

Australian Documentary History, practices and genres

Drawing on interviews with leading industry sources and containing discussion of over 200 documentaries, *Australian Documentary: History, Practices and Genres* brings to life over a century of documentary making and connects it to international debates in criticism, theory and history.

Documentary is the oldest continuous form of screen production in Australia, and today plays a pivotal part in our creative industries. This incisive book covers the development of documentary in Australia from the early days of cinema to the coming of television and to the digital environment. Addressing the issues facing today's documentary makers, the authors explore the role of the documentary in shaping the 'imagined community' of the nation.

Trish FitzSimons is Associate Professor at Griffith Film School, Queensland College of Art, Griffith University.

Pat Laughren is Associate Professor at Griffith Film School, Queensland College of Art, Griffith University.

Dugald Williamson is Associate Professor in the School of Arts at the University of New England.

Australian Documentary

History, Practices and Genres

Trish FitzSimons
Pat Laughren
Dugald Williamson



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
 978-0-521-16799-4 — Australian Documentary: History, Practices and Genres
 Trish FitzSimons, Pat Laughren, Dugald Williamson
 Frontmatter
[More Information](#)



Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
 314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India
 103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment, a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
 Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521167994

© Trish FitzSimons, Pat Laughren, Dugald Williamson 2011

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

First published 2011

Cover design by Marianna Berek-Lewis

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data

FitzSimons, Trish.
 Australian documentary: history, practices and genres / Trish FitzSimons, Pat Laughren,
 Dugald Williamson.
 9780521167994 (pbk.)
 Includes bibliographical references and index.
 Documentary films—Australia—History.
 Documentary mass media—Australia—History.
 Documentary television programs—Australia—History.
 Laughren, Pat.
 Williamson, Dugald.
 791.456

ISBN 978-0-521-16799-4 Paperback

Reproduction and communication for educational purposes

The Australian *Copyright Act 1968* (the Act) allows a maximum of one chapter or 10% of the pages of this work, whichever is the greater, to be reproduced and/or communicated by any educational institution for its educational purposes provided that the educational institution (or the body that administers it) has given a remuneration notice to Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) under the Act.

For details of the CAL licence for educational institutions contact:

Copyright Agency Limited
 Level 15, 233 Castlereagh Street
 Sydney NSW 2000
 Telephone: (02) 9394 7600
 Facsimile: (02) 9394 7601
 E-mail: info@copyright.com.au

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are respectfully advised that images of deceased people appear in this book and may cause distress.

Cambridge University Press & Assessment

978-0-521-16799-4 — Australian Documentary: History, Practices and Genres

Trish FitzSimons , Pat Laughren , Dugald Williamson

Frontmatter

[More Information](#)

For Andrew and Isabelle, Darby and Finola, Timothy and Patrick

Contents

.....

List of figures	viii
About the authors	x
Preface and acknowledgements	xi
List of abbreviations and acronyms	xv
1 The documentary field	1
2 Braided channels – documentary voice	13
3 Cinematic scenes of life	33
4 New waves of documentary	59
5 Australian television takes on independent documentary	85
6 Documentary and the Film Finance Corporation	109
7 Changing relations: the Australian Film Commission, Film Australia and documentary in the era of the Film Finance Corporation	133
8 Australian broadcasting cultures and documentary practice since the late 1980s	159
9 Documentary and the edge of reality	183
10 Documentary and civics	209
11 Documentary present and future	231
References	245
Secondary sources and correspondence	245
A select filmography	260
Interviews	271
Index	273

Figures

.....

1.1	A lantern slide presentation by the Salvation Army, 1894	2
2.1	Shenoah Ives as the young 'Aunty Grace' in <i>A Memory</i> (1999), Deb Welsh in background	18
2.2	Danny Phillips and Jan Cattoni, after shooting in Ireland for <i>After Maeve</i> (2006)	31
3.1	Damien Parer, Maslyn Williams, Frank Hurley, George Silk of the Department of Information Photographic Unit, 1940	48
3.2	John Heyer and crew shooting Tom Kruse's mail truck, <i>The Back of Beyond</i> (1954)	55
4.1	Children in Redfern, inner city Sydney, in <i>Living on the Fringe</i> (1965)	70
4.2	David Bradbury at the release of <i>Nicaragua No Pasaran</i> , 1984	83
5.1	Pat Fiske and Erika Addis filming Fred Hollows in Nepal, <i>For All the World to See</i> (1991)	94
5.2	Daryl Dellora finally meets Jørn Utzon, <i>The Edge of the Possible</i> (1998)	106
6.1	A dramatised self-criticism session in the Chinese Cultural Revolution, <i>A Breath</i> (1998)	121
6.2	Mothers and babies at the home for unmarried mothers, 1965, <i>Least Said, Soonest Mended</i> (1999)	129
7.1	Penny Fowler-Smith and her mother, Bremer, shooting <i>At Sea</i> (1997), cinematographer Peter Coleman in the background	137
7.2	Robin Anderson and Bob Connolly shooting <i>Rats in the Ranks</i> (1997)	150
8.1	Geoff Wheeler and David Goldie editing <i>Out of Sight, Out of Mind</i> (1987)	164
8.2	Andrew Leavold in Anthony Mullins' <i>Escape from Planet of the Tapes, Fortitude Valley 4006, Australia by Numbers</i> (2003)	174

	Figures	ix
9.1 Ian Dunlop and Dundiwuy Wanambi, editing material for <i>Djungguwan at Gurka'wuy</i> , part of the Yirrkala Film Project, around 1978	192	
9.2 Still from Dennis Tupicoff's <i>His Mother's Voice</i> (1997)	206	
10.1 Rachel Perkins on location in Central Australia, <i>First Australians</i> (2008)	224	
10.2 Richard Wanambi in a court holding cell in <i>Lonely Boy Richard</i> (2003)	228	
11.1 Crew in <i>The Hunt for the HMAS Sydney</i> (2008)	236	

The authors

.....

Trish FitzSimons is Associate Professor at the Griffith Film School, Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, Brisbane, where she supervises graduate projects, including documentaries, and teaches screen producing and screen distribution. Trish's work in documentary includes practice, history and theory. Her credits include *Another Way?* for SBS Television, *Snakes and Ladders – A Film about Women, Education and History* for the ABC and *Channels of History* – a social history exhibition of the women, land and history of Queensland's Channel Country for the State Library of Queensland.

Pat Laughren is Associate Professor at the Griffith Film School, Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, Brisbane, where he teaches documentary production and documentary scriptwriting. His credits include *Red Ted and The Great Depression*, *The Fair Go: Winning the 1967 Referendum* and *Ngukurr Weya Wi Na*. Pat has also produced a number of archival compilations which trace Queensland's film history, including *Queensland's First Films 1895–1910: Surprising Survivals from Colonial Queensland*.

Dugald Williamson is Associate Professor in the School of Arts at the University of New England, Armidale, New South Wales, where he convenes Media and Communications and works in the Writing Studies program. He teaches a course on Australian and international documentary for undergraduates and postgraduates, both on-campus and online. His publications include *Authorship and Criticism* (1989) and the co-authored *On Pornography: Literature, Sexuality and Obscenity Law* (1993), together with writings on media, culture and politics.

Preface and acknowledgements

.....

The history of Australian documentary has a long list of credits. The list runs from the filmmakers and participants to sponsors, producers, distributors, exhibitors, broadcasters, administrators, archivists, educators, audiences and beyond. These roles have altered through periods of cultural, institutional and technological change in which documentary has taken many different forms. This book explores the relations between these forms and the practices of production, distribution and reception in which they have emerged. It covers the historical developments of documentary in Australia from the early days of cinema to the coming of television and the digital environment. These developments are framed by a series of underlying questions and issues. How have documentary filmmakers pursued purposes of expression, information, promotion, entertainment, interrogation and witness in responding to their historical world, and what are the implications of their work for participants and audiences? In what ways have particular genres and techniques been used to define realities and meet new needs, and from whose point of view? How has documentary been constituted in relation to the category of nation and to international developments in production and distribution? What can be learned from the dynamic history of the form for documentary practice, policy and study, present and future?

Our approach to these questions combines institutional history, analysis of forms of representation and practitioner perspectives. It has been made possible by access to several different types of sources that we have integrated. At the outset we are pleased to acknowledge our obvious debt to the work of many authors, including Albert Moran, Chris Long, Peter Beilby, Ross Lansell, Megan McMurchy, Graham Shirley, Brian Adams, Ina Bertrand, Deane Williams, Martha Ansara, Lisa Milner, Ian Dunlop, Alasdair McGregor, Peter Hughes, Ken Inglis, the *Filmnews* editorial collective and others who have published studies of individual documentary filmmakers, institutions, periods or genres in Australia drawn on in this volume. We acknowledge also our debt to wider scholarship on Australian media and

xii Preface and acknowledgements

culture, and international work on documentary history and aesthetics by John Corner, Bill Nichols and others, with which we bring our methodology and account of Australian documentary into dialogue.

In writing this book we have been assisted by the availability of many reports, submissions, research and policy papers and other resources of federal and state screen agencies as well as industry and professional bodies; generally, statistics and specific statements about policy of the state organisations are taken from their annual reports unless otherwise noted. At the federal level, statistics are from Screen Australia's *Get the Picture* (AFC 2010, <http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/gtp/default.html>) unless otherwise noted. Also essential to our task has been new information gained through interviews and discussions with many people in relation to their varied roles in filmmaking, administration, policy and broadcasting.

This material has informed the case studies, of varying length, which exemplify the correlations between documentary forms and institutional and industry practices of documentary support, production and distribution. Along with the main stages of our general argument, these case studies are introduced by headings and sub-headings in the chapters. Some of them consider one or more individual films, including aspects of their production history. (We follow the convention of using the term 'film' in this book to refer to works produced for the cinema, television, video or digital media.) Other case studies focus on the story of a particular practitioner, organisation or company, or aspects of industry culture (for example, broadcasting in chapter 8), or filmmaking practice that extends into diverse social fields (for example, education and civics in chapter 10), in order to illustrate the changing nature of documentary as a cultural project in a range of contexts.

In examining general trends, our work is necessarily selective. One of the limits of the present volume is that it includes only a cross-section of work by established, consolidating and newer practitioners and cannot claim to be comprehensive in its coverage of significant films and filmmakers who have helped to build documentary culture in Australia and more widely. In our case studies we have often tipped the balance towards discussion of work that is not necessarily widely known, recognising that more extensive studies of several well-known documentary makers are already in public circulation. Readers are encouraged to treat 'Australian Screen Online' as an audiovisual complement to this volume; our filmography gives specific websites of cited documentaries.

This book has its origins in research that we have carried out over more than a decade, as well as in shared teaching interests. We thank the many people and organisations that facilitated our project. Our work was assisted by an Australian Research Council Small Grant, which enabled us to undertake many of the interviews for the book. The Griffith Institute of Higher Education provided support for exploring the teaching-related dimensions

of our research. We are grateful for the research and conference assistance provided by the Griffith Film School and the School of Arts and the former Faculty of Arts at University of New England. For opportunities to present and receive feedback on work in progress, thanks are due to several journals and conference organisations, including *Continuum*, *Media International Australia*, *Metro*, *Studies in Documentary Film*, the Australian International Documentary Conference, the Australian Screen Production Education and Research Association, the Australian and New Zealand Communication Association, the Australian Council of University Art and Design Schools, and the annual international conference, 'Visible Evidence'.

We owe a special debt of gratitude to those who participated in recorded interviews and subsequently checked and updated transcripts, or in more informal discussions and correspondence, for their generosity in sharing knowledge and their trust in our use of materials. Through further consultation we have often summarised or adapted their comments as well as quoting them directly in the case studies related to their work. Every effort has been made to identify and acknowledge the incorporation of these and all other sources correctly, but if advised of errors or omissions we would seek to rectify them in any future usage. The names of interviewees and discussants are given in the Interview list at the end of the References section of this book, as a way of including details of the exchanges more fully. We thank Kay de Chastel and Robyn Pratten for transcribing numerous interviews.

Our thanks go also to library, administrative and technical staff at Griffith University and the University of New England; the AFI Research Library; staff at Screen Australia who have helped our research, including Rosemary Curtis and Rachel Cullen; Kurt Schubert and Kitty van Vuuren, Rose Williamson and Matthew Wengert for research assistance.

For valuable comments on draft chapters at different stages we are grateful to Megan McMurchy and Owen Johnston. We have been fortunate to work with present and former staff at Cambridge University Press, and in particular thank Tony Moore for his encouragement and insights, and Lachlan McMahon and Debbie Lee for their patience, commitment to the book and outstanding editorial work. Jodie Howell and Jenny Mathias were fine publishers to work with in preparing the manuscript for printing, and were ably assisted by Shelley Mason. We thank the publisher's anonymous reviewers of our book proposal for their constructive comments. Special acknowledgement is due to Jane Mills for her enthusiastic support and invaluable advice on the full manuscript. We are grateful to Sue Jarvis for her assistance with finalising the manuscript, Jean Cooney for her dedicated and skilful copy-editing and Mary Russell for her care with indexing. Our thanks go to the individuals and organisations that provided stills. Melinda Robertson from Screen Australia, Amanda McCormack from the National Film and Sound

xiv Preface and acknowledgements

Archive and Elizabeth Ellis and Cyrus Irani from ABC Archives deserve particular thanks for their assistance with stills research.

Above all, we express our gratitude to Gary Reilly, Therese Collie, Rose Williamson and our respective families, without whose support and understanding this book would not have been possible.

Abbreviations and acronyms

.....

10BA	Section of the <i>Australian Income Tax Assessment Act</i> that allowed concessions on private investment in film production
ABA	Australian Broadcasting Authority
ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation (Commission until 1983)
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ABT	Australian Broadcasting Tribunal (forerunner of ABA)
Accord	Category of film funded by the FFC under a documentary investment agreement with the television networks
ACS	Australian Content Standard
ACTF	Australian Children's Television Foundation
ADG	Australian Directors Guild
AFC	Australian Film Commission
AFCH	Australian Foundation for Culture and the Humanities
AFI	Australian Film Institute
AFTRS	Australian Film, Television & Radio School
AIATSIS	Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
ANFB	Australian National Film Board
ASDA	Australian Screen Directors Association
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
AWG	Australian Writers' Guild
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BTCE	Bureau of Transport & Communications Economics
CAAMA	Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association
CH 4	Channel 4, United Kingdom
CDB	Creative Development Branch, AFC
CFU	Commonwealth Film Unit
CTVPF	Commercial Television Production Fund
d	director

xvi Abbreviations and acronyms

DCA	Department of Communications & the Arts (federal)
DCITA	Department of Communications, Information Technology & the Arts
DEET	Department of Employment, Education & Training
DOI	Department of Information
DVD	digital video disc
EBU	European Broadcasting Union
ed	editor
ep	executive producer
FACTS	Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations
FFC	Australian Film Finance Corporation
Film Australia	Federal government's film production unit
FLICS	Film Licensing Investment Company Scheme
IDFA	International Documentary Film Festival, Amsterdam
NFB	National Film Board of Canada
NFSA	National Film & Sound Archive
NIDF	National Indigenous Documentary Fund
NIP	National Interest Program
Non-Accord	Category of FFC-funded films outside the Accord agreement
p	producer
PFTC	Pacific Film and Television Commission
RTE	Raidió Teilifís Éireann, Ireland
SBS	Special Broadcasting Service
SBSi	SBS Independent
SPAA	Screen Producers Association of Australia
TAIMA	Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Media Association
w	writer
WFF	Women's Film Fund, AFC