER-LE	ABC	180,000
47	BLUEY	ABCKIDS	172,000
55	NEIGHBOURS	10 Peach	158,000

Note these are *average* figures, i.e. across the duration of each show. Not shown in the graphic is viewing trajectory. *Getting Their Acts Together* began with 232,000 viewers and ended with 131,000. It therefore shed 362,000 viewers from its lead-in immediately, or nearly 60%, and

finished holding half the audience with which it began. While dramatic decline is not atypical for later timeslots, the results were nonetheless disappointing. Without promotion the film began with reduced numbers, exacerbating its further reduction over the hour.

The film did better on the ABC's on-demand system, iView. The ABC had originally intended to hold it there until early June, however it remained available until late October 2020, with the ABC informing us it garnered a further 220,000 views. Note this may include partial viewings. We do not have statistics on the percentage of viewers who watched the film in its entirety on iView.

6.9.1 Conflict between institutional strategy and execution

Ironically, audience trends are clearly skewing away from overnight schedules and towards on-demand viewing (see Chapter 5). This is a global phenomenon; as noted in Chapter 4 the BBC has recently announced it is moving two of its linear channels to online-only with more likely to follow (Whittingham 2022). The fact has been recognised for some time by the ABC, who informed us during production that the TX schedule "is becoming increasingly irrelevant now", and of their preference to mount "long-duration social media campaigns to build interest so potential viewers seek out and select a show from amongst the plethora of options online" (Jasek 2019-2021, p. 16). The point was repeated at the 2022 Screen Forever conference both by the ABC's Head of Drama, and Head of Factual and Culture divisions (Jasek, notes taken during Screen Forever conference, 28-30 March 2022).

If this is the case, there is an apparent disconnect between rhetoric and action, with the ABC's outputs still clearly geared towards the TX schedule. Yet such a strategy requires a whole-of-organisation approach to succeed, which our case study reveals is not possible for all projects. If the overnight schedule is to be prioritised there needs to be the institutional backing of publicity and promotion, which in our case did not eventuate. Nor did a long-duration social media campaign. The organisation therefore failed to service either option.

The next chapter draws together macro and meso perspectives with observations arising from this case study, and considers their ramifications for the creation of public value television.

7 REFLECTIONS: THE 'PSB DILEMMA'

Getting Their Acts Together is a case study in the genre of arts documentary of the combined flowthrough effects to practitioners of industrial change, changes to business conditions and audience viewing habits, and the ABC's attempts to navigate its Charter obligations in an environment of precarity. The pressures generated exact professional, emotional, and creative tolls on all parties, and in the case of the ABC, contradictory behaviours.

Earlier we cited advice offered on the ABC's website to applicants wishing to pitch ideas. The following extract from the same source extends that citation:

> Can your proposal be bolder, more ambitious or riskier? Can you upscale your proposal using all the ABC has to offer as a national organisation? We want provocative issues captured in a creative and innovative way.
> (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2022b)

This echoes advice regularly provided by the ABC in public fora, generally phrased in variations of: "we want a unique spin on ideas"[48]. However, it is difficult to square that advice with our experience, either with regard to form or organisational support. My production diary summarises my thinking after completing *GTAT*:

> It's symptomatic of the pressure the ABC is under that they commission a work but then take a contradictory approach to its form. Then they don't support it as a whole organisation, despite efforts by the commissioning team to push it internally. They just don't have the resources. It's like dealing with a traumatised child who has fractured into multiple identities. Should we have rolled over on the title, hoping it might generate more enthusiasm from the marketing and publicity people? I suspect the reverse: under the circumstances we may as well have stuck to our guns on a purer approach to the storytelling for iView, and in hopes of a wider audience on the festival circuit.
> (Jasek 2019-2021, p. 41)

It should be asked whether our experience with the ABC was due to factors not viewable or able to be gleaned from my production diary (and other data), for instance internal management KPIs, the particular division of the ABC we dealt with, or interpersonal factors specific to our ABC EP.

[48] Jasek, notes taken at Screen Forever conference, 28-30 March 2022; also notes taken at SAFC industry forum with Jennifer Collins, Acting Director, ABC Entertainment & Specialist, 29 September 2022.

The matter opens more widely to embrace questions of what constitutes public value. As has been noted in the Introduction (Chapter 3), public value theory is the source of a large volume of scholarship, from management scholar Mark Moore's seminal *Creating Public Value: Strategic Management in Government* (1995), to Castells (1998), Benington & Moore (2011), Martin & Lowe (2014, op. cit.), and Meyrick, Phiddian and Barnett (2018) to name but a few. It has become a critical framework for assessing the worth of PSBs, the foundational heuristic being whether PSB's "output and outcomes deliver value that is appreciated by its publics, and add value to the public sphere" (Martin & Lowe 2014, p. 22). This exegesis contributes to that literature by showing at ground level how systems for measuring the public value of PSB outputs by economic metrices have attained existential dimensions at the ABC, and are accompanied by interventionist management practices as they attempt to service public value and populist remits that pull them simultaneously in opposite directions.

Throughout we have quoted Georgia Born, whose ethnographic study of the BBC in the 1990s shows how the same pressures in Britain contributed to: "a rush for the centre ground of broadcasting, producing a risk-averse broadcast culture in which imitation, populism and sensationalism have become rife…the BBC, which of necessity must follow as well as court public tastes, has been impelled to join the rush downmarket" (Born 2004, p. 11). She describes what could be fairly termed a kind of hell into which the BBC descended, where recursive levels of review and accountability, driven by neoliberal agendas and consultants from McKinsey & Co., hollowed out the confidence of the organisation and sterilised creativity across all its divisions and program categories. Now, a generation later, it remains a cautionary tale for Australian organisations dedicated to public value, including the ABC. In this context it may be said that our experience was due less to interpersonal factors or the division we dealt with, and more to systemic factors, in which public value measurement becomes intertwined with arguments over who may lay claim to knowing what the market/audience wants and how to service those wants.

We have shown that the BBC's Reithian ethic was influential in the formation of the ABC, where it quickly came into conflict with a competing drive towards populism. In the conclusion to Chapter 5 we concurred with Born's position that audience tastes are not autonomous, but are shaped through interaction with what is produced. Her assertion rephrases one famously made decades earlier by Reith: "He who prides himself on giving what he thinks the public wants is often

creating a fictitious demand for lower standards which he himself will then satisfy ('Memorandum of information on the scope and conduct of the broadcasting service', 1925, p.3)" (quoted in Born 2004). It may be easy to dismiss the idea as culturally homogenising elitism. But this ignores the question buried inside regarding creative agency, which, with regard to the ABC, may be restated as how much the organisation's longstoried highbrow-lowbrow dichotomy remains relevant to creating public value in a radically changed environment, and the extent to which this continues to act as a driver which places the broadcaster in contradictory positions.

In trying to serve multiple, frequently contradictory, priorities, *GTAT* shows this 'PSB dilemma' continues unabated, and the consequences for screen practitioners. The role of the PSB gatekeeper is to harmonise their organisation's priorities with their understanding of audience tastes. When the gatekeeper couples this with interventionist managerialism, the agency and embodied knowledge of the filmmaker takes a back seat, returning us to Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital and struggle (1996). All parties, whether they are the filmmaker, the commissioning organisation, or any other contributor to a text, seek to impose their own understanding of what will 'succeed' in the terms relevant to their own goals, by controlling the production of the text's symbolic meanings. As Bourdieu would have it, the forms of cultural capital possessed in the habitus of both parties are brought into conflict (here to the detriment of the filmmaker), justifying his assertion that "the generative and unifying principle of this 'system' is the struggle itself" (1996, p. 232).

Yet I would argue the struggle should not be drawn too starkly. Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010) make the point that although there may exist tensions and contradictions between economics and creative agency, this: "…is not the same thing as adopting a romantic position where creativity and commerce should always be opposed to each other" (p. 9). In expensive cultural forms such as television, producers almost always have the audience in mind, regardless of which camp they may see their work belonging to. Audience research has played a role in PSB since the BBC implemented its in-house Listener Research Unit in 1936 (Born 2004). As the previous chapter has shown, our preferences resisted adherence to genre typologies aligning to populism, yet nonetheless, our goal was still to win viewers. Moreover, the fact that filmmakers may be required to change their vision to accommodate market realities need not always be framed as sacrifice. As pointed out at the end of the previous chapter, our desire to avoid narration was not

easily sustained by the material we were able to shoot, potentially validating the preference of our ABC EP to include it.

That said, however, it is noteworthy that audience feedback generated by the film, through both direct communication and online commentary, tended to originate from arts-interested viewers, despite the ABC's attempts to reach a wider audience by recourse to genre typologies more closely aligned with popular entertainment. This suggests that although *GTAT* had only limited success on commercial grounds, it had greater success servicing the ABC's arts remit. Our experience of the ABC's conflicted approach to content creation in fulfilment of its Charter obligations to provide public value evidences how hard it is for all parties to navigate these contradictions. The point is especially pertinent in circumstances of industrial precarity where the ABC provides opportunities for creative artists that are unavailable elsewhere.

The consequences of the 'PSB dilemma' on the question of value is now examined, in the final chapter of this exegesis.

8 CONCLUSION

The aphorism sometimes deployed as an argument against metrics: "you can't fatten a pig by weighing it", is reflective of the ABC's dilemma as it attempts to mesh economic metrics with public value. Earlier I observed that in public fora ABC executives often refer to their desire for "a unique spin on ideas". They generally couple this with a requirement to speak to audiences, as assessed by viewing figures[49]. In an interview with Jock Given (2016, op. cit.), the then-ABC Director of Programming, Richard Finlayson, framed the issue in revealing language:

> How do we keep reminding [stakeholders] of our value? How do you deal with the inevitable politics of your funding environment? And how much are we responding to that pressure: are we trying hard enough to make sure the content we produce has both public value and is capable of reaching a big audience?
> (p. 29)

Finlayson here speaks of two 'values': the ABC's value and public value. The first is organisational, the second, cultural. By collapsing the second 'value' into a ratings number, the former instrumentalises the latter. The question of value is thus made hostage to a form of taxonomic oversimplification where 'value' is defined solely by economic yardsticks, which by their nature are unable to capture the intrinsic experiential qualities of cultural works. Julian Meyrick, Robert Phiddian and Tully Barnett address the problem of value in *What Matters? Talking Value in Australian Culture* (2018), where they refer to the hollowing out of the public sphere that occurs when culture's public value is conflated with its market value, "its consumer impact with its civic influence" (p. 133). They speak of:

> The fact that the people who experience culture are treated as consumers in a marketplace rather than members of a public, so public value (the underlying purpose of public investment) is inadequately addressed (p. xv).

[49] Jasek, notes taken during Screen Forever conference, 28-30 March 2022; notes taken at industry forum with Jennifer Collins, Acting Director, ABC Entertainment & Specialist 29 September 2022.

Our experience shows that by attempting to serve two masters the ABC serves neither, because the standards of 'public value' and 'market impact' are not commensurable[50]. The dangers are deftly summarized by Lotz, Potter and Johnson (op. cit.), in their survey of the changing macroeconomics of FTA television:

> The 21st-century competitive dynamics have made sport and some reality entertainment particularly valuable to services seeking advertisers, at the risk of crowding out other types of programming. If public funded services are expected to offer certain types of content or held to a particular remit, these must be central to the metrics used to evaluate them. Too often, metrics of attention are prioritised. To expect public-funded services can provide content that commercial services deem infeasible, yet also attract commercial-size audiences preordains their failure (2022, p. 287).

One of the ABC's skills has been to service its Charter by straddling market and civic spaces in service of nation-building agendas. However, longstanding existential battles have pushed the organisation into prioritising its survival over allowing the artists it commissions to tell their society's stories in non-template ways; by exercising a chilling effect on innovation the ABC risks undermining the core reason for its existence. The problem is common to other PSBs; as we have seen the BBC has long been caught in the same vice.

As FTA and cable services lose financial capacity, we have shown that industry discourse refers to the rise of streamers as replacements, key to a thriving local screen industry. However, industry data demonstrate PSBs remain vital to maintaining local stories on our screens and providing critical employment mass to Australia's creative community, regardless of the degree to which streamers scale up their investment in Australian content (5.1 & 5.4). The position of the ABC remains fragile, even as it celebrates its ninth decade. A central effect of industrial change is therefore that precarity obtains throughout the screen ecosystem, extending to its ultimate point of focus: the viewer.

In connection with how PSBs negotiate pathways through industrial change, Born has noted: "…it is in the cultures of production and the resulting programmes that any redefinition of public service values must finally impact and be judged" (2004, p. 360). She points out the guiding

[50] Former ABC Chair, James Spigelman, likens it to: "asking whether this rock is heavier than that piece of string is long" (quoted in Martin & Lowe 2014, p. 51).

values of PSBs are demonstrated centrifugally through the output of their programmes, however, in a movement that is simultaneously centripetal, those programmes draw on the conditions surrounding them. One of the core purposes of this exegesis is to show how producer's intentions are essential to maintaining the creative vitality necessary to navigate these movements in service of public value. A society's options for self-awareness through the mirror of its own stories; its abilities to evolve and mature; its emotional intelligence, ethical compass, and maps to navigate what it is to be an engaged citizen - all require a wide storytelling vocabulary, and opportunities to express it. When they are circumscribed, we are all the Precariat. Lotz et. al. speak of the need to rescope expectations of PSBs as part of public policy responses to the changing macroeconomy of television. They are right. Critical to that project is to extend our understanding of 'value' beyond economic metrics to re-embrace the purpose and importance of the public sphere.

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10 APPENDICES

10.1 Treatment: Getting Their Acts Together

Following is the document submitted to the ABC Content Executive to win approval for the project to proceed. Developed in collaboration with my production colleagues and with input from our ABC EP, it attempted to lay out the film's fundamental narrative drivers, despite the fact it was not possible to know what would in fact transpire during filming.

Adelaide Festival Documentary

"We only have half a festival and need the rest by August!" Follow joint Artistic Directors Neil Armfield and Rachel Healy as they strive to realise the 2020 Adelaide Festival - not always from the same direction.

The making of an international arts festival with all its history, pedigree and ambition in its 60th anniversary year, and the story of two extraordinary artistic directors who battle to bring it off.

ABOUT OUR PROTAGONISTS

NEIL ARMFIELD

Son of Len, a factory worker at Arnotts Biscuits, as was Len's father before that.

Renowned Indigenous director and theatre educator Brian Syron came to see his Homebush Boys High school production of "Toad of Toad Hall", and told him he had what it takes to be a director.

His elder brother died in 1960s, followed by his mother contracting a nearly-fatal illness. "This shook the family's world order to its core", and galvanised Neil. Aged 18 he came out and set his sights on a career in the arts.

His father and mother rolled their support in behind him, uniting the family by helping his early productions, making costumes and building sets. His career blossomed.

"I couldn't think of anything else I might do. I try to be as useful as possible, leaving a legacy, work practice, and quality of experience that is enabling, and helps society to reflect, question, and experience a joy in life that is not available in any other way."

Neil and Rachel were appointed joint artistic directors of Adelaide Festival in 2017. "We inherited a damaged and unmotivated organisation filled with siloised departments. Now there is a growing sense of family care for each other and the event."

Neil's real goal: "Restoring the memory of great festival experiences from 1980 (dir: Christopher Hunt) and especially 1982 (dir: Jim Sharman), which were really the culminations of Don Dunstan's legacy, to create a massive public event that ennobles audiences and the city, and creates a sense of community and communion to everyone."

The measure of this will be public and critical response to the 2020 Festival, as seen in Vox Pops and media grabs.

The obstacles: Complacency making the festival boring. Balancing the need to keep it challenging but not losing audience along the way – and, most importantly, his faith in his own vision: "You have to rely on your own pleasure as the yardstick and can't subdivide your taste into what will be popular and what's cutting edge. But I've been floored by the shift towards what's appropriate to say and do, and am still trying to correlate my sense of what is great and important as the rules are changing. The Adelaide Festival lets me challenge and respond to this".

RACHEL HEALY

Rachel's father worked for the Adelaide tram department; her mother was a primary school teacher. "Everybody went to the Festival, it was just what you did in Adelaide in those days, no matter your socio-economic group. My parents went to see Pina Bausch perform and hated her! But that didn't matter, the Festival was normalised, not a special treat, it was everyone's. It made a career in the arts something that was OK".

Rachel's real goal: "Make the Festival accessible to kids like me."

The measure of this will be public engagement with the Festival, both at free public events and via box office returns; and critical response to their program.

Obstacles: How can they reconcile the conflicting demands of bringing out expensive acts which are the very best in the world with ticket prices people can afford? "If we are to meet our financial targets that prove we are getting audience, which in turn justifies our requests for funding, the sales teams have to be pushing $100 tickets for all they're worth. How can we find time and space to get it out to people like my family who can't afford it?"

How does the Festival define its identity in reaction to the Fringe, held concurrently, and compete for scarce venues in a city with a chronic shortage of spaces?

And how do they keep the Festival cutting edge enough to be worth mounting artistically, whilst drawing in the audience they need to remain viable?

Treatment

Prologue

An excavator's shovel rises against blue sky. As it crashes to earth, cut to a dancer's foot landing, from an act presented by the Adelaide Festival of the Arts.

A montage of different acts intercuts with machinery renovating theatre spaces in Adelaide- Her Majesty's Theatre and the Adelaide Festival Centre; as well as posters and banners of the Adelaide Festival since its inception; and drone shots of the city highlighting the different venues the Festival uses.

Interweave the voices of artistic directors Neil Armfield and Rachel Healy, from interview materials gathered during the course of the shoot. We see them together and they tell us why they have chosen to devote so much of their lives to this job.

Intro them as characters, avoiding reliance on talking heads telling about their fame (especially his). Instead show it, eg archive of Neil directing, posters, movie/theatre clips; news footage of Rachel's previous initiatives.

Through a similar mix of media, establish the scale of the Festival of which they are directors. Over this intercut a voice-over track by Neil and Rachel that feels like their own private musings, summarising their individual goals for the milestone 2020 60th anniversary Festival: for Rachel it's to make the Festival accessible to people like she was as a girl, and for Neil it's to restore the Festival to its glory days of the Dunstan era.

2019 has been the biggest festival yet, but over the coming months they will have to present their vision for the 2020 festival to their Board. And they have a chronic shortage of venues, 50% of their program still to put in place, a large funding shortfall they have to find, and no opening event or headline act yet.

Can they woo and win the right blend of acts that will bring audiences, funding, colleagues, and their dreams together?

Act 1- The Nerve Centre

- May 7th: Rachel returns from a spotting trip overseas. Follow her to the Adelaide Festival office to reveal what she has found to the team.

- Use this to introduce us to the life of the office- see the chain of command, staff: get a sense of who the people are and where they've come from (pathways).

- Characters will include:
  Rob Brookman, Executive Director- their immediate boss, and man-in-the-middle with his hand on the purse strings
- Sarah Killey, ever-optimistic Philanthropy Manager, in charge of helping raise the apparently-impossible sums of money that are needed to realise Neil and Rachel's vision
- Marta Davis, their eccentric and entertaining Executive Assistant, one of the only people crazy enough to cope with the rollercoaster ride
- Lesley Newton, Head of Programming, who has been with the Festival many years and seen it all. Her job is to track and production manage the Festival schedule.

- Equate Neil & Rachel with the Adelaide Festival, ie they are proxies for it so it is personalised. Surprise audience with how entertaining and engaging they are.

- Reveal what is involved in curating the program. Do this by showing where R/N disagree – ie ongoing issues that will continue all year, in particular events such as "Coriolanus", and "Saigon". Break 4th wall where necessary if they do not want to explicitly name acts they don't like, to explain to us why.
  - Introduce a visual motif of a crossplot of acts being populated, returning to it as items are mooted, pencilled, then committed into the 2020 program. Utilise this as a device throughout the film to navigate the issues and problems particular to these acts.
  - Intercut with Head of Programming, Lesley Newton, to provide status updates on where the lineup currently stands- as of May there are only 5 shows slotted in with at least another 10 major slots to fill

- June 13th: Neil, who has been splitting his time between the Festival and directing *Things I Know to be True* for Belvoir St Theatre in Sydney, now comes to Adelaide full time, as programming decisions become more intense.

- Delve further into the historical part of Neil's goal: to surpass the great Festivals of 1980 & 82, the outcomes of the financially generous years of Don Dunstan's premiership of South Australia. Use this to throw to archive, and ask Neil, Rachel and Rob:
  - why are we still talking about the Dunstan era? What made him unique in his support for the arts? What was the political and economic status of Adelaide at that time? Is there anyone in this era that compares?
  - Have Neil expand on his historical connection to Jim Sharman, for whose Lighthouse Theatre he worked as Associate Director, and who's 1982 Festival he holds up as an exemplar.

- Contrast this with archival material of naysayers such as radio gadfly Peter Goers, who famously derided Neil's beloved 1980 Festival with its strong Asian strand as "having too much soy sauce". Elicit N/R's reactions to them- what effect do they have?
  - Include archival Vox Pops with general public, with an emphasis on people who disliked acts.

- Include commentary on acts hated by critics and conservatives, which may include Hans Werner Henze's *El Cimarron*; the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, John Cage, Steven Berkoff's *East,* Pina Bausch- via visual and press archive

- Delve further into Rachel remembering how democratised the Festival was (informing her goal to keep it accessible)
  - Interview Rachel's parents on how they used to take her to the Festival even though they weren't artsy people and sometimes hated acts such as Pina Bausch.
  - Use this to introduce a visual layer of home movie footage shot by the general public of Festivals past, as a personal, intimate and lyrical overlay sequence to music with occasional audio from Rachel. Her experience was the experience of the whole big country town that was (and still is) Adelaide.

- Incorporating archive material of past Festivals, Neil and Rachel explore what "keeping the Festival accessible" really means to them. It's not just about ticket prices, but the artistic dilemma: how do they keep the Festival cutting edge but also accessible? And how the ubiquity of the Fringe impacts this.
  - Include interviews with Rob Brookman and their boss, Festival Chair Judy Potter
  - This may also include past Festival directors such as Jim Sharman, Robyn Archer or Anthony Steel (who thinks the Fringe is the biggest threat to the Festival's identity).
  - Heather Kroll, Director of the Fringe. Does she see herself being in competition with the Festival?

- Establish the two largest initiatives R&N are now undertaking: a three-year collaboration with the French Festival of Aix en Provence (second-largest arts festival in the world after the Edinburgh Festival); and a co-commissioned show with Edinburgh which they will not see until August (the very time they are supposed to have locked down their program). Also use this to establish the importance for them of traveling to find acts (which we will pay off later in Act 2 when we follow them to the Edinburgh Festival).

- Add additional burning issues for the 2020 program – we won't know some of these until they materialise, but they will include Adelaide's dire lack of modern theatre infrastructure, especially the yet-to-be-made-public loss of Her Majesty's Theatre, their second-biggest venue, whose renovations will not be finished in time. This threatens some of the major acts they desperately want, but are yet to commit, including:
  - Renowned director Daniel Fish's production of *Oklahoma*. (Rachel: "It's amazing but SOOO technically demanding and needs 6 days to bump in")
  - The National Theatre Company of Britain's enormous opera *Triptych*, by cutting-edge composer Bryce Dessner, about photographer Robert Mapplethorpe
  - *The Lehman Brother's Trilogy*, which involves the full British cast being flown out (at huge budget pressure to Festival)

    - The continual drama of having to raise up to $3M every year to cover budget shortfalls- Rob Brookman and Judy Potter outline the budget numbers
    - Footage for the above will include video clips of potential shows, set against building and construction montage, and the rounds of meetings and conversations that form part of the natural rhythms of the life of the AF office.

- Another venue set for the chopping block is the floating Riverside Palais, a major venue for free public events- exactly Rachel's worst nightmare. This, at a time the Fringe is gobbling up all spare spaces in a small town. Besides interviews with Neil, Rachel and Rob Brookman, other potential material on this strand may include:
    - Interview with Adelaide City Council Mayor Sandy Vershoor on the reasons why Council don't like the Palais. Establish that she used to be CEO of the Adelaide Festival before Rob Brookman took over, where she was instrumental in having the Palais installed; now she's wearing a different hat she wants it gone, even though she's also an Adelaide Festival board member!
    - Board meetings at which this is discussed and Sandy Vershoor is pressed on the issue

- Show how these pressures affect R&N differently- film them separately and intercut

- Show how others see them, nature of their relationship

- Return to them often as they debate different potential shows for inclusion
    - Continue intercuts with Head of Programming, Lesley Newton as she keeps us up to date on the emerging crossplot of events

- Who is the power behind N&R's throne, ie senior Board members responsible for appointing them, and how do they feel about what is transpiring?
    - Why did they appoint N&R, and why have they just extended their contract? Doesn't this risk Neil's fear of complacency coming true?
    - Return to them after each Board meeting, in May, June and August. If what they say is too hagiographic, utilise them early in film only, creating a plinth for N/R that invites the audience to second-guess if they will take a tumble.

- As the climax to Act 1 approaches, they pitch their program - by now supposedly 80% filled - to the all-important June board meeting. How will this be possible given the logistical issues we know they will face?
    - Utilise the recurring motif of the crossplot of acts, seeing it become more populated (potential timelapse sequence of acts entered, scribbled on, and removed to be replaced by alternatives)

- End Act 1 - July: As they media launch their 2020 opera centrepiece, *Mozart's Requiem,* ratchet up the promise of impending drama by intercutting disasters of the past. Give a sense that, although we don't yet know what is going to happen, unexpected setbacks are the real challenge every festival director faces, including:

- Sacked/resigning directors (Peter Sellars and Elijah Moshinsky for financial profligacy)
- Artists arrested for indecency
- Fiasco opening ceremony (Antoni Miralda's 1976 "Flower Power Turns Sour")
- Artists pulling out at last second (2017: Headline acts Tim Minchin and Jimmy Barnes pull out just weeks before opening night; 2018 ditto Elvis Costello. Rachel says: "Contemporary music is a nightmare!")
- Artistic failure, audience rejection and inability to raise funds as a result
- Reveal past moments the Festival has nearly been shut down, eg 1994

- Does this scare them, or do they welcome the seat-of-your-pants energy that comes from creative decision-making under pressure - necessity being the mother of invention! How will they resolve the challenges to their goals?

<u>Act 2- Explore Neil & Rachel's private doubts and insecurities, and enlarge the story world</u>

- Late July: as Neil returns to his home town of Sydney to rehearse his production of *The Secret River* for this year's Edinburgh Festival, visit him to explore his own doubts around his creative process and how these effect his confidence in discussions he is having with Rachel.
  - Incorporate on-the-fly interviews with Neil in his own home as he undertakes mundane domestic activities such as cooking dinner or feeding his beloved dog. He is so often away this is where he will be at his most intimate and reflective. Round out his personal backstory here.
  - Probe his statement (garnered during research phase) that: **"I've been floored by the shift towards what's appropriate to say and do, and am still trying to correlate my sense of what is great and important as the rules are changing."**

- Intercut with sequences of Rachel getting on with planning alone
  - in her domestic setting with her family, probe her own doubts, which she will inevitably have as she is now in the thick of things. They will be around her belief in her own taste and judgement. Also the personal costs of prolonged absences from her family.

- Through this, explore the inherent differences in their approach to the Festival. While Neil's focus is inclined to the lofty and poetic, Rachel is very preoccupied with pragmatic concerns and financial viability, and how this comes into conflict with the desire to keep the arts accessible to kids like she used to be.

- Enlarge on the narrative threads of each expanding challenge as deadlines approach- utilise the crossplot motif to help audience navigate.
  - As part of this, using the private thought track device of the intro, delve deeper into the implicit differences between N/R's visions: pragmatism vs idealism, and their thoughts about what the Adelaide Festival's point really is- indeed why have arts festivals at all? What is the point of the arts, full-stop?

- August: we travel with Rachel to the Edinburgh Festival for her reunion with Neil, and into a world and an experience that most of us could only fantasise about. What does it take to travel overseas to woo & win acts at the original font and inspiration for the creation of the Adelaide Festival?
    - Observe them exhausted somewhere like a pub as they debrief after viewing up to 8 shows in a single day- how do they do it?
    - High stakes as they see the show they have co-commissioned with Edinburgh for the first time -if they don't like it they will reject it, leaving a significant hole in their schedule just months out
    - Late August/early September: back in Australia, N/R front the board for final approval of the 2020 program. But as Rachel says: "Things shift around all the time right up to just 2 months out!"

- Late September/early October: Neil, Rachel, Rob and the team prepare the public launch of the 2020 Festival Program.
    - Utilise montage of the building of Adelaide's theatres, now showing real signs of progress, but too late for 2020!
    - R & N's pre-launch nerves, the hurried last-minute changes.
    - Contrast Vox Pop opinion of the gathered crowd (almost certain to be favourable) with critical reaction
    - This will include radio gadfly Peter Goers as he criticises aspects of the Festival, from venue choice to acts to staff appointees, to lack of local content in visiting acts, amping up pressure on N/R.
    - See them being interviewed by him, and challenging him right back

- Meanwhile, utilising the momentum of the launch, Rob Brookman unleashes N/R's charm to woo philanthropists for their money- follow them to exclusive fundraising events (hopefully in private homes of the wealthy)

- Go inside a few headline acts as they prepare; the relationship with N/R from their side

- As opening night looms, focus in on the challenges as they sharpen, including Rachel's relentless pressure on her team to keep the Festival accessible

- As pressure mounts, do they crack or hold steady? - remind the audience of the dream. Make the audience realise that N/R are in fact extraordinary people – who we now know intimately! And we know that we ourselves would not be able to do what they've done.

<u>Act 3- It All Happens</u>

- "Mad March" 2020: Set against a backdrop of a car race (Clipsal) and multiple festivals, including the Fringe, RCC, and WOMAD, the 2020 Adelaide Festival unfolds:
- Backstage on opening nights with headline acts
- Last minute crises

- Chaos in the office (this is a universal constant in every year!)
- The scope and scale of the Festival, including events at Writers Week
- The crossplot is ticked off progressively
- The reactions of:
    - Audiences
    - Critics
    - Funding partners
    - The board
- R/N talk about 2020 in review. Pay off their personal goals set up at the start, and their vision for the future.
- And as theatre construction STILL continues…
- …next year they will do it all again!

Richard Jasek
April 24th, 2019