

INERTIA AND TURBULENCE: TELEVISION AND INNOVATION IN NEW ZEALAND'S DOCUMENTARY PRODUCTION ECOLOGY

ANNA JACKSON, UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND / UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Abstract: Internationally, documentary content has been a key area of innovation and experimentation for public broadcasters and public funding bodies as television moves beyond broadcast and into online and multiplatform environments. This has not been the case in New Zealand where the production of an online or convergent television documentary has had little or no support from either the primary funding body (NZ On Air) or any broadcaster. This paper examines the factors that have slowed the adoption of new platforms and technologies in television documentary in New Zealand from a critical political economy perspective, with an emphasis on the unique conditions that have shaped New Zealand's documentary production ecology. Through analysis of opportunities for innovation and barriers to participation in an emergent global new media ecology, this paper argues that a continued lack of investment in public service media significantly inhibits the development and wellbeing of New Zealand's documentary production ecology.

Keywords: New Zealand documentary, New Zealand television, multiplatform documentary, public service media, media production ecology, critical political economy, critical production studies.

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines how the specific conditions of New Zealand's television industry have shaped New Zealand's documentary production ecology from a critical political economy perspective, identifying declining public service values and cultural policy limitations as barriers to the adoption of new platforms and the emergence of documentary forms and practices. In this discussion I argue that a reconfigured notion of public media and a shift of priorities in cultural policy is necessary in order to support the development of contemporary documentary practices within a "new media ecology".

This paper is derived from research (in progress) towards a joint PhD at The University of Melbourne and The University of Auckland which examines New Zealand's documentary production ecology as a unique case study of a cultural and creative industry in transition. It draws on interviews, observation, analysis of production trends and my own involvement as a participant in the production ecology to assess how significant changes within New Zealand's documentary production ecology (such as the decline of public service broadcasting and the emergence of new media platforms and technologies) affect the function(s) of documentary as a creative and cultural industry.

Ecology offers a useful model for the examination of the complex dynamics within a cultural system. Common variants of the term 'ecology' in the context of media studies and creative and cultural industries discourse are 'creative ecology' (John Howkins, 2009), 'media ecology' or 'production ecology' (Simon Cottle 2004; Jeanette Steemers 2010). As in Bourdieu's concept of a "cultural field" (1993) this approach presents industry relations, practices and texts as, "complex, ambivalent and contested" (David Hesmondhalgh, 2007, p. 4). Media outputs are examined in relation to "the broader field of production including institutional and competitive relationships, dependencies, key players, and professional practices" (Steemers, 2010, p.39).

While New Zealand's documentary production ecology is affected by global media shifts, such as the introduction of new media technologies and platforms, it is also shaped by unique local conditions, such as a highly deregulated and intensely competitive market-driven broadcasting environment. The discussion that follows aims to examine how and why New Zealand's documentary production ecology has so far failed to participate in an expansion of documentary practices spurred by new media platforms and technologies that also serve to explore models for public media beyond existing broadcasting models. After outlining the factors that have shaped New Zealand's television industry (and by extension the production ecology of documentary in New Zealand), I analyse characteristics of television documentary in New Zealand reflective of a cultural policy framework that supports 'localness' and 'universality' (Dunleavy and Joyce, 2011), but fails to promote critical social debate or analysis or (central to this discussion) innovation. Finally, I examine some of the pathways towards content production for new platforms that have been explored in New Zealand, identify key barriers to innovation and argue for a revision of existing cultural policy frameworks.

DOCUMENTARY IN THE GLOBAL NEW MEDIA ECOLOGY

New technologies and media platforms necessitate new production and distribution models, new ways of engaging and interacting with audiences and have radically expanded the field of documentary, introducing new and hybrid forms such as the web documentary, multiplatform documentary and transmedia documentary. Documentary is no longer confined to the screens of cinema and television but can increasingly be found on our desktops, on our mobile devices, and in our public places, our museums, galleries, libraries, and streets. It is increasingly social, viral, locative, multi-modal, participatory and evolving. New technologies and media platforms have also had an impact on the production and distribution of linear documentary forms such as theatrical and television documentary, as producers, broadcasters and distributors are increasingly compelled to utilise web and social media to promote, distribute or even finance documentaries.

The adoption of new platforms and the emergence of new forms of documentary signify a redefining of public media in new public domains described by Patricia Zimmerman as a "new media ecology" that is:

layered, multiplatformed, swiftly changing, and reconfiguring audience and outreach [...] altering the relationships between production, distribution and exhibition with long tail marketing, niche markets, blurrings between professional and amateur, new economic models, and new emerging sectors of public media. (Zimmerman, p.287, 2008)

While the dynamics of this new media ecology challenge “old media” oppositions between independent and commercial (for profit) media (p.287), public media institutions such as Australia’s ABC and Screen Australia, the UK’s BBC, Canada’s NFB and France’s CNC have played a critical role in fostering innovation and supporting the emergence of new documentary practices. This has not been the case in New Zealand, where unique factors have created a public service media vacuum, inhibiting the expansion of documentary into new public domains as seen in territories where public media has a stronger foundation. There is no question that television, and public service broadcasting in particular, is going through a transitional period of significant change in New Zealand. However, rather than the expansion of established notions of public service media and the adoption of new platforms and technologies, change has meant a movement away from public service media. This is evident in the divestment of public service obligations for New Zealand’s state owned broadcaster TVNZ; the withdrawal of free to air non-commercial television (TVNZ 6 and 7); and the movement of some services to pay TV (Heartland and Kidszone).

NEW ZEALAND TELEVISION DOCUMENTARY IN CONTEXT

The history of New Zealand television (the most productive area of New Zealand documentary production) is characterised by change and uncertainty, and the present era is no exception. A combination of both global and local factors has created unique conditions underlying the current period of fluctuation without innovation; a state of inertia in the midst of turbulence.

Global economic, cultural and technological trends are manifested locally according to New Zealand’s specific conditions. Because of its small size, geographic isolation and unique cultural mix, New Zealand’s screen production ecology is fragile and subject to frequent upheaval. According to Roger Horrocks:

New Zealand television is a small and vulnerable habitat with a number of endangered species. Broadcasters and production companies struggle to survive and grow in a challenging environment, sensitive to any new form of life introduced (such as pay television) or any change of temperature (such as a downturn in advertising revenue). A key aspect of ecology is the awareness that everything is interrelated so that any change has subtle flow-on effects. (Horrocks, 2004a)

Horrocks points to the near-fatal impact of the coming of sound on New Zealand’s film industry in the 1920’s, which was “too fragile to carry the increased costs or to get around the legal problems associated with patents”, as a tangible example of the production ecology’s vulnerability to external forces of change (Horrocks, 2004b).

At the present time there are a number of different factors in the global media environment that have significant implications for New Zealand’s documentary production ecology. Globalisation has brought about the relaxation and deregulation of media ownership restrictions and the easing of global trade tariffs and the emergence of networked commu-

nications. Digital television broadcast has brought about a proliferation of free to air TV channels in addition to cable or satellite subscription services. New platforms have emerged such as mobile and web content delivery, video on demand and IPTV, creating an increased demand for content, access to niche markets, and opportunities for self-distribution. The introduction of cheaper, more accessible production equipment, such as HD prosumer cameras and desktop editing software, has created a lower barrier to entry and increased competition amongst independent documentary makers, amplifying tensions between ‘amateurs’ and ‘professionals’ within an industry where ‘creative labour’ is already precarious. Audiences are increasingly accessing and interacting with online and mobile content and engaging with social media. Content is increasingly pull rather than push, delivered on demand rather than on schedule, facilitating the Long Tail business model (Anderson, 2006), and the rise of crowdfunding and self-distribution. New technologies and new platforms also mean an increase in content that is hybrid, multimodal, multiplatform, participatory, user-generated, interactive and locative.

These shifts represent significant changes in media production, consumption and distribution (or use), providing new opportunities for the creation of new kinds of content on a variety of platforms and the ability to reach wider audiences/markets on a global scale. Yet the ‘new media ecology’ is also a highly competitive environment creating new challenges for local producers. For the New Zealand documentary production ecology the impact of these global forces is highly dependent on specific local conditions.

As previously stated, New Zealand television has a history of frequent and often dramatic change. Briefly summarised, in the early days of television in New Zealand in the 1960s the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation (NZBC) established a documentary department which, like the BBC on which it was moulded, produced documentaries emulating the Grierson model (Goldson, 2004). By the 1970s independent filmmakers emerged seeking to challenge the conservatism and dominance of in-house producers. The neo-liberal economic reforms of the mid-1980s saw a dramatic shift from “a highly protectionist economic structure based on tariffs, subsidies and a large public service” to “an extreme monetarist regime, one that stressed individualism, competition and commercialisation” (Goldson, 2004, p. 243). This resulted in the commercialisation of the public broadcaster (TVNZ), which became a State Owned Enterprise in 1988, and the launch of the first privately owned television channel, TV3 in 1989. In this period TVNZ’s in-house documentary production unit was closed, completing the transition to a fully independent and highly competitive television documentary production industry.

Public television in New Zealand has always occupied a negotiated position between cultural policy and economic imperatives, striving to meet public service objectives and justify government subsidy within a competitive market environment. The Broadcasting Commission, New Zealand on Air (NZ On Air), was an innovation intended to ensure the provision of a public broadcasting service in an environment where the state owned broadcaster is required to perform commercially in a competitive market, by opening up public funds for local content to all broadcasters and producers on a contestable basis. While the introduction of competition in New Zealand television and establishment of NZ On Air led to a boom in the production of local content it also created great tension in the production ecology between funders, broadcasters and producers. In order to receive funding from NZ On Air for a documentary, a producer must have approval from a broadcaster commissioner. This means that although NZ On Air has “a mandate to support various priorities within broadcasting – in summary ‘local content, coverage, Māori culture, children, and minority programmes’” (Horrocks 1996, p. 54 in Goldson, 2004, p. 244), programs must also have the potential to attract good ratings. So while documentary is largely dependent on cultural

subsidy and nominally expected to fulfil a public service function, it is ultimately required to be cost-effective and highly commercial.

The instability of New Zealand's television broadcasting environment is a significant factor inhibiting the innovation and change required for a shift to a multiplatform digital environment. TVNZ's dual commercial and public service mandate has always been highly problematic and at each election it becomes a political football. Throughout the 1990's TVNZ was treated as an asset to be groomed for sale. Labour's election in 1999 promised to bring about a renewed commitment to public service broadcasting, reflected in the introduction of the 2003 TVNZ Charter, a policy reform that was well-intentioned but largely ineffective, conflicting with both TVNZ's and NZ On Air's respective institutional objectives (Thompson, 2011a).

The election of a new National government in 2008 brought about the end of the TVNZ Charter and a return to the commercial agenda of the 1990s. In 2009 the Charter funds were reallocated to NZ On Air as a contestable fund for "high quality public broadcast content of wide appeal" (NZ On Air, 2009a). 2011 saw the passing of the TVNZ Amendment Bill, officially repealing the Charter and divesting TVNZ of its public service obligations. The commercial-free TVNZ digital channels on Freeview TVNZ6 and TVNZ7, established by the previous Labour government, once looked like promising contenders for the position of a reinvented public service media provider for the digital multiplatform age. However, in March 2011 the family-oriented TVNZ6 was replaced by a commercial youth channel and its children's content was shifted to pay TV (TVNZ Kidzone24 on SKY) (TVNZ, 2011). In April 2011 the Government announced that funding for TVNZ7, which has supported a great deal of factual public service content, would not continue beyond June 2012 (TVNZc, 2011).

While public interest in documentary is strong (NZ On Air, 2010a) and free to air broadcasters continue to screen New Zealand documentaries,¹ a fully contestable public funding model without a dedicated public broadcaster is unlikely to support innovation, such as the development of multiplatform documentary content. According to Peter Thompson's analysis:

funding arrangements need to take account of the position of a channel in the wider media ecology; in some instances, private commercial media might provide more public value per dollar than a public channel. However, this is certainly not a justification for making all funding competitive and open to all operators. Contestable public funding among a small group of similar commercial operators will still tend to overproduce genres/formats with proven audience appeal that minimise their opportunity cost. To ensure competition for quality and diversity, a plurality of institutional models needs to be present in the media ecology. In other words, optimising public value per public dollar requires an environment where there are not-for-profit operators which can accept content with high public value but high opportunity costs that would normally deter commercial operators. (Thompson, 2011b)

'TENDENCIES' IN NEW ZEALAND TELEVISION DOCUMENTARY

Two competing "documentary tendencies" in New Zealand television identified by Annie Goldson (2004), the 'fast turnaround' and 'quality series,' continue to dominate the

television documentary landscape in New Zealand in the form of the popular factual entertainment series ('fast turnaround') and Platinum Fund documentaries ('quality').

The \$NZ15 million Platinum Fund was established in 2009 with funds previously allocated to TVNZ for the provision of public service content under the TVNZ Charter (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2011). The fund aims to support "quality content which may be currently difficult to find on our screens or which may require a high level of public investment to get made" (NZ On Air, 2010b). Documentaries that meet Platinum Fund criteria are "long-form appealing documentaries on subjects of cultural, historical or artistic importance" and "research-driven short documentary series on issues or topics important to New Zealand" (NZ On Air, 2010c). The emphasis on quality equates with fundamental public service values with an aim to "inform, educate and entertain a good cross-section of New Zealand" (NZ On Air, 2011).

The Platinum Fund, which also supports quality drama and current affairs series, now plays a vital role in ensuring that some content with cultural as well as commercial value remains on New Zealand screens. However, a brief analysis of the documentaries supported by the fund suggests that Platinum Fund documentaries, rather than promoting innovation, support the well-established function of documentary as national project. As Mary Debrett has argued (2004), while New Zealand On Air's funding policies have succeeded in building up New Zealand documentary as a popular genre and boosting documentary as an industry, this success is largely superficial and has come at a cost. Debrett describes documentary as the most cost-effective way to produce a higher volume of local content, achieving the seemingly positive outcome of promoting both national identity and local industry. Building on an argument developed by Avril Bell, Debrett cautions that rather than performing the social function of providing a public forum of critical analysis and debate and the exploration of alternative points of view, New Zealand documentary has become a vehicle for New Zealand identity as a national brand, a process which, "constitutes a stage in the commodification of documentary, and the corporate take-over of public space" (Debrett, 2004, p. 10).²

Claims that New Zealand's branded strands won an audience for documentary and helped build a 'documentary industry' invoke the inherent 'worthiness' of the documentary idea, yet simultaneously undermine it by asserting tabloid values and glib celebratory nationalism. Whether or not publicly subsidized programming can deliver public service goals in a broadcast marketplace depends on the accommodation of priorities other than revenue and ratings. Continued subsidy for social documentary as a discrete genre is a key element in preserving television programme diversity, for as documentary's past truth and reality claims become untenable, only social purpose remains to differentiate the genre from the ragbag of factual programming. (Debrett, 2004, p. 20)

A brief analysis of the funding decisions for the first two years of Platinum Fund investment in documentary content (2009–2011) would seem to support this view. The 2009–2010 round of Platinum Fund investment was heavily weighted towards historical New Zealand subjects, summarised as follows: Docudramas were a major focus, with the fund supporting three historical docudramas, all centred on significant New Zealanders. Even the three drama programs funded were based on true stories: (Bliss, the story of New Zealand writer Katherine Mansfield's early years; Tangiwai, the story of the Tangiwai train

disaster and *Stolen*, a telefeature based on the true story of a New Zealand kidnapping case). A 1 ½ hour arts documentary, *Canvassing the Treaty* and five part documentary series on New Zealand rivers, *Rivers with Craig Potton*, were also funded in this round (NZ On Air, 2009b).

The 2010–2011 Platinum Fund has an almost identical (though extended) blend of docudrama, drama ‘based on a true story’ and natural history documentary consisting of: Two historical docudramas (*What Really Happened? Waitangi* and *Journey into Darkness*); three dramas based on ‘true stories’ (*Billy*; *Rage*; and the series *Underbelly NZ*); two documentary series (*Descent From Disaster*, “Descendents of the people involved take us through major NZ historical events”, a six by one hour documentary series; and *The Story*, “Four leading documentary makers provide insights into important NZ institutions”, four long-form documentaries); and three natural history documentaries (*The Hunt for the Pink and White Terraces*, a one hour program; *Primeval New Zealand – Where Wild Meets Weird*, a one hour program; and *Wild Coasts*, five by one hour documentary series) (NZ On Air, 2010b).

There is no doubt that these documentaries play an important role in providing New Zealand audiences with quality television content, telling well-crafted New Zealand stories made by some of the country’s most experienced and talented documentary makers. However, there is still a gap to be filled here, with room for social documentary and innovation. Of the four functions of documentary identified by John Corner (2002), the Platinum Fund addresses aspects of three: Documentary as “The Project of Democratic Civics” (p. 6), “Documentary as Journalistic Inquiry and Exposition” (p. 6) and “Documentary as Diversion”. What remains to be developed is “Documentary as Radical Interrogation and Alternative Perspective” (p. 6).

If New Zealand’s ‘top shelf’ Platinum Fund documentary programs bear the ‘New Zealand Inc.’ brand as a mark of quality, many of the popular factual entertainment series funded by NZ On Air under the category of documentary have a generic flavour. These series eschew specific New Zealand stories in favour of universal subjects and themes that can be on-sold internationally as either cheap content or as a ‘format’, a pre-packaged concept with demonstrated commercial appeal able to be replicated (with the infusion of local flavour) in other markets. Examples of locally devised formats marketed and sold internationally are *What’s Really In Our Food?*, a consumer-focused show about “what’s in the food we eat” (Top Shelf Productions Ltd, 2008, 2009, 2010); *Beyond the Darklands*, an “insightful professional analysis of the lives of some of New Zealand’s most notorious criminals” (Screentime Ltd, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010); *Missing Pieces*, “the personal journeys of people who are searching for someone for a very special reason” (Eyeworks New Zealand Ltd, 2008, 2009, 2010); and *Money Man*, a program in which a financial trainer teaches Kiwis to manage their money (Cream Media Ltd, 2006, 2007, 2008). Two of these factual series (*Beyond the Darklands* and *What’s Really in Our Food*) have actually delivered sales income to NZ on Air (which takes a 25% return on net sales of programs where its investment is \$200,000 or more) (Murray, 2010).

The commercial and popular success of New Zealand factual entertainment formats could be seen as an indicator of the growing maturity of documentary production in New Zealand as a creative industry capable of delivering transnational content to the global market. However, NZ on Air’s role in ongoing investment in such content highlights the complex mix of priorities faced by funders in what John Corner (2004) refers to as the ‘post-documentary’ age. For NZ On Air, ratings “provide a measure of value for public money” (Murray, 2010, p. 5) and support its objectives of reaching a sizeable audience where “programmes are valued by their target audience” (NZ On Air, 2011). The popularity

of Popular Factual series therefore could be seen to justify recurrent investment from TVNZ. However, questions could be raised about the fine line between ongoing support for content widely seen and enjoyed by the public, and the subsidising of content that delivers high ratings and therefore commercial success for the broadcaster, therefore potentially displacing the funding of more innovative and commercially 'risky' forms of content (such as multiplatform documentary production). A recent review of NZ on Air's recurrent funding of TV series defends the practice of recurrent funding for high-rating content in a way that suggests that, particularly in the recessionary climate, the documentary industry cannot succeed without public subsidy (or in NZ on Air's terminology, 'investment'). The report points to a weakness in the funding framework that effectively compels NZ On Air to favour certainty over risk:

Popular Factual documentary series were consistently the highest rating genre of those recurrently funded, with almost all series far exceeding the ratings targets. With all genres, broadcasters have largely paid lower licence fees for these series in recent years, a factor that when combined with the demonstrated commercial success of these programmes could support an argument for lower public subsidies in the genre. One outcome of lowered public subsidies however is likely to be that despite receiving high rating for primetime local programmes, broadcasters would probably look to acquire more international product at a lower cost than locally commissioned programmes. The challenge for NZ on Air is to find a balance between the levels of public subsidy for series that prove to be commercially successful, while retaining (and growing) broadcasters' support for locally commissioned programmes. (Murray, 2010, p. 5)

Economists and cultural policy analysts Hasan Bakhshi and David Throsby (2010) contend that digital platforms and production technologies have the potential to expand creative and economic opportunities:

We stress innovation along four dimensions: audience reach; artform development; value creation, and business models. A cross-cutting theme is technological change. Digital technologies in particular raise the possibility that arts and cultural organisations can overcome the traditional constraints imposed by physical location, thereby expanding [...] audience reach" and to open "new avenues for developing the artform, create new sources of economic and cultural value, and spur new business models. (p. 4)

If, as Bakshi and Throsby argue, new digital platforms and technologies can facilitate the development and expansion of arts, culture and commerce as never before, New Zealand documentary producers will have the opportunity to bypass some of the limitations of local funding, production and distribution models, to reach new audiences, explore new forms and allow for the delivery of more cost-effective and targeted public service media. Arguably the commercial success of New Zealand popular factual television formats demonstrates the commercial potential of new forms of transnational content. However, given that multiplatform content production is emerging as a complex art form that requires new models for production and distribution, and while many New Zealand documentary producers may have world-class expertise in fast-turnaround television, few, if

any, have skills and experience in multiplatform/transmedia production. This would be a significant issue if there were a global (or even local) market for convergent documentary formats. So far, however, while it is clear that the 'new media ecology' is in a state of transition, the business model for post-television documentary is unclear, even in the territories where new forms of documentary are most actively supported by both public and private screen institutions.

A recent study by Canada's Documentary Network, 'Documentary and New Digital Platforms; an ecosystem in transition' presents "a snapshot of the reaction, production and distribution of documentaries in a rapidly-changing digital environment" (p. 2). The study finds that new platforms are not detrimental to the television documentary ecology. On the contrary, it finds the number of hours viewers spend watching television increases every year, as does their interest in documentaries and that "online distribution platforms and broadcaster portals serve as audience-multipliers [increasing] the influence of documentaries" (p. 2).

These findings may seem a promising endorsement for the future of emergent forms of documentary and a good rationale for television broadcasters to embrace new platforms, but there's a significant catch:

Today this new form of distribution does not automatically generate significant economic returns. For the most part, the platforms that disseminate documentaries on the Internet are not profitable. New ways of managing rights need to be found which can boost the public profile of works, and can also be a real source of revenue for the creators and producers. (Observatoire du Documentaire | Documentary Network, p. 2)

In a media environment as deregulated and commercially competitive as New Zealand, the uncertainty of the potential for new media platforms to offer a return on investment is largely unsupportable in the absence of a public service broadcaster or public funding body truly mandated to risk ventures in new media spaces. It is remarkable then, that some (albeit tentative) steps have been taken towards new forms of content production. The final section of this paper examines some of the pathways towards content production for new platforms that have been explored in New Zealand, identifies key barriers and limitations and suggests some broad measures that need to be taken to open up opportunities for innovation and expansion within both New Zealand's television production ecology generally, and documentary production, more specifically.

MULTIPLATFORM AND BEYOND: FIRST STEPS (AND MISSTEPS) TOWARDS INNOVATION

Internationally, the investment in multiplatform content by public media institutions is not just the shouldering of the public burden of risk that the commercial broadcaster is unable to carry but a recognition that, in what Mary Debrett (2009) describes as 'the multiplatform era,' a single platform can no longer adequately serve the needs of a diverse and dispersed public:

In the social context of the digital era, when media services and the media habits of the fragmented audience are so diverse, access is no longer about scarcity, and universality needs to be addressed across the full range of media platforms in order to aggregate sufficient fragments to reach a general public. The flexible access of on-demand media offers a reinvented form of

universality, one that caters for contemporary lifestyles. It can also be argued that, by distributing re-versioned content, such services extend the shelf-life and reach of publicly funded productions, building on word-of-mouth publicity, and thereby help to maximize the value of public investment. (Debrett, 2009, p. 810)

Australia's Public Broadcaster, the ABC, with the assistance of the Australian Film Commission, now Screen Australia, first launched the Documentary Online Initiative in 2001 "to encourage exciting and adventurous projects that exploit the possibilities of the Internet and challenge conventional documentary forms" (Screen Australia, 2001).³ Today, the ABC continues to have a clear multiplatform commissioning strategy in place for documentary. As the ABC's commissioning guidelines indicate, multiplatform content entails more than video clips online, it requires a multifaceted approach to storytelling and interactive engagement across all platforms used:

TV Documentaries is actively seeking television ideas for all of the above genres that can translate onto other platforms across the ABC – ABC Online, mobile and gaming.

We encourage you to think of ideas that can run in parallel (rather than competition) with the programme itself, and give audiences the chance to experience and engage more fully in your idea and subject. "DVD extras" material is already accommodated by current web-support for programmes (e.g. Gallipoli Submarine, Australia: Land of Parrots) therefore these bigger multiplatform projects need a more ambitious sense of scale and level of interactivity. We are also looking for content where the online experience becomes intrinsic to the program i.e. a necessary part of content creation. (ABC Television, 2011)

NZ On Air took its first cautious steps towards the exploration of 'digital content' beyond television broadcast in December 2007 with the establishment of The Digital Content Partnership Fund. The fund, which provided up to one million dollars in contestable funding per year over a four-year period, has been experimental in the sense that few guidelines or restrictions have been given to applicants:

To encourage the widest range of innovative proposals NZ On Air is not limiting ideas to a particular target audience or genre. We are seeking genuinely original online audio/visual content that can attract and engage new audiences in significant numbers, preferably on more than one platform. The content must reflect and develop New Zealand identity and culture, and a clear understanding of and focus on a particular audience is key.

While leaving the style and target audience of projects open NZ On Air is likely to favour those projects that augment our current work in the television, radio and NZ music areas. Archival, Sports or News related projects are not a priority for this fund. (NZ on Air, 2010)

The contrast between these two requests for proposals is revealing, not only in terms of general differences between the two television production ecologies (for a start, Australia

is large and robust enough to support such an RFP for documentary alone), but more significantly, in terms of the different strategic approaches to new media platforms and technologies. The Australian RFP is specific in its call for multiplatform projects that run in parallel with program designed for television broadcast; potential platforms are specifically identified; and expectations in terms of scope, interactivity and user experience are stated. In contrast, the New Zealand RFP is open, articulating only one specific criterion. The only 'must' in a RFP that uses terms and phrases such as 'not limiting', 'open', 'preferable' and 'likely' is; "The content must reflect and develop New Zealand identity and culture, and a clear understanding of and focus on a particular audience is key" (NZ on Air, 2010). Even in the context of an initiative designed to promote innovation, NZ On Air is constrained by the cultural policy imperative to promote New Zealand identity above all values while at the same time securing an audience reach that qualifies its investment.

At this point I must acknowledge my own involvement, to various degrees, in three unrelated submissions made to The Digital Content Partnership Fund over a two-year period, two of which were documentary projects, none of which were successful. Lest my criticism of the Fund be attributed to a case of 'sour grapes' I would like to take pains to point out that during the fund's four-year existence no documentary projects have been funded (surprising considering the role that documentary content has played in spearheading multiplatform production in other territories such as Australia). I would also argue that my experience in submitting to the fund has provided me with a unique insight into the efficacy of the fund from a content producer's perspective in addition to that of a critical observer. My conclusion (subjective as it may be) is that the fund was hampered from the outset, lacking specific strategic objectives, providing little direction for content producers and showing little evidence of being informed by research into models for online and multiplatform public media employed elsewhere. As one submitter states in feedback cited in NZ On Air's own (overwhelmingly positive) review of the fund at the conclusion of its four-year term:

Overall the New Media Fund [sic] has been a frustration to those who work in the area. It has basically been unobtainable. It has been geared towards old media practitioners and it seems most of the awards have been to the old school. In general the fund system works too slowly and is too unwieldy... [for smaller scale projects]. (Richard Naylor, cited on p. 9, NZ On Air, 2012)

Critically, the absence of specific objectives also meant there were no clear measures for success. While (in my opinion) many of the projects were disappointingly lacking in innovation, the fund has supported a few outstanding projects, the most notable of which is *Reservoir Hill* (KHF Media, 2009, 2010), a multiplatform teen drama series which won a Digital Emmy and is an excellent example of highly immersive and interactive multiplatform storytelling (using mobile as well as television broadcast and online platforms and incorporating social media and participatory elements).

Another initiative that could have had positive benefits for New Zealand documentary producers, TVNZ7's educational multiplatform initiative, *Learning Hub*, was also doomed from the outset. Regrettably, *Learning Hub* was launched on the same day that Broadcasting Minister Jonathan Coleman confirmed that funding for TVNZ7 will not continue beyond June 2012 (TVNZc, 2011). TVNZ 7 *Learning Hub* offers textbook 21st century public media content; online educational material that extends broadcast content and offers viewers an opportunity to explore topics in greater depth and to engage with interactive educational resources (similar, though on a more modest scale, to the services provided by

BBC Learning in the UK). As Debrett (2009) has argued, such multiplatform services extend the shelf life of broadcast content and expand its uses (and arguably its wider marketability).

Not all initiatives towards developing a 'post-broadcast' media environment have also originated from within public institutions. The first online/web documentary project of any significance that I have identified in New Zealand does not come from an established documentary producer, has no association with a New Zealand TV broadcaster and received no public funding. *Down to the Wire* (<http://downtothewire.co.nz/>) is an online project conceived and produced by Wellington-based digital agency, Heyday (Heyday, 2010). The project is not overtly labelled as documentary, but in subject matter, form and content it is consistent with web documentaries such as those commissioned by ABC Online. Appropriately, the project tells a story of innovation, presenting the story of New Zealand's Internet. The project uniquely utilises the properties of the web as a medium, using text, videos, an interactive timeline and music. It evolved over time, used social networks extensively and provided opportunities for users to contribute. It has even adapted some of the documentary conventions of the most popular New Zealand TV documentary formats, such as the use of a high profile personality (actress Madeline Sami) as series narrator. Where broadcasters and NZ On Air take the position that multiplatform content constitutes unjustifiable risk, here is a business that has invested its own resources in the development of an online documentary project as a demonstration of its capabilities, and as a means of demonstrating not only technical and creative capability but the potential of new forms of media communication to engage and connect with the audience/user. *Down to the Wire* shows that innovation can be seen not as commercial risk but as commercial investment.

Another independent initiative, the first of its kind in New Zealand, is Doc Lab, a three-day intensive cross-media incubator designed to encourage filmmakers currently working on projects to actively develop a cross-media/multiplatform approach. Doc Lab was established in 2010 by Documentary Edge, an organisation run by The Documentary New Zealand Trust (a non-profit organisation promoting documentary filmmaking and advocating opportunities for New Zealand documentary filmmakers). Multiplatform production intrinsically requires a collaborative approach, as the skill set required to work across multiple platforms encompasses a tremendous depth and breadth of technical and creative knowledge. It is an approach to production that necessitates a fluency in the languages of TV, web, mobile and gaming whilst still maintaining the focus on content and not platform. This is not a task for a single individual, but a collaborative effort to be made by a team, pooling resources and skills. Doc Lab aims to provide content producers from 'old media' backgrounds with a greater insight into new production methods and increased awareness of new media technologies and platforms.

Doc Lab was facilitated in 2010 and 2011 by Wendy Levy, then Director of the Producers Institute for New Media Technologies at the Bay Area Video Coalition in San Francisco (BAVC). Teams of filmmakers workshop projects with the assistance of both local and international mentors with a range of expertise in the development of multiplatform content. Having participated in the Lab in 2010 as part of a filmmaking team, and in 2011 as a mentor and participant/observer, I have been able to see how the Lab functions both to expand filmmakers' understanding of working with new media technologies and platforms and to develop a multiplatform or transmedia approach to storytelling.

While the aims of the Lab are commendable and content is excellent, this program does have its weaknesses and limitations, the most significant of which is that the Lab works in isolation, unconnected to a broader public funding program and unsupported by a

broadcaster or alternative distribution platform. As the projects developed do not fit with existing public funding criteria or public media policies and lack commercial viability, the Lab is a theoretical exercise, though one generally applied to existing projects that the producers have a genuine (and often heartfelt) investment in. Consequently, my observation of Doc Lab has been that while some filmmakers have drawn some inspiration from the experience, perhaps applying their energies to the production of a complementary website that they may or may not have otherwise invested in developing, on the whole Doc Lab projects have failed to get off the ground and many participants seemed to express disillusionment with the limited opportunities for actual production.

MOVING FORWARD

Several roadblocks to innovation are identified in a 2008 report, *Research into New Zealand's Independent Documentary Sector*, commissioned by the New Zealand Film Commission and Creative New Zealand to understand the "barriers and opportunities" faced by documentary makers, and to enable these agencies to reassess their current programs and determine their future roles in relation to New Zealand documentary production. The report was a response to an increasing number of proposals from established documentary filmmakers to the Screen Production Innovation Fund, a fund intended to "provide grants to emerging and experimental moving-image makers for innovative and experimental moving-image productions", which were not innovative or experimental but more suited to mainstream/commercial television (Creative New Zealand and the New Zealand Film Commission, 2008). The report found that documentary makers were critical of funding and commissioning models as well as with the television environment. They felt that the documentaries produced were too homogenous and commercial, and constrained by the parameters of what constituted a 'New Zealand story'. They also identified that experienced filmmakers were undervalued and underutilised, while inexperienced filmmakers lacked opportunities for development, with various factors making it very difficult for even experienced and well-regarded filmmakers to survive in the industry as documentary makers.

The report also highlights what is a critical challenge for New Zealand's documentary production ecology; recognising a "growing need to meet multi-platform delivery requirements, including online possibilities" but emphasising that, "the potential for new revenue streams is still uncertain" (p. 15). Ironically, since this report was published, opportunities for the funding of innovative and experimental documentary works have diminished even further. The Screen Production Innovation Fund was replaced with the Independent Filmmakers Fund in 2009 (the "Creative New Zealand Independent Filmmakers Fund") and in early 2010 the New Zealand Film Commission withdrew from the fund. The 2010 funding round was continued by CNZ but disestablished in the latter part of 2010. Since the disestablishment of this fund only three documentary grants have been made by Creative New Zealand; \$29,710 to Shirley Horrocks towards a documentary on Michael Parekowhai's Venice Biennale 2011 (Creative New Zealand, 2011, 04 March); \$6,000 to Peter Takapuna towards post-production costs of a documentary on waka (Creative New Zealand, 2011, 28 October); and \$6000 to The Documentary Edge Trust for the 2012 Doc Lab (Creative New Zealand, 2011, 03 February). As of April 2012 no decision has been made regarding the future of NZ On Air's Digital Content Partnership Fund and The New Zealand Film Commission mainly makes small investments in post-production funding for theatrical documentaries. The current funding climate therefore provides very little support for any kind of non-commercial documentary, let alone works for new platforms or other forms of innovation.

Although audiences increasingly engage in time-shifting and screen-shifting prac-

tices that disrupt the one to many flow of television, broadcasting will continue to dominate our media ecology for some time. However, the increasing role of new platforms in our media consumption should be recognised as we re-evaluate current funding, production and distribution models. A critical first step would be to re-examine outdated funding models that continue to privilege national identity politics and ratings-driven measures of success and give more weighting to the value of innovation. This is no easy task, one that demands new approaches to not only the allocation but also the sourcing of funds, as the Observatoire du Documentaire | Documentary Network report finds:

Documentary creation on the new platforms should be able to develop with appropriate resources without straining budgets allocated to linear documentaries produced for theatre and television release which should continue to develop. It is essential to find new sources of money. One way of increasing resources would be to involve the Internet service providers. As for the funds currently intended to finance the multiplatform productions and dedicated to experimental creation and innovation, a portion of these envelopes could be reserved for documentary on the new platforms in order to encourage its development. The granting of specific funds could allow these digital works to exist independently or in complement of linear documentaries created for television. (p. 2, February 3rd, 2011)

These turbulent times for public service broadcasting in New Zealand should stimulate action rather than inertia. If the broadcasting landscape is to be reshaped yet again, it is time to broaden and challenge existing definitions of content and distribution, to think Public Service Media not Public Service Broadcast; to consider cultural as well as economic value and to consider the role that *all stakeholders* (including Pay TV and Internet Service Providers) might play in contributing to the development of New Zealand's media ecology.

ENDNOTES

- 1 It should be noted that the Māori Television Service (MTS) supports a significant number of quality New Zealand documentaries, but that MTS receives funding from the Māori Broadcasting Funding Agency, Te Māngai Pāho, in addition to screening programmes funded with the assistance of NZ on Air. While MTS has a specific mandate to support the Māori language and culture in New Zealand, it serves as an excellent model for a successful New Zealand public service media provider.
- 2 See also Jane Roscoe's study of the series 'An Immigrant Nation' for an excellent in-depth study of New Zealand documentary and national identity (Roscoe, 1999).
- 3 See <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/documentaries/online/> for an archive of ABC Online Documentaries.

REFERENCES

- ABC Television. (2011). TV Documentaries/programme makers/multiplatform. Retrieved from <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/documentaries/programmakers/multiplatform.htm>
- Anderson, C. (2006). *The Long Tail: why the future of business is selling less of more*. New York: Hyperion.
- Bourdieu, P. (1993). *The field of cultural production: essays on art and literature*. Cambridge, England. Polity Press.

- Corner, J. (2004). Documentary in a Post-Documentary Culture? A Note on Forms and their Functions. Paper presented at the Changing Media-Changing Europe. Retrieved from <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/research/changing.media/John%20Corner%20paper.htm>
- Corner, J. (2002). Performing the Real: Documentary Diversions. *Television New Media*, 2 (255).
- Cottle, S. (2004). Producing Nature(s): On the Changing Production Ecology of Natural History TV. *Media, Culture and Society*, 26, 81-101.
- Creative New Zealand and the New Zealand Film Commission. (2008). Research Into New Zealand's Independent Documentary Sector. Retrieved from http://www.nzfilm.co.nz/getattachment/5b745fab-76a9-40b6-9452-325df70840c8/Research_into_NZ_s_Independent_Documentary_Sector.aspx?disposition=attachment
- Creative New Zealand. (2011, 04 March). Funding Round, Arts Board Arts Grant. Retrieved from <http://www.creativenz.govt.nz/en/results-of-our-work/who-got-funded/funding-rounds/arts-board-arts-grant-mar-may-2011>
- Creative New Zealand. (2011, 28 October). Funding Round, Te Waka Toi Quick Response. Retrieved from <http://www.creativenz.govt.nz/en/results-of-our-work/who-got-funded/funding-rounds/te-waka-toi-quick-response-351512111108504>
- Creative New Zealand. (2011, 03 February). Funding Round, Arts Board Quick Response. Retrieved from <http://www.creativenz.govt.nz/en/results-of-our-work/who-got-funded/funding-rounds/arts-board-arts-grant-080903361223686>
- Debrett, M. (2004). Branding Documentary: New Zealand's Minimalist Solution to Cultural Subsidy. *Media Culture Society*, 26(1), 5-23.
- Debrett, M. (2009). Riding the wave: public service television in the multi-platform era. *Media Culture Society*, 31(5), 807-827.
- Dunleavy, T. & Joyce, H. (2011). *New Zealand Film and Television: Institution, Industry and Cultural Change*. Intellect Books.
- Goldson, A. (2004). A Look In: Documentary on New Zealand Television. In R. Horrocks & N. Perry (Eds.), *Television in New Zealand* (pp. 240 - 254). Auckland: Oxford University Press.
- Heyday. (2010). Down to the Wire. Retrieved from <http://downtothewire.co.nz>
- Hesmondhalgh, D. (2007). *The Cultural Industries*. Los Angeles; London, Sage.
- Howkins, J. (2010). *Creative Ecologies: Where Thinking Is a Proper Job*: University of Queensland Press.
- Horrocks, R. (2004a). Studying New Zealand Television: Themes, Methods, Perspectives. In N. Perry & R. Horrocks (Eds.), *Television in New Zealand : programming the nation*. Auckland: Oxford University Press.
- Horrocks, R. (2004b). Turbulent television: the New Zealand experiment. *Television and New Media*, 5(1).
- KHF Media. (2009, 2010). Reservoir Hill. Retrieved from <http://www.khfmedia.co.nz/projects.html>
- Ministry for Culture and Heritage, (2011). TVNZ Amendment Bill. Retrieved from <http://www.mch.govt.nz/what-we-do/our-projects/completed/television-new-zealand-tvnz-amendment-bill>
- Murray, A. (2010). A Review of Recurrently Funded Television Series 1998/1999 – 2009/2010: NZ on Air. Retrieved from <http://www.nzonair.govt.nz/media/52964/review%20of%20recurrently%20funded%20television%20series.pdf>
- NZ on Air. (2010, December). Digital Content Partnership Fund 2011. Retrieved from www.nzonair.govt.nz/media/51288/dcpf%20rfp%202011.pdf
- NZ On Air. (2009a, April). New Platinum Television Fund announced. Retrieved September 11, 2011, a from http://www.nzonair.govt.nz/news/newspresreleases/press-release_2009_04_23.aspx

- NZ On Air. (2009b). Platinum Funding 2009 - 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.nzon-air.govt.nz/TV/TVPlatinumFund.aspx>
- NZ On Air. (2010a, October 20). New Zealanders speak: Research reveals the value Kiwis place on having New Zealand on air. Retrieved from http://www.nzon-air.govt.nz/news/newspressreleases/pressrelease_2010_10_29.aspx
- NZ On Air. (2010b). Platinum funding 2010-2011. Retrieved from <http://www.nzon-air.govt.nz/TV/TVPlatinumFund.aspx>
- NZ On Air. (2010c). Platinum Fund Criteria. Retrieved from <http://www.nzon-air.govt.nz/TV/TVPlatinumFund.aspx>
- NZ On Air. (2011). How We Invest 10 February 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.nzon-air.govt.nz/AboutUs/AboutUsHowWeInvest.aspx>
- NZ On Air. (2012, January). Digital Content Partnership Fund Review. Retrieved from http://www.nzonair.govt.nz/media/64069/dcpf%20review_website%20version.pdf
- Observatoire du Documentaire | Documentary Network. (2011, January). Documentary and New Digital Platforms: an ecosystem in transition. Retrieved from www.obsdoc.ca
- Roscoe, J. (1999). *Documentary in New Zealand : an Immigrant Nation*. Palmerston North, N.Z.: Dunmore.
- Screen Australia. (2001, June 12). Final project announced in groundbreaking Documentary Initiative. Retrieved from http://afcarchive.screenaustralia.gov.au/news-and-events/mediarelease/2001/release_87.aspx
- Steeimers, J. (2010). 'The BBC's Role in the Changing Production Ecology of Preschool Television in Britain.' *Television and New Media*, 11(1), 37-61
- Thompson, P. A. (2011a, July 26). End of an Error? Death of the TVNZ Charter. *Scoop.co.nz*. Retrieved from <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/HL1107/S00287/end-of-an-error-death-of-the-tvnz-charter.htm>
- Thompson, P. A. (2011b). *The Cost of Everything and the Value of Nothing? Funding Possibilities for Public Television in New Zealand*. Presented at the Forum on the Future of Public Television, Victoria University of Wellington.
- TVNZa. (2011, February 28). TVNZ Re-launches Public Service Channel TVNZ 7: TVNZ Media Releases. Retrieved from <http://tvnz.co.nz/content/4041841>
- TVNZb. (2011, January 19). New TVNZ channel merges TV and Facebook [Electronic Version]. Retrieved from <http://tvnz.co.nz/entertainment-news/new-tvnz-channel-merges-tv-and-facebook-4001509>
- TVNZc. (2011, April 06). TVNZ7 to close as govt confirms no more funding. Retrieved from <http://tvnz.co.nz/national-news/tvzn7-close-govt-confirms-no-more-funding-4104745>
- Zimmerman, P. R. (2008). Public Domains: Engaging Iraq through experimental documentary digitalities. In T. Austin & W. deJong (Eds.), *Rethinking Documentary: New Perspectives, New Practices* (pp. 284 - 298). Maidenhead, England; New York: McGraw Hill/Open University Press.