‘LAUGHS AND LEGENDS,’ OR THE FURNITURE THAT GLOWS? TELEVISION *AS* HISTORY

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1. Introduction: Television as History

2006 marks the fiftieth anniversary of broadcast television in Australia. It was launched in Sydney and Melbourne in 1956, just in time for the Melbourne Olympic Games. This anniversary has provoked a flurry of events, including a national conference, a number of exhibitions, and a spate of celebratory television specials and newspaper articles. Now seems a particularly fruitful time, then, to look at the ways in which television itself has become a historical object; to consider some of the ways in which television is memorialised. This paper is concerned not so much with the events of this history as much as with the way in which it is written; with television *as* history rather than the history of television.

Television as history can be distinguished from *histories of things on or about television*, such as programs, broadcasters, genres, technology, policy, audience and the like. Particular historical studies are not uncommon, but if you wanted to explain to someone what constitutes our discipline's major object of study, you would be hard put to identify a work that tackled that job *as history*.[1] Media, cultural and television studies routinely construct television within the endless present tense of science, policy, journalism and critique. The attempt to render it historically has barely begun, least of all in Australia. Both Anne Curthoys and Albert Moran made a similar point in an issue of *Continuum* edited by Hartley fifteen years ago[2], but little has changed in the interim, either here or globally. This is despite regular returns to the problem, such as the 2001 edition of *Media International Australia* focussed on Australian media history edited by Graeme Turner, and Liz Jacka's ruminations on the problem in 2004.[3]

Much writing about television tends to use the scientific present-continuous tense, but that doesn't mean that what we do is science. Scientists will tell us that for any new endeavour there is a pre-scientific period, the type of whose knowledge can be

characterised by what Michael Billig has rather disparagingly dubbed 'logic and anecdote'[4] (although that does seem a pretty accurate description of humanities-based approaches to media). This precedes a properly scientific phase based on the testing of hypotheses using large-scale empirical data.

But television as history hasn't even reached the 'logic and anecdote' stage yet. Its just anecdote. Television *as* history is strangely elusive. Generically, historical anecdotes about TV are apt to head off in one (or both) of two directions; folklore or ideology. Either way – popular memory or corporate self-interest – legends are spun that serve the interests of the teller. Such stories tell us more about the source of the narrative, whether a national, academic, commercial, producer or consumerist speaking position, than they do about television as such. They are 'data' not 'discipline.'

Data and anecdotes cannot turn into history by themselves. In a context where the history of TV still seems to be mostly 'folklore' or 'ideology' rather than 'discipline' or 'science', it seems premature to attempt the history of 'television as history', but it may be timely to apply some logic to the anecdotes. Two purposes may be served:

- First, a period of what Marx used to call 'primitive accumulation' of knowledge is needed about the pastness of TV's past in order to produce sufficient 'surplus value' to enable a properly scientific historical enquiry to ensue[5] (). Jacka opens her article with a quote from Paddy Scannell about the impossibility of conducting meta-commentary when the basest data is elusive – in Scannell's case, chronological accounts of the formation of broadcasting activities at the BBC.[6] In this regard, it transpires that a latter-day knowledge-equivalent of Inca-gold, i.e. an accelerant to the process of 'primitive accumulation' that may precipitate epochal change, has recently been discovered and is ripe for exploitation in order

to kick-start that scientific phase. It is called the Internet. It is towards that 'future of history' that we point at the end.

- Second, analysis of the various extant versions of television history may reveal both generic patterns and ideological tendencies: we'll be able to tell you what television as history has been *for*, hitherto. That is the purpose of the present paper.

2. No Origin; No 'It'

Television *as* history (as opposed to the history of things on television) is confronted by a problem at the outset. There is no coherent object of study. Television is too complex, contingent and context-dependent to have an essence, either technically or as a broadcast system. 'It' was improvised, emerging as the work of many hands, individuals, corporate and governmental, over a lengthy period, in many countries, and so its history is one of multiple starts.

The point that is picked to stand for the beginning of TV depends on whether its origin is ascribed to technology, to nation, or to broadcast system, or to context of viewing; and also on who is the narrator – for instance, the point of origin is different for Ann Curthoys than it is for Channel Nine. Technologically, television was invented at least twice; electromechanically and electronically. Nationally it was invented anew in many countries; 'firsts' of various kinds are claimed by the British, Germans, Americans and others. Each country set up its own national system of technology, standards, legislation, broadcasting organisations, programs and of course audiences. Subsequent histories are nation-centric. The British 'forget' the part played by Germany; the Americans 'forget' the part played by the British[7]. Such national differences mean that any anniversary is arbitrary, even if you concentrate on the launch of broadcast systems as opposed to technical inventions. Thus, 2006 is the 50th anniversary of regular

broadcasting in Australia, but the seventieth in Britain; sixty-ninth in Germany, sixty-fifth[h] in the USA; fifty-fourth in Canada … and so on up to Bhutan, where television is six years old. Each of the pioneer countries developed different standards, including internally competing ones.

The context of viewing was not uniform either. The BBC targeted a domestic audience in order to boost receiver sales, which meant in effect that the *very* first broadcast TV audience was confined by and large to electrical retailers, and in terms of both programming and people's experience of the new medium the first broadcast was the test transmission. In 1936, the BBC scheduled programming specifically for them during the afternoons, so that they might demonstrate the sets. Meanwhile, television was launched in Nazi Germany as a public rather than domestic medium, projected in television viewing halls, and in the USA its use during this early period was largely confined to department stores.

The origins of broadcast systems themselves are misremembered or cheerfully faked, especially to make them coincide with the present purposes of corporate players. TV was invented in Australia on multiple occasions before the 'official arrival' in 1956. Australian experiments with mechanical television and early electrical systems took place before WW2, including a visit in 1938 and rumoured demonstration by John Logie Baird himself. After the war, there are multiple claimants to the origins of television, as Albert Moran has usefully outlined. One of them was at the Powerhouse Museum, which demonstrated an imported Pye 625-line television set from 1954.[8]

The quest for a single point of origin is not only fruitless, it is also metaphysical, a version of Derrida's 'origin of society' problem – the idea of a fixed point always implies a 'before' that therefore unfixes both the point and with it the

notion of a singular origin.[9] So television as history has no origin; there is no 'it.' And we haven't even got to September 1956 yet.

Naturally, in Australia the same applies. The Derridean moment is generally held to be Bruce Gyngell's 'Good evening and welcome to television', which opened TCN9 in Sydney on 16 September 1956. The frequently repeated clip of this moment, however, is not the originating moment of television at all. It is something rather different; one of the first, if not the very first, of the *memorialisations* of television in Australia. The famous Gyngell clip was in fact made a year later to celebrate the first anniversary of Sydney TV station TCN9.[10]

In any case the anniversary applies to Sydney alone. Television didn't 'begin' across Australia; it rolled. Regular broadcasts began in New South Wales and Victoria in 1956. It didn't reach the other mainland states till 1959. Tasmania and Canberra waited till the early 60s, and the Northern Territory did without it till 1971. Notwithstanding the success of Imparja, established in 1988, it may be argued that Indigenous Australia still awaits a television service to match national systems like the ABC and SBS, with a bid for a NIBS (National Indigenous Broadcasting Service) still 'under review'[11].

The problem of origin illustrates well some more fundamental difficulties. We have tried to draw a distinction between the 'history' and 'memorialisations' of television. We've discovered – almost – that there's no such thing as television; it is too various a phenomenon to be reduced to an invention or scientific object of study with properties that can be defined and tested. We will proceed therefore with the task of 'primitive accumulation' of knowledge, the necessary precursor information that may allow 'television *as* history' eventually to be attempted. This paper is the start of that larger project. We have looked for evidence across four main sites:

- Published histories

- Exhibitions and shows in Cultural Institutions
- Memorialisation of television *on* television
- Memorialisation by 'Pro-ams' both in physical sites and on the Internet .

What follows represents a preliminary survey of these four fields. Thus far, we have drawn on national, private and university archives, watched many hours of Australian television specials, searched library catalogues, newspaper indexes and the worldwide web. While in some cases this process of primitive accumulation has produced little more than lists of available resources, we have begun, where possible, to create taxonomies and conceptual categories. Through synthesis and comparison within and across these sites and categories, we have been able to identify some of the implications of the diverse ways in which television in Australia has been memorialised up to now, and along the way, to take some tentative steps toward the future of television as history.

3. Published Histories

Most of what passes for the published history of television is incidental to other purposes, and this is true all the way from large-scale, magisterial academic works through to special newspaper sections published to celebrate television's anniversaries[12] and essays in museum catalogues.[13] Portions of the history of Australian television appear in histories or treatments of other things – for example, 'the nation' – that include some historical analysis or contextualisation of television. Manning Clark's magnum opus was published in 1936, so naturally it makes no reference to television, but the 1963 'short' version is equally shy about 'the box'. Evidently the great 'nation-making' historian did not see popular pastimes and commercial entertainment as part of that endeavour. Few historians have since[14].

While there are some published histories of Australian television, the available literature exhibits a predictable lack of coherence and comprehensiveness (a lack which the conference at which this paper was originally presented was intended to address). Therefore, we have divided the histories or historical texts that do exist into two categories: trade or popular books and academic texts, in addition to incidental works (that is, works published for purposes other than to document television' history, or to celebrate particular anniversaries). Each of these fields offers some works that contribute to the patchwork of histories of Australian television we have uncovered. By including academic publications alongside trade ones in this taxonomy, in a sense we are reducing academic work on television history to data, rather than according it explanatory status. The reasons for this are twofold: first, while we acknowledge the value of much of this work in its own terms, as we explain below the *historical* is frequently subordinate to other aims; second, there is so much crossing of genre boundaries in the publishing on television history that it is more useful for *our* purposes to include academic works alongside trade publishing, in order to build up the most complex and complete picture of the way television is memorialised as possible.

Trade

The category we have labelled 'trade' histories demonstrates the full spectrum of 'anecdotal', 'folklore' and 'ideological' treatments. An early example of a trade history that sets the tone for later studies is Sandra Hall's *Supertoy: 20 Years of Australian Television*[15]. It treads what has become a familiar path in describing the history of Australian television, covering pre-history, policy, industry players and individual stations (both commercial and public), audiences (children and ratings) and various programming genres (variety and drama). It is not likely that Hall invented this

taxonomy; it may be nearer the mark to say that this is a commonsensical array of topics (and probably itself an import). What is certainly true, however, is that Sandra Hall is not an academic. She's a feature writer, literary editor and film and TV critic. She has written a novel and short stories, and she has edited an anthology of erotic writing. But her taxonomy of television is still the one commonly used in both general and academic accounts.

Gerald Stone's *Compulsive Viewing: The Inside Story of Packer's Nine Network,* which Ketupa.net calls 'a *60 Minutes* flavoured account' of the leading commercial network: 'colour, action, a fascination with the big fella and legal stoushes'[16], is a typical example of the anecdotal histories of Australian television that most commonly exist. However, the institutional history in Stone's account is valuable given the typically guarded nature of broadcasters. The stories Stone tells are exceptional in the Australian context where 'insider' works such as these are rare.[17] More readily available 'insider' histories of Australian television can be found in biographies, autobiographies and memoirs of television personalities, journalists and ageing stars.[18]

Folkloric accounts include Peter Beilby's (1981) *Australian TV: The First 25 years*[19], a large-format 'scrap book' about the first 25 years of Australian broadcasting including short, journalistic pieces and a multitude of pictures and memorabilia. Celebrating the first 25 years of television, Beilby's work is one of a series of studies, folkloric and otherwise, produced in the first quarter-century of Australian television[20]. Accounts of Australian television after this are thin on the ground.[21] Worthy of a mention here is a substantial television documentary about television,[22] Vixen Films' *Glued to the Telly* (1995), which was itself supplemented by a coffee-table scrapbook[23].

In place of more broad-ranging accounts of television may be found what we call 'ideological' treatments – narrowly partisan accounts, or those promoting a specific

player's perspective (including reports produced by the various incarnations of the media regulatory body), such as Ken Inglis' (1984) *This is the ABC.*[24]

Academic histories (including Government agency reports and publications)

Academic histories of television are less common than you might think, especially those concerned with programming as opposed to broadcasting systems[25]. With a few exceptions, the academic study of television remains in the present tense as it engages with scientific or policy discourse, pondering questions of effect, behaviour, technology, power and profit. Many academic works, even those that do seek to trace historical events, fall short as history because such accounts of the field are literally tendentious: they are crafted to provide insight into the analysis of present-tense issues, not to account for the pastness of the past.[26] The approach of historians to discussions of Australian television include television in histories of broadcasting or the development of national infrastructure, resulting in a tendency to refer to 'transport' when talking about 'communication.'[27] The academic neglect of television history is especially pronounced in Australia; we await both our Asa Briggs[28] (a magisterial institutional history by an historian) and our Horace Newcomb (a comprehensive encyclopaedia of television including historical accounts)[29].

4. Cultural Institutions

Academia is not alone in its neglect of television. Given that watching TV is the most popular pastime in the world and in all history and has been for most of the time that most people alive today have been alive, it is surprising how little notice the major institutions of cultural memory have taken of it. Museums, galleries and archives that pretend to national status have almost completely ignored it. Television as *cultural* history is strangely elusive. On the whole, where they have noticed it at all, cultural institutions have not been kind to television. They have perhaps been too prone to what

Roland Barthes once called ‘either/or-ism’: *Either* Cultural Institutions, *or* the dreaded Tube, viz.:

Cultural Institutions	TV
extraordinary	ordinary
institutions of collection	medium of diffusion
public	commercial
city and civic experience	suburban and domestic experience
♂ tendencies	♀ tendencies
education/art	consumption/entertainment
contemplation	behaviour
historicise art and culture	**memorialise schlock, dreck, kitsch**

… and so on.

This familiar set of oppositions drives a persistent tendency, most notable among those who value cultural institutions, to associate value with one side of the ledger and – therefore – disrepute with the other. So if you’re interested in popular media, the great national institutions have been something of a cultural wasteland for the past 49 years. But there are specialist museums, archives and cultural institutions.

Thought the fiftieth anniversary of Australian television has prompted two attempts which we will discuss below, it is still very difficult to find an exhibition on television that takes the medium and its practitioners just as seriously as artists, photographers and filmmakers are taken in galleries. What would television history look like if it were curated for the Tate Modern or MOMA? The closest thing we have found in Australia was the inaugural exhibition at Sydney’s Museum of Contemporary Art in 1991, to celebrate 35 years of Australian TV. *TV Times* was curated by David Watson and Denise Corrigan. One of its exhibits was a large black box with peepholes through which visitors could spy – as if through an open fridge door and other surveillance slots – on a suburban couple (played by actors) who sat there watching television (and looking bored, leafing through magazines, and so on). Very Foucauldian, and an artwork in its

own right. But the MCA collapsed financially soon afterwards and had to be re-launched with a different business plan. Memorialising the popular arts in a serious way seems not to be part of it.[30]

In the process, television usually becomes a symptom of something else. Part criminal, part fool, it stands for our collective fears, desires and follies. In a serious mood it is the history of technology (read: determinism); of social and cultural impact (read: negative); of corporate players (read: capitalist power); or of cultural imperialism (read: Americanisation). But meanwhile, we are called upon to wallow in nostalgia and see the ads, comedy shows, kids' TV and sport from, well, yesteryear. We are invited to laugh at the mullets, cringe at the flares, and wince at how our favourite celebrities used to look. Such topics may also correspond to various target demographics and their accompanying modes of consumption: nostalgia and 'the history of me' for the oldies; arch critique and knowing kitsch for the urban sophisticates; the delighted enjoyment of celebrities and games for the kids.

An additional difficulty for the task of memorialising television may be related to the way in which television is collected by cultural institutions (or more properly, by the national cultural institutions that collect television). There is no Australian cultural institution dedicated solely to the medium, like the Museum of Television and Radio in New York and Los Angeles, and the Museum of Broadcast Communications in Chicago.[31] The closest we have is the National Film and Sound Archive in Canberra. Inheriting the legacy of the National Historical Film and Speaking Record Library the National Film and Sound Archive exists as the national repository of Australian television's history. While Australian audiovisual content has been collected since as early as 1937 and the original National Film and Sound Archive formed in 1984, there has never been a comprehensive archive of Australian television. Along with the other

‘screen’ and recorded arts, the archive maintains an official collection of television footage in a permanent collection of news and ‘representative’ programming. This collection relies principally on networks or production companies donating self-selected examples of interesting, innovative, significant or landmark content.[32]

In the quest for completeness, or even representativeness, national audiovisual archives such as the National Film and Sound Archive are challenged by the volume and character of the content they are trying to collect. Audiovisual archives are hybrid institutions, combining elements of otherwise differentiated collecting institutions such as libraries, archives and museums. The principals of preservation central to museology, for instance, are important for audiovisual archives, since the technical nature of the medium makes it impossible to separate the technology from the product[33]. As such, the maintenance and collecting of artefacts and objects is as important as the preservation of documents or content, in order to maintain access to audiovisual content. The changing nature of the content – recorded on a variety of materials, subject to sometimes quite rapid decay, and increasingly becoming multi-platform – poses further challenges to the maintenance of a national collection.

The NFSA is the only cultural institution in its category that is not a ‘national’ institution and has not been awarded statutory status.[34] Nevertheless it answers its public responsibility as a national cultural institution by facilitating public access to its holdings and exhibitions. *Take ’84* celebrates the year that the National Film and Sound Archive opened and includes elements from ScreenSound’s collection collected in 1984 – television is represented in the form of news and that year’s Logies. The permanent exhibition *Sights and Sounds of a Nation* uses the archive’s own holdings to trace the history of Australia’s film, photography, television, radio and recording industries.

Organised by decade, the exhibition navigates phases of development of the Australian audiovisual industries using various unifying themes.

But the central remit of an archive is preservation, not access, and the role played by audiovisual archives is further complicated by commercial imperatives that overshadow their collections. As much as they aid in the preservation of national culture, most audiovisual archives also serve as stock inventories, centralising content for re-use in future productions, subject to the negotiation of copyright royalties. For these purposes, television also boasts its own industrial archives[35]. The maintenance of large archives by the commercial and public networks enables the broadcasters to exert control not only over the reuse of content (achievable through copyright provisions) but also over access to their recorded histories. Substantial, unofficial, decentralised and distributed audiovisual archives exist across Australia's universities as well. However, copyright regulations restrict access to this content to members of the educational institution that holds the recording[36].

Exhibitions and events

We have also managed to find examples of television's memorialisation in exhibitions mounted at state and regional museums. These tend to fall into three categories - those that celebrate specific programs, those that seek to portray an era or industry; and those that seek to memorialise television itself.

<u>Program-specific exhibitions:</u>

This category includes a visit from the Smithsonian's *Star Trek* exhibition at the Powerhouse,[37] but exhibitions of Australian television tend to favour children's shows.[38] Frequently, landmarks and milestones trigger the memorialisation of television – the National Museum of Australia's touring exhibition *Hickory Dickory Dock,* which celebrated 39 years on-air of the ABC's *Play School* in 2004. Similarly, *Mr Squiggle:*

Who's Pulling the Strings? (it closed in October 2005); subtitled 'The Life and Art of Norman Hetherington' celebrated the puppet-making and artwork of Squiggle's creator/alter ego.[39]

A permanent exhibit (not driven by an event or anniversary) is the Grundy-donated '*Neighbours* Kitchen' (belonging to the Robinson family in the show, replete with Scott and Charlene's plaster wedding cake in the fridge) which is included as an installation at the Australia Gallery of the Melbourne Museum. The *Herald Sun,* describing 'exhibits you must not miss' when the museum opened in 2000, declares that the set and *Neighbours* itself present 'suburban Melbourne to the world.' And the world presents itself to Melbourne, for busloads of backpacker fans make the pilgrimage out to 'Ramsay Street'– turning Pin Oak Court in Vermont South and other *Neighbours*-related places into a global sacred site of soapie memorialisation.[40]

<u>Portraits of an era or industry:</u>

The single-program focus of these exhibitions is a start at least, though the spectre of either/or-ism remains. The promise of a broader memorialisation of Australian television appeared in the catalogue for *Back of Beyond: Discovering Australian Film and Television*, an exhibition mounted in Sydney and exported to the US in 1988. A collaboration between the Australian Film Commission (under Phillip Adams' aegis) and the UCLA Film and Television Archive, it set out to showcase Australian film and television directors and their work as part of the part of the Bicentennial celebrations. The television that is included, however, is the kind that looks most like director's cinema – the mini-series and Kennedy-Miller in particular. Television is not celebrated on the basis of its uniquely *televisual* qualities but only to the extent that it aspires to a legitimated Australian cultural form – film[41].

As the touchstone of a particular era, television has featured on at least two occasions as a link to the domesticity of yesteryear. In 1997 the Heide Museum of Modern Art in Heidelberg, Victoria offered *1956: Melbourne, Modernity and the XVI Olympiad*. Here television provided the link to the 1950s domestic experience, and in the component curated by architect Derham Groves examining the architectural transformation of the family home to accommodate 'the box in the corner,' television is memorialised as a peripheral driver of architectural change. Television again featured as a component of a bygone domestic lifestyle in 2001's *Living in the Seventies.* Mounted by Adelaide's National Automotive Museum, the exhibition was designed to accompany the launch of the new Holden Monaro. Looking at the 'cars, clothes, politics, film and television'[42] of the 1970s, television is included in a familiar line-up of 'iconic' representations of the era when the original Monaro was famous.

Television Itself:

It seems rare that television as such has been the subject of an exhibition. In addition to the MCA exhibition already discussed, we have managed to uncover only one other example. In 1994 the Victorian Arts Centre's Performing Arts Museum featured an exhibition of photographs and publicity shots entitled *Welcome to Television* showing Australian television personalities from the 1950s through to the mid-1970s. It drew on a collection of 100,000 negatives, many unpublished, donated by entertainment photographer Laurie Richards. An article from *The Age's* Entertainment Guide[43] describes this exhibition as 'dethroning' Australian television icons. The surprise expressed in this article about, for instance, the fact that Channel 9 newsreader Brian Naylor had a previous history on children's program *Swallow's Juniors,* or that Bert Newton spent his early days 'as a TV stud,' reveals gaps in the public memory of television. Journalist Barbara Hooks uses the exhibition as an opportunity to explore the

status of women in early Australian television. She interviews Susie Boisjoux, featured in some of the stills, who was a 'pointer' on *The Astor Show* and *The Tarax Show* as well as a hostess on daytime and children's television, appearing on *IMT,* made commercials and hosted *Sincerely Yours,* her own Friday night show.[44] Thus the exhibition was made to tell us as much about gender as it did about television itself.

Despite the examples above, TV exhibitions remain quite rare events in Australia (and indexed information about them perhaps even rarer). Nevertheless, like Sandra Hall's instant taxonomy of TV history, they tend to conform to what Raymond Williams once called 'the culture of the selective tradition.' Some aspects of a cultural form are selected over others, such that 'the history of television' is standardised. We learn what to expect.

But things have picked up for the fiftieth anniversary. 2006 featured two new exhibitions by major national cultural institutions – *On the Box* at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney and *TV50* at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image in Melbourne. Curated by Peter Cox, *On the Box* drew particular public interest both before and after it's April 6, opening.[45] But while we'll see 'the largest collection of television costumes, props and memorabilia ever displayed in Australia'[46] and more than five hours of footage, Cox himself suggests the exhibition is dense, and full of detail but not 'encyclopaedic'.[47]

With a greater emphasis on moving image content than memorabilia, the ACMI exhibition launched Thursday, June 22, curated by Mike Stubbs with the assistance of a group of QUT researchers (including ourselves). It has been fascinating to be involved in the very practical problems associated with trying to make television into good history and a good show at the same time. Not the least of the issues is a familiar conundrum for

any curator or artistic director interested in popular culture – what will persuade potential visitors to switch off the TV set at home and come in here to watch TV? It all seems counterintuitive. Immersed as everyone is in popular culture, and as familiar and ubiquitous as television is, why would anyone bother to invest time in visiting more of the same? But making the exhibition different enough to draw a crowd ought not to entail rendering television into something so different that is no longer recognisable.

5. Television on television

Television's memorialisation of itself – principally in the form of anniversary specials and station idents or promos – has, over time, become the closest thing we have to an 'official' history of Australian television. However, it is a selective history, 'written' by winners, laced with nostalgia and consisting almost entirely of anecdote. More than one observer has constructed Australian television as a series of 'great moments' (e.g. *Who Weekly*, Alan McKee and the Powerhouse Museum) [48]. How such moments come to be 'great' seems to be via repetition at each 'birthday' or milestone, which eventually establishes an unauthored but quasi-official history. This process of selecting what is significant and weeding out what is not through repetition constitutes television as a historical object in a particular way, resulting in an imagined distinction between what *is* television as against what is merely *on* television. This 'selective tradition' prioritises local (Australian) content, technological innovation, and live rather than scripted television, especially early variety programming. Frontier myths persist even today, with early presenters lauded as pioneers while the industry, like the railroad companies of the American West, congratulates itself for taming the new cultural landscape through technological innovation.

Specials

Early programming about television celebrated the medium either as a booming post-war industry or as a technological marvel. On the industry side, Astor sponsored *This is Television* (1956). It promoted television as a nation-building industry, making TV sets, domestic content, and transmissions of the latest overseas programs, education, Australia variety and quiz shows, and films. On the marvel side was the General Motors Hour, also called *This is Television* (GTV9, 1956). Interspersed with ads for Holdens and an overview of the functioning of a studio, Eric Pearce explained some of the science behind the wonder of electronic image transmission.

TV – or at least Nine – marked its 20th and 21st birthdays with back-slapping gala events in ballrooms packed with personalities. Hosted by Bert Newton and regularly featuring 'special guests' from television's past and musical acts extolling the virtues of television's future, these events resembled the Logies. Tracing a familiar path from September 1956 through *Pick-a-Box, IMT,* key news events, memorable sporting broadcasts, children's television, imported drama events and the successes of local programming, they prefigure what was to eventually become a stable format for television's memorialisation of itself: the 'birthday special.'

As television matured, TV history shows moved out of the ballroom and into the studio, represented as the natural home for station-specific specials and those celebrating the past or ongoing history of particular programs. The 30th and 40th anniversaries were less focused on the live experience of *making* television and more on the content – the magical moments that television has provided for the delighted viewer. The emphasis was on genre divisions and viewer nostalgia, leavened by celebrity presenters making painful scripted jokes.

Recently the television special seems to have made one more shift. By adding the archive as a site from which stories can be told, an additional layer of historicity is also added. This proves particularly true in the more recent memorialising of 'legends', where Graham Kennedy and Bert Newton appear to be in a league of their own. Held up almost as personifications of television's history of itself, the moment chosen to reveal Kennedy's supposedly vitriolic response to being booted off the air is accompanied by a trip to the Nine archive. Here, surrounded by the recorded history of the network, Ray Martin (himself a candidate for the pantheon of TV legends) emphasises the historical status ascribed to Kennedy. Showing the audience the canister containing the reel of film on which the rebuke is recorded, Kennedy's celebrity is conflated with the history of the network. Rather than the celebration of a broadcaster's achievements, the archive locates the program as a document of historiography.

In 1991 Channel Nine's *35 Years of Television* made history of its own. It claimed to be the first show that covered commercial TV as a whole, rather than only one channel (although it complained that 'the other networks' were reluctant to share their material). It is presented by stars and personalities from all three commercial networks. It ran for a full two hours in place of Nine's Sunday night movie. Personalities (or in the case of Mary-Anne Fahey's Kylie Mole, characters), present relevant genre segments. Not to be outdone, Seven followed with *40 Years of Television* (1996, ATN7), a large-scale, studio-based affair hosted by Garry McDonald. In addition to clips, McDonald presented song-and-dance numbers and vignettes celebrating 'the box.' This was matched by Nine's *40 Years of Television: Then and Now*, and *40 Years of Television: The Real History* (Nine Network).

Celebrations for television's 50th anniversary are already well under way. For instance the Nine Network has recently aired a special called *Five Decades of Laughs*

and Legends, on the curious grounds that we are now inside the year of the anniversary. As Graeme Blundell[49] commented in *The Australian*, '*Five Decades* smacks of a grab for ratings desperately – and cheaply – fashioned from the junk pile and the banal hysteria of TV's supermarket.' Despite the less than lofty motives of the networks, the history of TV can't help being compelling viewing, Blundell conceded. 'It does illustrate just how far we've come' since 1956. Given that the 'we' Blundell invokes is 'the Australian nation,' these more recent shows hint at a kind of television history that, while both partial and partisan, at least transcends the level of individual institutions. In these moments, the idea of television as shared cultural history is foreshadowed, but not yet delivered.

6. ProAm TV History Online

To fill in the void left by 'official culture' and television itself there are now legions of amateurs, fans, retired technicians and announcers from the heyday of broadcasting. They maintain museums in barns and sheds. They have migrated enthusiastically to the net. They are the 'ProAm' consumer co-creators of television history. The ProAms tend to fall into two broad groups, organized around technologies on the one hand and programming on the other. Between them they collect everything from old TV sets and parts to images, screen captures, video clips, theme music, surrounding ephemera (TV magazines and memorabilia), idents, intros and test patterns. There is program-specific fandom, cult, camp, retro, nostalgia, and the fetishisation of obsolescence. On the web, there are sites devoted to histories of things on television, and some to television *as* history. [50]

The technologists divide (very roughly) between 'pros' and 'ams'. The pros are those who have worked in the industry and can discuss details down to the question of whether the electron beam in early cathode ray tubes swept right-to-left or left-to-right.[51]

Amateurs are those who love, collect, and learn about the furniture that glows.[52] They are also apt to invest in physical sites, to show the collected wares.

Those interested in programming tend to be the fans, cult-show followers, or ordinary people giving voice to their personal enthusiasms and nostalgic desires. Any Google search for a particular television program (other than those currently being broadcast) will generally land you at the personal webpage of an amateur enthusiast who has posted images, anecdote, press clippings and trivia about the show,[53] or, for more widely popular ones, at a well-organised and more systematic fan website.[54] As an article in *The Age* puts it: 'It babysat generations, distracted countless teenagers from homework and, as Homer Simpson sagely observed about television, became our "teacher, mother, secret lover".' Sure, the shows may have been ludicrous – think *Webster, The A-Team, Charles In Charge* – but they became part of our lives nonetheless. So what do you do when they end? Immortalise them online'[55].

In this context it is worth considering that the extreme diversity of aesthetics and logic of selection in such immortalisations, while making it difficult to find ways to harness the collective knowledge of fans and amateurs, also provides a richer picture of the diverse meanings and everyday uses of TV content than does the rigour and homogeneity of professional curation.

In museology, the practice of popular collecting is usually distinguished from the professional practice of curating. The latter is seen as reasoned custodianship, selection, arrangement and/or exhibition of objects for public consumption, and the ability to reflect critically on and explain the reasoning behind the choices made. Mere collecting is often viewed pejoratively, but Paul Martin has argued for the benefits of collaboration between the amateur, everyday cultures of collecting and the cultural institutions for whom curation and exhibition are core business[56]. He makes the point that individual collections

of apparently trivial objects provide more depth of knowledge on their specialised subjects than institutional collections and curatorial practice can possibly provide. He argues that museums need to transform their own practices in relation to popular collecting, if only to let some of it in. In the case of online television memorialisation, a good example of this would be the European early television project *Birth of TV*, which is planning to build in the ability for members to contribute information (http://www.birth-of-tv.org/birth/). In short, new media have begun to transform the hidden history of popular collecting into a shared resource.

In fact, ProAm memorialists may even be doing a better job, in some instances, of working towards a systematic shared history for television. In the field of TV history, James Paterson and Tom Bosic's *Australian Television Archive* (austv.hostforweb.com)' is probably the best example of Charles Leadbeater's notion of 'ProAm' creative innovation in the new economy.[57] It is organised, purposeful, serious, collaborative, and regulated (it has a mission statement, detailed terms and conditions of membership and use). The Archive is a non-profit venture that harnesses the power of collaborative knowledge production, offering archival footage/trading and historical and technical information contributed by members. Download access is only available to those who contribute footage, vintage equipment, information, or money to the archive. Its taxonomy of television history is logical. In addition to archiving footage and information, as of 2005 the website features an 'Archivist's Reference Manual,' an ongoing collaborative project that invites members to write quality articles on issues relating to the archiving of audiovisual material. The aim is 'to provide a comprehensive and ultimately authoritative text on the subject.

The ProAms are proving to be much more interesting and useful to the cause of television *as* history than the great cultural institutions of memory. Like eBay their

websites make accessible curios that would have been impossible to find before. And unlike 'official' curators they're only interested in TV history, in which many of them have played an active role, on both sides of the screen. Some of them even seem to be working for broadcasters now. The BBC especially seems drawn to the possibilities (e.g. www.bbc.co.uk/bbcfour/tvontrial/).

7. Conclusion: The Future of History

It's clear that television history is not the work of one agency or even one 'discursive regime'. The work of producing it is shared among academics, cultural institutions, ProAms (including fans and TV professionals, and the history that emerges is different in each case, and in each country. Each of these cultural 'sites' of memorialisation constructs a different (and necessarily partial) mythological object and 'story' for television. In particular, the popular memorialisation of television constructs a very different picture of 'what matters' in TV history than do official, institutional, or published histories. For instance, the popular fetishisation of obsolescent technology is in tension with an industry discourse of technological progress; the underplaying of soapies by the industry is in tension with the high level of fan activity around them. If there is to be such a thing as a thorough, shared memorialisation of television as history, it would need to draw on and somehow integrate these perspectives, a task which seems impossibly complex.

But the future of television history looks a lot more interesting than its past. As we've investigated the cultural memorialisation of television it has also become clear that something new is afoot. The Internet offers entirely new possibilities for TV as history, and the number of potential participants in the work of piecing it together has dramatically increased with the inclusion of the 'ProAms.' At the moment the various parties to this work have little in common and less mutual contact. The next question is

how the dispersed and idiosyncratically organised resources and spaces of ProAm memorialisation might be more productively networked, both with each other[58] and with the cultural institutions whose remit is to remember television for the public. Following that, we may be able get beyond the era of 'primitive accumulation' and attempt a more systematic academic history of television that will more adequately represent our discipline's object of study.

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[1] Garth Jowett comments on an earlier version of this paper in *Flow*: 'I have through my survey of the current literature been made aware how few serious works there are dealing with this subject in a manner which would satisfy scholars in other fields seeking some sort of guide to the role and impact of television in modern life.' jot.communication.utexas.edu/flow/?jot=view&id=1214

[2] Ann Curthoys, 'Television before Television ', *Continuum,* vol 4, no 2, 1991, pp 152-170; Albert Moran, 'Some Beginnings for Australian Television: The First Governor-General', *Continuum,* vol 4 no 2, 1991, pp 171-183.

[3] *Media International Australia,* no 99, May 2001; Liz Jacka, 'Doing the History of Television in Australia: Problems and Challenges', *Continuum,* vol 18, no 1, March 2004, pp 27-41.

[4] Michael Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour*, Sage, London, 2005. This argument of Billig's is to a large extent a dialogue with Robert R. Provine, *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation*, Faber and Faber, London, 2000.

[5] Karl Marx, *Capital, a critique of political economy,* vol 1, translated by Ben Fowkes, New York, Vintage Books, 1977.

[6] Jacka, op cit, p 27.

[7] See for example the Wikipedia's main entry on television at: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Television

[8] See: www.ben.com.au/articles/47/0C028547.asp. This fact is included in the *On the Box* exhibition, discussed later. The section concerning the origins of television in the exhibition makes considerable mention of the role the Powerhouse Museum played as a site for the previewing of television in Australia. While justifiable in the context of history, such activity carves out a space for the Powerhouse as an origin of Australian television. In doing so, the number of originating sites is increased, the concept of what the 'television' that commenced in 1956 actually 'is' is further complicated, and the legitimacy of claims made by the industry as the natural fathers of television are brought further into relief.

[9] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1976, pg 7.

[10] Gerald Stone, *Compulsive Viewing: The Inside Story of Packer's Nine Network*, Viking/Penguin Australia, Ringwood, 2000, pp 47-48. See also Graeme Blundell's article in *The Australian,* 8 April, 2006.

[11] See www.aba.gov.au/tv/overview/FAQs/AusTVhistory.shtml#1 (dates of television's progression across Australia); www.imparja.com.au/company.htm (Imparja); www.dcita.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/12663/IndigenousTVReview.pdf (for the latest review of NIBS); and svc003.wic001g.serverweb.com/Programs/Broadcasting/National_Indigenous_Broadcasting_Service/default.asp (for the original NIBS bid from now-defunct ATSIC).

[12] Television's 40th birthday was marked by a special section in *The Australian* that included no less than 31 articles.

[13] The particular example here is Derham Groves, *TV Houses: television's influence on the Australian home,* Black Jack Press, Carlton North, 2004. This is an expansion of his catalogue essay for the 1996 exhibition *1956: Melbourne, Modernity and the XVI Olympiad* (published as Derham Groves, 'There's More To 'Televiewing' Than Meets The Eye' in Museum of Modern Art at Heide, *1956: Melbourne, Modernity and the XVI Olympiad,* Museum of Modern Art at Heide, Bulleen, 1996). Groves traces changes in architecture and domestic life rendered by the arrival of television in Melbourne, examining advertising, editorial cartoons, newspaper and magazine articles, knitting patterns, *Australian Home Beautiful* and furniture catalogues.

[14] Meanwhile academic specialists in other fields often offer useful historical backgrounders or case studies in pursuit of other objectives. Histories of Australian television appear in Philip and Roger Bell's books on Americanisation (Philip Bell & Roger Bell, *Implicated: the United States in Australia,* Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1993; Philip Bell & Roger Bell (eds), *Americanization and Australia*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 1998). They provide a history of Australian television that considers the presence of American content on the medium and the acknowledgement and discussion of this by the Australian presses particularly. See also websites such as *Australia: Our National Stories – Linking a Nation* by the Australian Heritage Commission, www.ahc.gov.au/publications/national-stories/transport/chapter9.html, and Jenny Black's two works on rural broadcasting *The country's finest hour: Fifty years of rural broadcasting in Australia,* ABC Books for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Sydney, 1995, and *The country's finest hour: Sixty years of rural broadcasting in Australia,* ABC Books for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Sydney, 2005.
[15] Sandra Hall, *Supertoy: 20 Years of Australian Television*, Sun Books Pty Ltd, South Melbourne, 1976; see also Sandra Hall, *Turning On, Turning Off: Australian Television in the Eighties*, Cassell Australia, North Ryde, 1981.
[16] See www.ketupa.net/packer.htm, also www.caslon.com.au/
[17] The most substantial similar work to appear since is probably Graeme Blundell, *King: The Life and Comedy of Graham Kennedy,* Pan Macmillan, Sydney, 2003.
[18] See for instance Maggie Tabberer, *Maggie,* Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1998 and Stuart Littlemore, *The media and me,* ABC Books, 1996. The latter is used particularly productively by Graeme Turner to contextualise his analysis of *This Day Tonight* in *Ending the affair: The decline of television current affairs in Australia,* UNSW Press, Sydney, 2005.
[19] Peter Beilby (ed), *Australian TV: The First 25 Years*, Nelson in association with Cinema Papers, Melbourne, 1981.
[20] Also in this category along with Hall's work already discussed is Christopher Beck (ed), *On Air: 25 Years of TV in Queensland*, One Tree Hill Publishing, Brisbane, 1984, and Mungo MacCallum (ed), *Ten Years of Television*, Sun Books, Melbourne, 1968.
[21] Hall op. cit. is a notable exception here.
[22] There has been, of course, particular attention paid to television by television programs and networks themselves. These are discussed later.
[23] Cate Rayson, *Glued to the Telly*, Elgua Media, Redhill South, 1998 (coffee table book); *Glued To The Telly* 1995, Vixen Films, Melbourne, 1995 (video recording).
[24] See Kenneth S Inglis, *This is the ABC : the Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1932-1983,* Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1983, which is an official history of the ABC as a broadcaster.
[25] Alan McKee, *Australian Television: A Genealogy of Great Moments*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 2001.
[26] See here particularly Tom O'Regan, *Australian Television Culture,* Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, 1993; Hugh Elliot, 'Radio and Television after 1956', 1960, republished in Albert Moran (ed), *Stay Tuned: The Australian Broadcasting Reader,* Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, 1992, pp 108-109; Albert Moran, 'Emergence and Consolidation of Television Networks, 1955-1986' in Albert Moran (ed), *Stay Tuned: The Australian Broadcasting Reader,* Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, 1992, pp 110-115. Also important in this category are reports produced by or on the behalf of the successive media regulatory agencies such as Colin Jones & David Bednall, *Television in Australia: Its History Through the Ratings*, Australian Broadcasting Tribunal, Sydney, 1980. See also for industry perspectives: *The Gyngell Tapes*, Four-part interview with Bruce Gyngell by Julie James-Bailey, Australian Film, Television and Radio School, North Ryde 1986; Bureau of Transport and Communications Economics, *Australian Commercial Television 1986-1995: structure and performance*, Report 93, Canberra, 1996; Kate Aisbett, *20 Years of C: Children's Television Programs and Regulations 1979-1999,* Australian Broadcasting Authority, Australian Children's Television Fund, Film Finance Corporation, Australian Broadcasting Authority, Sydney, 2000. A notable exception to this trend is Turner, op cit, which uses cultural history to progressively illuminate contemporary events in a way that makes the history look forward rather than the analysis look backwards.
[27] See here Graeme Osborne, "'Communication – see Transport'" in Graeme Osborne and William F. Mandle (eds), *New History: Studying Australia Today,* Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, 1982, pp 153-163.
[28] Asa Briggs, *The BBC: The First Fifty Years,* Oxford University Press, Oxford & New York, 1985.
[29] Horace Newcomb, *Encyclopedia of television*, Fitzroy Dearborn, New York, 2004. See Curthoys, op. cit.; Albert Moran, *Images and Industry: Television Drama Production in Australia,* Currency House,

Sydney, 1985; Albert Moran, 'Some Beginnings for Australian Television: The First Governor-General', *Continuum,* vol 4 no 2, 1991, pp 171-183.
[30] All traces of *TV Times* have been lost from the MCA website, which confirms that the museum opened in 1991but coyly doesn't mention with what. See www.mca.com.au/default.asp?page_id=4.
[31] see www.mtr.org/; and www.Museum.TV. The entry on Australian television included in the Museum of Broadcasting's Encyclopaedia of Television is a particularly erudite account of the history of Australian television. See www.museum.tv/archives/etv/A/htmlA/australia/australia.htm.
[32] For the details and terms of the collection program, see www.screensound.gov.au/ScreenSound/Screenso.nsf/allDocs/RWPD43FC4DB0FBB6732CA256B5D001B6366?OpenDocument
[33] Ray Edmondson, *Audiovisual Archiving: Philosophy and Principles,* Revised edn, UNESCO, Paris. portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=15592&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html, 2004, pg 34.
[34] Along the lines of the National Maritime Museum, the National Archives of Australia or the National Museum of Australia (see Edmondson, 2002, ibid., pg 33)
[35] In addition to television networks, some production companies such maintain archives as do the broadcast departments of particular national and international bodies, such as the Olympic Television Archive Bureau (www.otab.com). In the latter case, the maintenance of an archive serves to both record the organisational history of the body and promote their efforts by pooling content for licensed reuse by others.
[36] These generally hold off-air recordings and content released commercially. Although unsystematically recorded by many hands for diverse uses, these collections may represent substantial resources for the construction of a history of Australian television. Trade in off-air recordings among universities is permitted under copyright regulations, which means it is usually easier to organise access through these means rather than physically attending an institution.
[37] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 January 1998; *The Australian*, 10 October, 1997.
[38] Also recently was *Li'l Elvis and the Truck Stoppers,* a touring exhibition by the Australian Children's Television Foundation, based around a 13-part TV series of the same name. Part of the ACTFs education program, the exhibition sought to inform visitors about animation processes. Designed to be hands-on, it included original cells and a 'motion simulator' to enable children to manipulate optical illusions and place themselves in the animation.
[39] Puppets feature as an exhibition curiosity earlier than this as well. In July 1994 the National Philatelic Gallery in Melbourne featured *A Show of Puppets,* an exhibition of television puppets from *Rubbery Figures* through to ABC-TV's *Lift Off Whackadoo Cafe* characters (*Age*, 23 July, 1994).
[40] See: backpackerking.com.au/theage_with_the_king.html.
[41] The approach to television demonstrated here is similar to the inclusion of the Kennedy-Miller mini-series in Dermody and Jacka's 1998 reflective on the Australian film industry (Stuart Cunningham, 'Kennedy-Miller: 'House Style' In Australian Television', in Susan Dermody & Elizabeth Jacka (eds), *The Imaginary Industry: Australian Film In The Late '80s*, Australian Film, Television & Radio School, North Ryde, 1988, pp 178-199). Cunningham's chapter in this piece is worth comparing with Graeme Turner, 'Mixing Fact and Fiction' included in the catalogue accompanying the *Back of Beyond* exhibition – in Scott Murray (ed), *Back of Beyond: Discovering Australian Film and Television,* Australian Film Commission, North Sydney, 1988, pp 68-75.
[42] *The Advertiser*, 17 December, 2001.
[43] *The Age*, 10 June, 1994.
[44] *The Age*, 23 June, 1994.
[45] *The Australian,* 30 March, 2006; *The Australian,* 8 April, 2006
[46] See: www.powerhousemuseum.com/exhibitions/coming.asp.
[47] *Illawarra Mercury,* 20 May, 2006
[48] McKee, op. cit.;
[49] a.k.a. 'Alvin Purple': www.imdb.com/name/nm0089882/.
[50] ProAm TV History sites include: *Classic Australian TV* www.classicaustraliantv.com/index.html, an individually maintained website that focuses on Australian drama series from the first 21 years of Australian television;
aus.tv.history, www.austvhistory.com, an archive of Australian television historical content; *television.au The History of Australian Television*, televisionau.siv.net.au/index.htm; *Australian Television Information Archive* www.australiantelevision.net/list.html, a news and information website on Australian (mainly drama) series and mini-series, maintained since 1998 by a Canadian Australian

TV fan; and *MILESAGO - Television - The Logies*, www.milesago.com/TV/logies.htm, a website for Australasian music and popular culture 1964-1975.

[51] Victor Barker's *Television History* at my.integritynet.com.au/barkertv/. See also *Australian Museum of Modern Media* (www.tvworld.com.au/)

[52] e.g. *Television History – The First 75 Years* at www.tvhistory.tv.

[53] *Countdown Memories*, www.countdownmemories.com/

[54] To sample, see Perfect Blend; an extensive fansite for *Neighbours*. Perfect Blend 'aims to create the most accurate and comprehensive information source ever assembled..and we have been proud to act as factual consultants to the recently relaunched official BBCi Neighbours site' (perfectblend.net/about.htm).

[55] 'Retro Vision,' an article in *The Age*, which surveys fan memorialisation of TV programs (including some of the websites listed in this section) at www.smh.com.au/articles/2004/03/12/1078594553600.html.

[56] Paul Martin, Popular Collecting and the Everyday Self : The Reinvention of Museums? Leicester University Press, London; New York, 1999.

[57] Charles Leadbeater & Paul Miller, The Pro-Am Revolution: How Enthusiasts Are Changing Our Economy and Society, Demos, 2004.

[58] Existing platforms for filtering and aggregating ProAm knowledge and online resources include webrings (e.g. *Australian Television Webrings*: l.webring.com/hub?ring=austv) and the peer knowledge portal About.com (eg. classictv.about.com). The About.com pages are guides to very specific subjects, particularly web resources related to those subjects. Each one is maintained by an expert (frequently, an amateur expert) in the field. It has proven to be a reasonably effective way of filtering and annotating specialist content; however collaborative information collection and filtering is far more efficient (as in Wikipedia).