

**FRIENDS OF THE NATIONAL FILM AND SOUND ARCHIVE INC.
THE INAUGURAL ROD WALLACE MEMORIAL LECTURE**

**Why bother?
Reflections on the duty of care to Australians' creativity.**

Delivered by **Kim Williams AM**

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A recording of a pianola roll of Percy Grainger playing Greig's Peer Gynt Suite arrangements and Debussy's Pour le piano "Toccata" is heard for 16 minutes as the audience enters the cinema, and fades out before the proceedings commence.

We are gathered today on the ancestral lands of the Ngunnawal people, and I would like to acknowledge them as the traditional custodians and pay respect to their culture and its continuity. I pay my respect to Elders past and present and to the Elders of other indigenous communities in Australia.

I also take this moment to acknowledge the diverse peoples and cultures who have been welcomed to this nation.

Finally, I recognise our shared freedoms and responsibilities, inherited from Magna Carta and on through the common law.

These three elements shape modern Australia and its creative possibilities.

As an Australian, I value the opportunity to acknowledge country as a simple act towards reconciliation. The *Statement from the Heart* makes such recognition, in my view, obligatory.

I increasingly feel compelled to recognise the many peoples, ethnicities and faiths which comprise our nation, given the never ending assault on difference which too often permeates modern society.

Our common human rights at law also need to be recalled and defended relentlessly. Although fragile, they provide bedrock to our future.

Here at the National Film and Sound Archive, a memory institution, history really matters. And in so much of the creative work housed here, symbols really matter.

It is an honour to deliver the inaugural Rod Wallace Lecture. When I received the invitation from Ray Edmondson on behalf of the Friends of the NFSA, I felt equally honoured and burdened.

Honoured to be the first to give this address, named in memory of a remarkable pioneer, who I have got to know from his oral history recordings. Those recordings reveal a devotee to building the broad collection for which he had responsibility at the National Library, including its extensive body of film and sound material. A humble man who deserves due recognition.

Rod Wallace took pleasure in the creation of the Archive as a separate body. It is splendid to have members of the family with us today, as we recognise him and his work.

My feeling of burden relates to the need to give a fair and hopefully absorbing account of what a memory institution devoted to creativity liberated by the moving image and sound recording, truly means.

We all need to reflect on what genuine creative wonders are housed within this collection and what a striking duty of care for acquisition, conservation, education, exhibition and scholarship reposes on those charged with the awesome obligation to give it enduring purpose.

Politicians have the first duty of care, then the board and finally and inevitably most importantly, the workforce who are delegated with the prime responsibility to give life and meaning to the true work of an archive, in its living function.

Before going further I want to say that I address all here today as a true friend. My observations are my own, some may occasion discomfort, but they are offered openly as to why we have bodies like the NFSA; why the institution and its work matters; and how the collection, properly curated, is core to understanding the many facets that comprise Australian life and being Australian.

As with other memory institutions, the collections reflect the prevailing morality and power constructs of their day. Past approaches to knowledge hierarchy and value often sit uncomfortably with contemporary sensibility. Nevertheless, invaluable knowledge and insight is provided with avenues to fresh reflection and critical review.

Archive is a funny word – one Oxford definition being “*to place or store infrequently used files or a memory at a lower hierarchical level*”. We all think we know it as a noun or a verb, but do we reflect sufficiently on what it requires to have durable institutional meaning?

I was recently reading a paper given by Justice Michelle Gordon AC of the High Court on the 70th anniversary of the judgement in the ‘Communist Party Case’

where Justice Dixon, later a Chief Judge, had described *the rule of law* as "an assumption" on which the Constitution was framed. Justice Gordon went on to observe that although the phrase "rule of law" was only used once in the 156 pages of the case report, the case has been hailed in other important judgements and by scholars; as 'a celebrated victory for the rule of law'; 'a powerful example of the rule of law ... at work'; and even as 'the classic case protecting the rule of law in Australia'.

It prompted me to reflect on the status of *duty of care* on the part of parliaments and governments for the institutions created and funded under their aegis and which are respondents through their ministers to parliamentary scrutiny. It often would seem to me that 'the duty of care' is, as Dixon said, "an assumption". Often in my view, an unsafe one.

Certainly, there are regular mentions of duty of care in parliamentary handbooks - in fact I found over 2700 in reviewing the Parliament and Public Service website references, for this lecture. However, these all refer to regulatory and compliance policy, and behavioural issues. Matters relating to workforce management, health policy, parliamentary committee behaviours and responsibilities, and diverse legal issues such as immigration and human rights are invoked.

What I would see as a fundamental 'duty of care' for the many institutions created by the parliament, goes unmentioned. And yet the health of the cultural fabric of our nation is fundamentally dependent on the assumption of that duty of care being observed, diligently.

John O'Hara first proposed independence of the Film Division from the (then) Commonwealth National Library in the 1950s, and was removed by Harold White for his heresy. A long process followed.

The magnificent efforts of Ray Edmondson, Mike Lynskey, Bob Hogg, Bob Hawke, Barry Cohen and many passionate members of the broad film and television community, resulted in the NFSA's foray into the world as a quasi-separate institution.

The separation from the National Library was announced in the House of Representatives by Cohen on 5 April 1984. It followed prolonged and ardent advocacy from the early 1976 *Martin Review* through the corporately sponsored *Last Film Search* to rescue nitrate film across the country, on to the National Library Council's Film Archive Committee.

From an AFI industry conference in late 1983, the road to independence had been secured. The industry's advocacy and Cohen's initial announcement culminated in Prime Minister Hawke's official opening here, on 3 October 1984.

The final actions transpired in record time – just six months from the government’s announcement saw the opening of this repurposed Institute of Anatomy building as the new home for the collection.

I was the CEO and managing commissioner of the Australian Film Commission at that time. I well remember the supercharged atmosphere up to and after the announcement. I recall a fervently angry Director General of the National Library - Harrison Bryan - remonstrating with me on the phone as to the iniquity of the separation decision and its foolhardy action. Harry was at that time 61 and I was but 31. As politely but firmly as possible, I told him I disagreed.

In any case, it is long overdue that the relationship between the Library and the NFSA was properly renewed. But I digress - I was but a minor player when people like Ray had done the heavy lifting and people like Bob Hogg, senior adviser to Hawke – did the toughest thing in government, listening carefully and acting decisively.

Whilst it is true that an independent Archive would not exist today but for indefatigable advocacy, it is also true that it was Bob Hawke, skillfully guided by Bob Hogg, who made it happen. Hawke and Hogg and Barry Cohen, the Minister for Home Affairs, deserve to be remembered for their forthright, rapid-fire action. It demonstrated rare courage and commitment as a living example of government making a statement about an institution and its independent life. A positive vote for one of the most important aspects of our recorded memories, dreams, and aspirations.

The story since then has been more complex and at times there have been serious bumps along the road. The NFSA was semi-autonomous from the time of the 1984 separation. It was briefly rebadged, inexplicably, as *ScreenSound Australia* in 1999. A wholly unsatisfactory period from 2003 until 2008 ensued, on the altar of ‘neat on paper’ managerialism, when it was a division of the Australian Film Commission. At least the Archive’s original name was properly restored then.

Finally created as a statutory body with its own Act in 2008 by the Rudd government, the NFSA has since experienced many challenging events to stable and coherent planning and execution - most relating to resourcing. An overview of the annual reports over the last decade and more, paints a worrying picture of financial and staffing challenge with regrettable severe decline in both. Scholarship has definitely suffered.

A sense of last-minute rescue characterises the Archive’s history as seen in the last government’s 5 year \$40M additional funding announced in late 2021 for the digitisation of certain at-risk video and audio materials. As with many statements in recent years, it was more about intention than definitive action, however at least it signified something approaching duty of care.

That sense of duty of care must see the never-ending negative rollcall of boards with a responsibility to creative life and scholarship, ceasing to disqualify membership from subject matter specialists or creators. Community representation does matter, but knowledge, creativity, and expertise count more. Especially if we are to treat intergenerational obligation seriously, above all in memory institutions.

This institution was from the 1984 outset, a vote for investment in the nation's memory. A vote for the creators who used recorded image and sound technologies to document the people and land, to tell original stories which made us laugh, cry, or simply sit in wonder, imagining a better world.

It was a vote of confidence in and for Australia itself. It was a real time example of the duty of care in government actively working. I aim to speak as to why that matters today. Why we should indeed, bother.

The separation of the NFSA from the NLA provided a striking affirmative blow by the Commonwealth in favour of investment in preserving, studying, and celebrating Australian creativity. It was a huge step in necessary action for a better-informed understanding of Australian history and identity. It acknowledged the indelible impact of moving images, sound, and many allied ephemera in that process. The government said these things matter; they need to be preserved, nourished, and enlivened. And they need investment to ensure care and study.

It was a noble start. It even had the attendance of Jack Valenti the President of the then all-powerful Motion Picture Association of America – the advocate for Hollywood. Another story over which I won't digress, although it was a colourful trip!

Let me revert as to why we should bother.

A nation's personality, its identity and how that manifests itself is complex. Describing it is riven with the danger of persistent recourse to generalisation and cliché. However, the concept of a national identity is fascinating and very real. What it is to be an Australian and that which defines us is at the heart of our national being.

In our young nation - and I refer here to the time since political Federation in 1901 - the role of film, radio, television, and recorded sound in the development of contemporary identity is more prominent than for nations with much longer political histories. We as the national anthem says are 'young and free' – considerably more open to the impact of media than far older societies¹.

¹ For clarity throughout this address I use film and television as generic terms encompassing moving image creations. Similarly radio is used as encompassing sound media although there are obviously numerous sound recording technologies, including venerable 'ancient' ones.

I am sure we all agree that our nation has many diverse identities allied with unifying themes that are central to the sometimes, but by no means always, shared perception as to what it is to be an Australian. Those views have evolved in substantial measure from the impact of our literature and art; from our numerous and varied sources of political and social leadership; but also and overwhelmingly in my view, from the strong impact of cinema, music, and the print and electronic media.

Film, television, and radio had an important role in imbuing Australians with our sense of self-reliance, reinforcing our quirky humour matched with a projection of an uncanny optimism - each of which I would describe as core to the national personality. They also have reflected that sense of egalitarian idealism which is close to the heart of many Australians' imagined sense of self, albeit at marked divergence from the lived reality.

Narratives matter in nation building; they provide a core to the ideals that drive us. Story telling is central to the growth and development of all societies and nations. Popular narratives make much of that come together within any developed society and are reflected in the quality of the confidence and content in the strands of social and political discourse in all cultures. So let me review some of that work and why it matters, and why we must stand up affirmatively for institutional purpose and support, demanding that duty of care is properly sustained.

Clearly Australia is a very different place from the time of Gwen Meredith's *Blue Hills* (1) and its amazing 27 year run on the ABC, when those four remarkably strong women Bella, Fleur, Mabel, and Granny populated the nation's homes up until 1976. The evocative theme spoke to that idyllic secure country place where Australians metaphorically traveled and shared the joys, trials, and tribulations of that practically perfect country community. It was a shared fantasy. One built on certainty. One that was safe. Secure.

Many of the social values reflected in the series - that sense of a close affinity with community and the land - is reflected time and again in our film, our literature and in numerous television series such as those exceptionally long running programs from the 70s and 80s - *Bellbird* and its later big brother *A Country Practice*. (2)

Australians have a long uninterrupted continuity with film and cinematic experience from its foundation. Fittingly for our country, one of the oldest surviving pieces of moving imagery anywhere is that of Maurice Sestier and Walter Burnett of the *Melbourne Cup of 3 November 1896*. (3)

Needless to say it was an instant national hit revealing one of the central relevant aspects in the development of our national identity. Cinema travelled across Australia very rapidly - what an audience saw in urban Melbourne was

also being viewed in remote cinemas from Cairns to Broome or from travelling picture showmen across Australia.(4)

Cinema was a binding agent central to the development of a national spirit from Federation. Actuality film making has been at the backbone of Australian filmed effort ever since and has provided the most consistent area of original filmed Australian work.

Charles Tait's *Story of the Kelly Gang* of 1906 is often referred to as the first feature film ever made; now listed on UNESCO's Memory of the World International Register as the world's first feature film.(5)

The importance of it is extraordinarily high. It ran for almost an hour in continuous narrative at a time when 20 minute films ruled the day. It depicted one of the great national icons who, only 25 years after his execution, was rapidly becoming a national legend of mythic proportion. In 2004 the film was listed on the Australian Memory of the World Register too, but for a different reason – to quote: “ *the film has creative significance as the germinal filmic representation of the Kelly bushranger legend, a central element in Australian culture, which has since been made at least 22 times*”.

In the first decade after Federation, Australia produced over fifty narrative feature films and was easily the most active producing nation of extended narrative film at that time. With nationwide distribution, the centrality of that body of produced work to the growth of a national identity should not be underestimated and has been, in my view, undervalued in Australian history. The theme of the outsider travels from *The Story of the Kelly Gang* onwards.

Through the First World War years and on through the later days of the silent era in the 20's one sees the emergence of several signposts for characteristics which have informed the view of Australians about themselves ever since - as seen, for example, through the remarkable work of Raymond Longford and his equally talented companion, Lottie Lyell.

In *The Sentimental Bloke* of 1919 we see C. J. Dennis's characters realised with Doreen played by Lottie and Arthur Tauchert as the redoubtable “Bloke”. (6)

The film spoke to a new-found national confidence after the vicissitudes of war and its immediate celebration in irreverent, at times quite riotous comedy with all that playfulness with language many know and love so dearly, as seen in the intertitles. This comedy was not confined to the genius of Longford (and he was most assuredly a genius) but was also seen in the works of Franklin Barrett and (7) Tal Ordell, whose *Kid Stakes* of 1927 celebrating Fatty Finn and his childhood antics is another silent masterpiece. This last excerpt is, as with so many other examples this evening, from the superb work of the Archive and its restoration team – especially with much nitrate film rescued from the *Last Film Search* initiative starting in 1981 funded by Kodak, the Utah Foundation and

others with the Library's then chair, Ken Myer's endorsement. But of course 'the Search' was simply a continuation and enlargement of Rod' Wallace's persistent quest for old film, which began in the 1950s.

Kid Stakes, *The Sentimental Bloke* and one of Raymond Longford's other great classics - *On Our Selection* - spoke of the simple celebration of working people in a young nation still finding its way.

Such was the success of the Steele Rudd characters that here we see a remake made only twelve years after Longford's masterpiece, of *On Our Selection* made this time by Ken G Hall, which was to hold the box office record for an Australian film from its 1932 release until the 1970s. (8)

Whether in Woolloomooloo or on the land the naturalism of the performances and the settings is still intensely endearing and spoke with remarkable effect to audiences across Australia forging a national sensibility.

The remarkable period of original creative activity in the silent era saw the national ethos and personality being reflected in the spirit of the nation's people as influenced by the entertainment which they consumed. And they consumed it reliably, with the third highest per capita cinema attendance in the world.

Australians' characteristics of an irreverent sense of humour, our scepticism, and the obligation to never take oneself too seriously are clear in the work from that time.

Similarly the stories are about the resourcefulness of ordinary people - their struggle and survival. There is a simplicity and directness contained within them and the abiding sense of a national code of that which is fair that runs through to the present.

There is also the regular appearance of the bushranger – *Robbery Under Arms* had already been made twice by 1920 and was made twice again by 1985. We love our land based pirates!

Other notable contributors in that period were the three McDonagh Sisters - Paulette as writer/ director, Isabel as lead actor and Phyllis as art director, production manager, publicist, and all things in between. They triumphed with several urbane productions at a time when their challenge was simply immense.

There was a free flow of people back then and a variety of international directors worked in Australia including Norman Dawn whose 1927 epic *For the Term of His Natural Life* (9) stands, even allowing for its extravagant melodrama, as a landmark to this day. It was the single most successful film at the box office until K G Hall's *On Our Selection* and indicates the hunger which Australians have always evidenced for the discovery of our history – albeit an assisted and not necessarily accurate one! We are all grateful for the Australian Film

Commission's support for the superb reconstruction of this masterpiece in 1981 which, thanks to my father, was commercially distributed in cinemas.

The centre of storytelling for Australians occurs in the real commitment seen whenever Australian history is well executed in our film and television – witness the record viewing levels achieved by the eight hour miniseries *ANZACS* or the sequence of exceptional Kennedy Miller Mini-Series of the 1980s - *The Dismissal*, *Bodyline*, *Vietnam* and *The Cowra Breakout* or dozens of ABC series from the early *Stormy Petrel* through to productions from over a decade ago; *Curtin* and *Bastard Boys*.

Many of our most successful cinematic productions have been based on Australian history; starting with the readily remembered *Breaker Morant*, *Gallipoli*, and *Phar Lap* where each touches a nerve in most Australians, at times, with quite fervent patriotic, overtones.

It should be recalled that films of the silent era provided genuine nationally delivered entertainment. The first radio services commenced being licensed for limited service areas in 1923 and the ABC was incorporated in 1932 taking a long time to deliver services nationally.

National connection was by way of cinema and to a lesser degree print. Cinema was core to shared experience and Australian stories were central to the medium right through until the arrival of the talking picture in 1928. The going got much harder after that.

The importance of film to the nation was recognised by the Parliament with the establishment of *National Historical Film and Speaking Record Library* in 1935 as a joint endeavour of the Commonwealth's National Library then housed in the parliament, and the Department of Commerce, including a modest film production capability which had antecedents to 1911. This later became the Commonwealth Film Unit, and then Film Australia. Film Australia ceased to exist in 2008 and now has its entire output housed here, at the NFSA.

As recently as 1960 the Parliamentary Library and Commonwealth National Library were separated legislatively. The then Deputy Librarian, and subsequent Parliamentary and National Librarian, Harold White, was a film buff, and had secured a dedicated film division with the support of the previous Chief Librarian Kenneth Binns. Apart from having a successful non-theatrical distribution function, the library had started the early acquisition of Australian films for what was termed the 'historical collection'.

Rod Wallace had joined the Library in 1945 and was in the film section, headed by Larry Lake. He succeeded the very capable Lake in 1956 as Chief Film Officer and subsequently was head of Special Collections. The pace picked up

under Wallace who was a persistent, effective advocate for the Library's responsibility to film heritage through acquisition and as importantly, conservation. Wallace was an inveterate letter writer across the country in seeking out 'film stashes', securing such key parts of the collection as the seventeen Ken G Hall Cinesound features and various other examples of early film, including many priceless nitrate reels.

Let us return here to the reasons we bother – the produced work of Australians. (10)

With the arrival of the talkies another of the key drivers of national opinion and character blossomed – the newsreel. And no nation loved the newsreel more than Australia. We had a vigorous newsreel market from the early silent formats right through until the last produced example 47 years ago on 27 November 1975.

From their inception around 1910 through the golden production era in the 30s to the 60s, the Australian newsreel was the actuality voice of the nation and is a repository of much of the most valuable material in the NFSA. That which has survived provides a fascinating story as literally part of our living national memory.

Who can think of the Second World War without remembering the searing images of Damien Parer's *Kokoda Front Line* which won the first Academy Award for an Australian work – the statuette having been bequeathed to the NFSA by Ken G Hall, from his time as Cinesound head. (11)

The newsreel era is paid tribute in Phillip Noyce's 1978 film, *Newsfront*, where the integration of newsreel footage seamlessly with new material weaves a magic which captivated audiences - exposing an aspect of Australia that was largely unremarked until *Newsfront* was made.

I recently went to a revival screening of a restored copy from the NFSA in Sydney and there were a couple of hundred hungry audience members eager to see it for the first time or to relive the experience and hear producer David Elfick, director Philip Noyce and actor Chris Haywood speak about it. It was a special occasion, and I would say for a large portion of the audience, a revelation. (12)

Despite extensive, at times ferocious distribution challenges, Australian film continued to advance in the thirties though a variety of intrepid producer entrepreneurs; most particularly seen in the work of two strong directors – Ken G Hall and the incomparable Charles Chauvel. They are, together with the cinematographer/director Frank Hurley, amongst my personal lifetime Australian creative heroes.

Ken G Hall was a prolific and successful producer and ran the substantial Australian studio, Cinesound, later establishing Sydney's Channel 9. As a director his comedies stand high and saw the renewal of the Steele Rudd characters in *On Our Selection* in 1932 which held the box office record for an Australian film until the 1970's.

Another in the Steele Rudd series - *Dad and Dave Come to Town* - still stands well, with its larrikin fish out of water banter delivered with a sure touch. It is a quintessentially Australian piece of comedy with an irreverent wit and innocence matched with self-assurance which was I am sure very welcome at the turbulent time of its release in Australia in late 1938 and subsequent wide release in the UK in 1939.

It is to be regretted that the NFSA Award named in Ken Hall's honour has not been made since 2012. (13)

It was around the time of the late Dad and Dave films and on through World War II that Australians experienced the dramatic impact of radio on the national personality. Jack Davey, George Wallace, and the unsurpassed Roy Rene – the inimitable 'Mo' - ruled the air waves.

Mo was magnificently vulgar - the quintessential example of the Australian lair. Having made only one film, stage was his medium until he found how brilliantly his talent for timing worked on radio and for six years, he was a national star. That ribald sense of going a little too far but not quite over the top, permeates Australian comedy to this day from early Graham Kennedy right up to many brilliant examples with the *D Generation*, *Andrew Denton's* vivid work in the nineties and the more recent work of the *Chaser* team. It is us. (14)

It is impossible to do justice as to the quality of the impact of Charles and Elsa Chauvel on the national spirit of Australians and the way we see our country and society. He was the writer/ director and she his creative writing and producing partner. The dramatised documentary *In the Wake of the Bounty* is famous for revealing a young, raw Errol Flynn who was catapulted to international fame and fortune from it. But it is for their bold and original epics that the Chauvels are justly revered and remembered.

Forty Thousand Horsemen (15) was the first really striking representation of a generation of Australians in war defending King and country with a rare confidence in its representation of laconic Australian character and independence. Its impact was dramatic. Its evocation of the Australian characteristics of mateship and egalitarianism has had resonances ever since; as seen in Ken Hannam's *Sunday Too Far Away* which had a similar impact on people of my generation.

The Chauvel's *Sons of Matthew* (16) charted different territory with a family saga set in the outback with rich evocative cinematography and a stirring story about the trials of fire, tempest, and drought in the development of the land. It speaks

to a sense in pioneering rural Australia which has deep resonances in public imagination – witness the produced work about bushfires in recent years.

The experience of landscape and the strong identification with it - especially the outback – is, for most Australians, a reflection of the power of their film and television experiences.

(17) And music too – take but one striking example from my brilliant composition student, Iva Davies and his *Great Southern Land*.

Charles Chauvel was imbued with a most endearing trait – he was an incurable optimist which kept him going through thirty tough years of film making, in a time when making a film in this country was about as easy as planting a crop in a drought. So great was his optimism that between making films – and there were big in-betweens - he wrote and self-published courses on screen writing and film making. I know, as I own several of them. Can you imagine such commitment – such persistence, such confident optimism?

For me it is part of our most enduring national characteristic – a quality of what I would describe as cheerful persistence. I believe at its best, it is central to an Australian ethos. And it would seem to be an embedded part of the place rapidly implanting immigrants, no matter what their ethnicity.

Jedda from 1955 stands as an enduring film landmark from the Chauvels. The first sign of almost blind optimism was that it was made in colour when there were no colour laboratories in Australia, and they had to ship the material to Britain for processing. They did not see a single foot of processed film before principal photography was completed.

In an even greater act of optimism in a land that was distinctly racist, it is an Aboriginal story of a stolen woman, isolation and love told with great sensitivity. Both roles were, unusually for the time, played by Aboriginals. *Jedda* evokes a sense of kinship to land and people not seen previously and stands proud and alone in creating an epic about a sense of Aboriginal experience, love and loss, with a heart rending closure. (18)

In our contemporary society there are naysayers about *Jedda*, indicating discomfort with its sensibility. It was made almost seventy years ago and for me, is an early progenitor of deep empathy with First Nations people. It preceded, quite boldly, the national movement about the necessity of effective national reconciliation with indigenous Australians. Perspective is called for in viewing and studying it. Clearly it is well deserving of conservation and scholarship.

There is much to do in our national storytelling and documentation to liberate a more expansive informed and open view as to the necessity of reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Australians.

On that journey, housed in the NFSA is a vast range of relevant films including the pioneering work of the late Ian Dunlop whose *People of the Western Desert*, commenced in 1965 and, comprising 19 films, was a signal landmark in international documentary history and ethnographic filmmaking. His work is divided between here, the National Archives and Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. It is core to the filmed experience of Australia. It is pleasing that Dunlop was the 2009 recipient of the Archive's Ken G Hall Preservation Award.

Well before Ian Dunlop were Walter Baldwin Spencer's ethnographic film and sound recordings from 1901 and Fanny Cochrane-Smith's 1899 recording of Tasmanian Aboriginal songs in her own language, not to mention the many Pacific Islands ethnographic films made by Frank Hurley. There has been a body of work in film and television of importance which addresses issues of meaning, life, and purpose between indigenous and other Australians, much of it needless to say, in a span of documentary work too large to detail here, the balance in a limited quantity of drama.

From the Chauvels' pioneering work there have been other important contributions such as Nicholas Roeg's *Walkabout* which still stands up, together with Ted Kotcheff's *Wake in Fright*, as remarkably special outsiders' views of Australia. (19)

Bob Weis' brilliant production of the Sonia Borg/ Hyllus Maris written *Women of the Sun* made for the SBS in 1981 still remains as one of the singular moments in original Australian television. (20)

Since then we have seen many important productions such as Blackfella Films' *Redfern Now*, through *Mystery Road* and *Total Control*.

Henri Safran's 1976 film *Storm Boy* played successfully as an allegory on several levels to Australian and international audiences. (21) It is a beautiful film with a balance and lightness that was an important contribution in its own modest way to addressing our most important national roadblock to real social maturity - the realisation of mutual respect, understanding and reconciliation with indigenous citizens. It reintroduced David Gulpilil to Australians after his first appearance in Roeg's *Walkabout*.

Fred Schepisi's 1978 adaptation of Thomas Kenneally's *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith* (22) is an impressive work capturing as it did the tragic tension of Jimmy caught between European and traditional societies which eventually and inevitably provokes action from which there is no return. The film clearly springs from a sense of moral outrage and deeply felt passion which deservedly captured wide and enthusiastic critical attention.

It is with a sense of real pleasure that one can cite the film which won the Best Film at the Australian Film Institute awards in 2006 - the highly original *Ten Canoes* by Rolf de Heer and Peter Djigirr. (23)

The English language storytelling by David Gulpilil, and subtitled Ganabingu language, makes the lighthearted humour and the confident portrayal of a proud, connected and successfully functioning world totally compelling.

Ten Canoes proved to make a ready and warm connection with audiences across Australia. In fact well over 300,000 of us saw it in the cinema alone.

Reverting to my chronology, I would now like to take you back to the post Second World War period. It was an exceptionally hard time for creative life in our nation and for those in support of its collection and preservation. The Chauvels were amongst the few who had the grit, perseverance, and wherewithal to continue making films through the fifties.

Outside of the strong continuing efforts in documentary at the Commonwealth Film Unit and in other places, it was an essentially barren period creatively. For original drama it was singularly tough in theatre, film, and television. Radio progressively ceased to be a mainstream medium for comedy and drama as the take up of television grew exponentially.

Although people of my generation were habitués of *The Argonauts* on ABC radio - creative, imaginative and compelling for kids across the nation. (24)

However, there was an overpowering repressive social and political atmosphere which eschewed Australian creative and intellectual endeavour generally as evidenced from the low production level of 37 films in the 20-year period from 1946. That roster included numerous foreign films such as *The Sundowners*, *Kangaroo*, *On the Beach* and *Bush Christmas* which were made using Australia as a location and story base, often in pretty clumsy ways.

However the quite suffocating environment was soon to see the liberation of a creative mainspring not seen since the first, careless, explosive energy of the first decade after Federation.

Before visiting that explosion from the 60s and 70s I should not forget about our recorded sound heritage in this recital of reasons and examples as to why the duty of care matters in defining core purpose. The NFSA indicates that its duty of care informs collection development strategies; preservation priorities; and activities to engage the public with the NFSA collection. It says that the curatorial approach values professionalism, accountability, impartiality, collegiality, and the ethical, effective, and efficient use of resources. It reads well, however on transparency it is often perplexing.

As many will know Australia had one of, possibly the highest, penetrations of domestic pianos, pianolas, and player keyboards anywhere in the world. In fact on entering the hall today you all heard Australian Percy Grainger playing via a pianola roll. Grainger in his lifetime recorded many performance renditions for the pianola (or more correctly for the reproducing piano keyboard from player piano rolls). Many other great pianists and composers had recorded themselves playing their own works, such as Busoni, Debussy, Gershwin, Mahler, Ravel, Scriabin, Paderewski, Saint-Saëns, Rachmaninoff, Prokofiev, Richard Strauss, and Stravinsky. They provide invaluable examples of style and practice from another time and as importantly vital insight as to domestic entertainment.

The recordings of the Grieg *Peer Gynt Suite* arrangements and of Debussy's *Pour le piano* heard on entry to this cinema today were all real renditions of Grainger himself playing as registered from piano rolls. As you heard, he was a gifted pianist.

One of the finest, possibly the best, private collection of piano rolls, player pianos and reproducing players (which attach to ordinary keyboards) was acquired over a lifetime, by the Sydney music teacher Denis Condon who died in 2012. At the time of his death it comprised over 7500 rolls and a rich diversity of grand, upright and cabinet players in fine condition. The collection was lost to Australia when it was acquired by Stanford University Libraries in California. It is now housed in the recorded sound collection of their music library. A significant loss to Australia.

The high ownership levels of domestic pianos, meant that Australians had an active home entertainment life and were often accomplished musically, reflected in basic requirements from the time as to advanced music skills specified for a primary classroom teacher's qualification.

It is in my view, a very real loss for the sound heritage collection at the NFSA that the majority of the Mastertouch collection of piano rolls, made at the Mastertouch factory in Sydney from 1919 up until 2005 when it closed, is in the process of disposal. Most of the release copy collection originally passed over to the Archive, is in the process of disposal, together with wax cylinders, the precursor to the recorded disc, and over 80,000 International Main Run Shellac discs – what we know as 78s. This unusual testament to the home entertainment fabric of Australia is leaving the curatorial priorities, based on no coherent statement I can find.

The NFSA's mission is described as to collect, preserve, and share Australia's vibrant and diverse audiovisual culture as embodied by an evolving collection – reflecting who we were, who we are, and who we want to be. The commitment to transparency I mentioned earlier, struggles to fit with the quality of those words.

Coming from a music background, I struggle to understand the voiding of such items. The remainder of the sound collection offers many treats mainly in the history of popular entertainment with most classical work belonging to the ABC or largely relegated to byways in the collection.

One wonders as to the detail of the ABC's policy for what it keeps or preserves – it seems haphazard. Similarly, I wonder as to whether there is a systematic deliberate collection policy at the NFSA as to sound recordings of classical, jazz, current popular artists, experimental music and so forth. To an outsider it can appear that material which is in the collection has been offered, not sought out, according to defined criteria.

Returning to the defence of preservation, conservation, and scholarship in the *duty of care*; I remember, in late 1984, devising a large celebration of a particularly important moment in the history of Australian television. It was to celebrate the publication in 1959 of a small manifesto, penned and published by Hector Crawford. The manifesto posited the most spirited advocacy for regulated Australian content on commercial television as a requirement for the issue of licenses, which were proving to be 'permits to print money'.

The rules in the late fifties/early sixties confined the number of commercial broadcasters to two in the major markets and a solo one in all the others reflecting the political nature of such allocations and regulatory settings that have bedeviled Australian public policy ever since – a subject better reserved for another day!

Hector had become a friend whilst I was the chief executive at the Film Commission, and I treasured his reflections on his battle history in television and before that in a very substantial radio career which saw the export of over 20,000 hours of Australian radio drama. Like the Chauvels, Hector Crawford was one of the grand optimists and the creative studio he ran in Melbourne was responsible for producing a range of dramas which projected a view of our society and its ways which permeated the sense of self and purpose when Australia was still shedding its almost exclusively UK centric view of the world.

His television career started modestly with a simple commission for *Consider Your Verdict*. (25)

Hector's advocacy for Australian content regulation with others was progressively ever more successful and what had been a rather constrained regulatory body gradually changed in response to a more engaged political view as to national policy priorities from the late sixties with initiatives to support production and education.

The roll call of Crawford productions (26) is a recital of many of the hits of Australian television. There were a string of police shows *Homicide*, *Division 4*,

Matlock and Cop Shop. A steamy serial *The Box* and one of the benchmark pieces of Australian television *The Sullivans* - the story of an ordinary family set in war time Melbourne which ran for six years and was exported to over 70 countries. The company moved into miniseries in the 1980's with the hugely successful *All the Rivers Run* which was followed by another evergreen that renewed the association of Australian audiences with the mythology and hankering for the bush on a weekly basis - *The Flying Doctors* which ran for over 10 years.

Each program in its own way provided a perspective and sense of what it was to be an Australian and what it was to be living now or in the past in our country. Each was a contributor to a sense of confidence in being Australian; seeing and hearing Australians living their daily lives. Most importantly they were hugely popular – core programming, and a central part of social discourse.

That success was mirrored in many other productions in the seventies, most memorably in *Number 96* - the saucy Australian serial set in a Sydney apartment building that combined melodrama, extravagant characters including high-camp tonality, lashings of comedy and - most famously – sex, in abundant quantity. (27)

From the outset in early 1972, *Number 96* was a mega hit – running five nights a week for six years, with a spin off movie to boot. The show was part of Australia's coming of age with gay, Jewish, Lancashire, black and feminist characters, and remarkably adventurous storylines. It spoke to profound change throughout the nation, politically and socially. Andrew Mercado, the curator for the NFSA registration, describes it as arguably the most groundbreaking TV series in the world when it burst onto screens in 1972, with the tagline 'The night Australian TV loses its virginity'.

Number 96, the numerous Crawford Productions and their later audience and creative inheritors in the soap opera genre such as the equally successful *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*, broke forever the cultural cringe that had affected Australians' confidence in and about Australian work, Australian accents and Australian story telling.

Producer, John Edwards and his creative collaborators Debra Oswald and Imogen Banks, saw *Offspring*, and many others including his earlier *Love My Way* and *The Secret Life of Us*, have striking impact – collectively garnering abundant Logie and AFI Awards. (28)

Australians have reveled in story telling about themselves embracing dramas that speak of a world directly relevant to their own experience or connected with national streams of public curiosity and fantasy.

All modern societies are dependent on the common stories that bind and renew them if they are to have vitality, confidence, and a secure heart. The story telling campfires of the modern era are cinema, music and television. The Australian

cinema and TV campfire has been a mercurial creature which waxed and waned over the decades but has been central to Australians' views of themselves.

The dramatic change experienced in television content through the seventies was to witness the renaissance of feature film production. A sequence of works truly changed the national mood, energized national confidence, and broke with the cringing, creatively impoverished and hesitant 50s and early 60s forever.

In fact, that body of produced work gave government the confidence to invest in the National Film and Sound Archive.

That investment predated what I would describe as the cowardly cloak of binary governmental budget assertion:- shabby 'this or that' thinking. The ultimate obfuscation against the performance of political duty of care. For example, the last ten years of severe funding erosion must cease. It must be corrected, as the decline has done serious damage to the mission and to ethical duty as much as anything else.

The body of work since the mid-1970s has been extraordinarily influential in reminding us of our history - investing it with relevance and meaning. The gifted work of diverse cinematographers has delivered our sense of visual understanding and celebration of the landscapes of Australia in a visceral way. And, it has seen Australian actors, directors and others take to the world stage as never before.

We have experienced the regular celebration of diverse Australian stories reinforcing a national sense of humour, resilience, community, and that we hold values such as fairness and equality high.

Film and television, music and radio have had a central role in forging national personalities in their complex evolution arriving at an Australian identity. A nation that is aware of its capacity and which hopefully has a well-developed sense of the challenges before it.

The precious process in the cinema described by the *Mad Max* and *Happy Feet* director, George Miller, so eloquently as one of "shared public dreaming", has been renewed for Australian work over the last 45 years with a force that is overwhelming. The broad product of the modern era has produced a sequence of original works where creative teams have spun many wonders.

Rod Wallace instinctively knew its importance.

We know national confidence, and maturity, depends on it.

This is why we must bother:

Thank you.

Kim Williams November 2022

The following moving image and audio excerpts were interpolated in the lecture, as indicated by bracketed numbers in the text:

- 1 Ronald Hanmer *Blue Hills* theme
- 2 Clip from the titles for *Bellbird* followed by *A Country Practice*
- 3 Footage from *1896 Melbourne Cup*
- 4 Scene of John Meillon with horse and cart from *The Picture Show Man*
- 5 Excerpt from *The Story of the Kelly Gang*
- 6 Excerpt with intertitles from *The Sentimental Bloke*
- 7 The goat race scene from *The Kid Stakes*
- 8 Excerpt from the K G Hall *On Our Selection* (1932)
- 9 Excerpts from *For the Term of his Natural Life*
- 10 Excerpt from the opening of a Cinesound newsreel, cutting to war footage
- 11 Mute excerpt from *Kokoda Front Line* by Damien Parer, followed by newsreel tribute narration
- 12 Excerpt from Maitland floods sequence in *Newsfront*
- 13 Excerpt from *Dad and Dave Come to Town* (with audio)
- 14 Classic Roy Rene audio excerpt
- 15 Mute excerpt from the charge at Beersheba sequence in *Forty Thousand Horsemen*
- 16 Mute excerpt from *Sons of Matthew* featuring the outback clearing process
- 17 *Great Southern Land* music cue
- 18 The death sequence from *Jedda* (with audio)
- 19 Mute excerpt from *Walkabout*
- 20 Excerpt from *The Women of the Sun* (with audio_
- 21 Mute excerpt with Finger Bone Bill from *Storm Boy*
- 22 Scene from *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith*
- 23 The first river sequence from *Ten Canoes* (with audio)
- 24 Sung theme music for *The Argonauts*
- 25 Opening credit sequence from *Consider Your Verdict* (with audio)
- 26 Title and theme of *Homicide, Division 4, Cop Shop, The Box, The Sullivans, All the Rivers Run* and *The Flying Doctors* (low audio)
- 27 Montage sequence with titles: Abigail, Joe Hasham and Johnny Lockwood in scenes from *Number 96* (with audio)
- 28 The death of Frankie in *Love, My Way* (with audio)

The lecture concluded with an extended montage made up with excerpts from each of Picnic at Hanging Rock/ Caddie/ The Picture Show Man/ Newsfront / My Brilliant Career/ Breaker Morant / Gallipoli/ Mad Max II/ Man from Snowy River/ Phar Lap/Puberty Blues/ We of the Never / Crocodile Dundee/ Year My Voice Broke/ Young Einstein / Sweetie/ Proof /Strictly Ballroom/ Romper Stomper/ Muriel's Wedding/The Adventures of Priscilla Queen of the Desert/ Shine/ The Castle/ The Boys/ Chopper / Rabbit Proof Fence/ Lantana/ Japanese Story/ Somersault/ Little Fish/ Kenny/ Happy Feet/// Holding the Man/ Mad Max Fury Road/ Paper Planes/ Working Class Boy /The Water Diviner/ Lion/ Rabbit Proof Fence/ Sweet Country/ Animal Kingdom/ Red Dog/ Chopper/ Samson and Delilah/ Mystery Road/ Breath/ Romulus, My Father// Charlie's Country / The Sapphires.